

GRACE ABUSE: SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE

By David Lee Burris

The Doctrines of Calvinism

T-U-L-I-P

- .Total Hereditary Depravity
- .Unconditional Election
- .Limited Atonement
- .Irresistible Grace

Irresistible Grace

An unregenerate person cannot voluntarily believe in God but once God determines to save him, that same individual cannot overcome or resist the power of God no matter what he may desire.

John Calvin and Grace

By **Wayne Jackson**



One of the most influential religious figures of the last millennium was John Calvin of Switzerland. Calvin was born in 1509. At the age of fourteen, he went to Paris to study the classics. He was so austere that his fellow students nicknamed him “The Accusative Case.”

In 1529, he commenced the study of civil law. Presently, though, Calvin became intrigued with the teachings of the German reformers and so gave himself to the study of religion.

In 1533, he broke with the Roman Catholic Church after a religious “experience” during which he believed he received a commission from God to restore the Church to its original purity.

By the year 1536, at the age of only twenty-six, he had completed the first edition of his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The initial edition was a small volume of six chapters. The final version (1560)—revised over the years—had grown to eighty chapters.

To a significant degree, Calvin’s views—which were developed from the writings of Augustine, a “bishop” in northern Africa (A.D. 353-430)—have formed the doctrinal basis of much of modern Protestantism.

In this article, we wish to briefly comment upon John Calvin's influence upon the religious community on the subject of grace. His ideas are circulated in several denominations, and, tragically, have found their way into the thinking of many people.

One of Calvin's prominent errors was the notion that man is born totally depraved, having inherited both the effects and the guilt of Adam's original sin.

Even infants, therefore, have in them the seed of sin. Indeed, their whole nature is a sort of a sin-seed, so that they cannot be anything other than corrupt before God (*Institutes* ii.I.8).

At birth, then, all men stand in need of the Lord's grace. From this fundamental error, others spring.

Limited Grace

One of the cornerstones of Calvin's theology was the dogma of predestination. This is the notion that, consistent with his own sovereignty, God, before the foundation of the world, pre-determined who would be saved and who would be lost.

In view of this, when Christ died, his death was efficacious **only for the elect**.

This concept of limited atonement—hence, limited grace—is so foreign to the teaching of the Scriptures that it is difficult to see how anyone with an elementary knowledge of the New Testament could accept it.

Hear the testimony of Paul:

“For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to **all men**” (Tit. 2:11).

Because God loved the entire world (Jn. 3:16), and so wants all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and not a single one to perish (2 Pet. 3:9), Christ died to be the propitiation for sins—not just for the elect, but potentially for the entire world as well (1 Jn. 2:2).

Irresistible Grace

Calvinism argues that by a secret and special operation of the Holy Spirit, God's grace is poured forth upon the elect. Since the extension of this grace is an act of divine power, it cannot be resisted any more than the original creation could have resisted the creative might of the Lord (Hodge 1960, 688).

But the fact is, though God's grace is generously offered, **it must be received** by the sinner.

"[W]e entreat also that you receive not the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1).

It is certainly possible to "receive not" that which is offered (cf. Jn. 1:11).

Unconditional Grace

Calvinists argue that grace is given to the elect **unconditionally**. If such is the case, then there is absolutely nothing that one must do in order to receive salvation—not even believe.

One writer states:

[W]e believe that there is no warrant whatsoever for the view that John 3:16 lays down faith as a condition to be performed by the lost person in order to attain spiritual eternal life.

Again he says:

God, without the use of the gospel or any other human means, will save all of his redeemed loved ones in every land and in every age (Sarrels 1978, 443-444).

The foregoing affirmations are ludicrous.

Paul declares that we have "access by faith into this grace" (Rom. 5:2). In his discussion of grace in his epistle to Titus, the inspired apostle states that God,

"according to his mercy, saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit ... being justified by his grace" (Tit. 3:5-7).

Paul equates being saved by the **washing of regeneration** with being justified by grace. The washing is an allusion to **man's response** to God by submitting to baptism.

Grace is supplied by the Lord—independent of any merit on our part. Clearly, though, the washing of regeneration is a condition of our redemption.

But is that expression an allusion to baptism? Even Calvin admitted that he had “no doubt” that Paul was alluding to baptism—though he denied the connection between baptism and salvation (see Shepherd 1950, 405).

Irrevocable Grace

Calvin maintained that the elect could be certain that God would never allow them to fall away from the faith. They would thus persevere unto the end.

A sizable segment of Protestantism has adopted the doctrine to some degree or another. Charles Stanley, a prominent Baptist clergyman, has attempted to argue this case in a recent book (see Jackson 1993).

But the New Testament teaches otherwise. A child of God can **fall from grace** (Gal. 5:4), or fail, i.e., fall back from the Lord's favor (Heb. 12:15; cf. ASV fn).

It is possible to deny the Master who **bought** you and so be **destroyed** (2 Pet. 2:1). Thus, we must keep ourselves in God's love (Jude 21) and give diligence to make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10), lest our reception of divine grace be **in vain** (2 Cor. 6:1).

Conclusion

While we acknowledge that John Calvin taught some truth, we must also recognize that he advocated much error, and that error must be rejected.

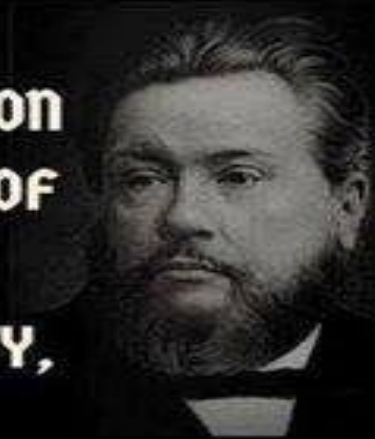
THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE



TOTAL
DEPRAVITY
UNCONDITIONAL
ELECTION
LIMITED
ATONEMENT
IRRESISTIBLE
GRACE
PERSEVERANCE
OF THE SAINTS

WE BELIEVE, THAT THE WORK
OF REGENERATION,
CONVERSION, SANCTIFICATION
AND FAITH, IS NOT AN ACT OF
MAN'S FREE WILL AND
POWER, BUT OF THE MIGHTY,
EFFICACIOUS AND
IRRESISTIBLE GRACE OF GOD.

CH SPURGEON





‘ALMIGHTY GRACE RIDES
VICTORIOUSLY OVER THE
NECK OF FREE-WILL, AND
LEADS IT CAPTIVE IN
GLORIOUS CAPTIVITY TO
THE ALL-CONQUERING
POWER OF IRRESISTIBLE
GRACE AND LOVE.’

-CHARLES H. SPURGEON

Irresistible Grace Defined by Calvinists

“Since it is the will of God that those whom He gave His dear Son in eternity past should be saved, He will surely act in sovereign grace in such a way that the elect will find Christ irresistible. God does not force the elect to trust His Son but rather, gives them life. The *dead* human Spirit finds the dead spirit of Satan irresistible, and all *living* human spirits find the God of the living irresistible.

Regeneration (the work of God) must precede true repentance and faith.” - Duane Edward Spencer, *TULIP: The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture*

Calvinism: Irresistible Grace

Larry Ray Hafley
Pekin, Illinois

I. Introduction:

A. Definition of the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace.

1. "All those whom God has predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, by His almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.

"This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed by it" (The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 10).

2. "As Calvinists we hold that the condition of men since the fall is such that if left to themselves they would continue in their state of rebellion and refuse all offers of salvation. Christ would then have died in vain. But since it was promised that He should see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied, the effects of that sacrifice have not been left suspended upon the whim of man's changeable and sinful will. Rather, the work of God in redemption has been rendered effective through the mission of the Holy Spirit who so operates on the chosen people that they are brought to repentance and faith, and thus made heirs of eternal life" (Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, p. 163).

3. Irresistible - "that cannot be successfully resisted or opposed" (Webster).

B. This doctrine logically follows other Calvinistic tenets and teachings.

I. If one is totally depraved as Calvinism alleges that he is, i.e., "opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil," then it follows that God must alter this state, for one in that condition could do nothing toward righteousness.

2. Our study, therefore, must focus on the state or condition of the sinner. Further, we must see the operation of the Spirit in the conviction and conversion of the sinner.

II. Discussion:

A. True, the sinner is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13). But what does this mean?

1. Calvinism equates deadness of sinner with a dead body. As one would not command a corpse to act in order to have life, so one cannot tell a "dead" sinner to act.

2. But the sinner's death is not one of inability to act.

a. Sinner "walked" and "lived" in lusts (Eph. 2:2, 3; Col. 3:7 - NASB).

b. While acting, he was said to be dead, but how, in what sense?

(1) Obviously, not like a dead body, a corpse.

(2) "Dead in sins" equals separation from God's favor, unforgiven (Isa. 59:1, 2; Col. 1:21; 1 Tim. 5:6).

(3) To be "quickened" (made alive) is to be forgiven all trespasses (Col. 2:13), hence, to be dead is to be unforgiven.

c. Calvinistic argument for irresistible grace is thus based on a false definition of death as regards the sinner.

d. Observe Calvinistic arguments that are based on this false concept.

(1) The resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of Lazarus are given as examples of how God irresistibly quickens the dead sinner (Boettner, pp. 165, 168). Neither could resist the call to life - "It was not possible" (Acts 2:24).

(2) The sinner is "dead." God must quicken them as He did Christ and as Christ did Lazarus (Jn. 5:21, 25).

(a) Yes, the voice (word) of the Son of God quickens (Psa. 119:50; Jn. 6:44, 45, 63, 68).

(b) Note: "they that hear shall live" (Jn. 5:25), but dead sinner may choose not to hear (Acts 13:26, 38, 39, 46; Matt. 13:15).

-- Calvinist Objection, One must hear voice of Son of God, not voice of preacher.

-- Answer To Objection: To hear preaching of the truth is to hear the voice of the Son of God (cf. Lk. 16:29; Acts 13:27; 15:21; Lk. 10:16). Calvinists assume immediate, direct speaking of Spirit.

3. Consider the opposite view, the "dead" saint (Rom. 6:2; Col. 3:3).

a. The saint is declared "dead" just as alien is, but in what sense? If being dead is compared to corpse as dead sinner is, saint is inactive (Eph. 2: 10)!

b. "Dead to sins" (1 Pet. 2:24) simply means separated from sins. As "dead in sins" means separated from God by sin (Col. 1:21), so "dead to sins" means alienated from guilt of sins.

c. Though saint is "dead to sins," he can choose to sin (1 Jn. 1:8-10; Rom. 6:13; 8:12, 13). So, sinner "dead in sins" can choose to obey (Rom. 6:16-18).

d. Compare case of Adam. He was certainly "dead to sin," and "totally hereditarily righteous. "

(1) It did not take a direct operation of the devil's unholy spirit to move and motivate him. The devil used words and motives. While "dead" to sins, Adam heard, believed and obeyed.

(2) Cannot God appeal to one through words and motives as the devil did, or is the devil's word more powerful than God's gospel?

B. New Testament illustration and demonstrations of resistible and acceptable grace.

1 . First, it is the word of God, the gospel, which produces faith (Jn. 17:20; 20:30; 3 1; Acts 14: 1; 15:7; Rom. 10: 17). Even the devil knows this (Lk. 8:11, 12; 1 Thess. 2:16).

2. The Holy Spirit convicts and converts the sinner, but how does He do it?

a. Through words of the Spirit (see Acts 2:4, 22, 29, 36-41).

b. By preaching the gospel "with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven" (I Pet. 1: 12), Peter:

(1) Convicted men of murder (Acts 3:13-15).

(2) Urged them to repent and turn for forgiveness (Acts 3:19, 26).

(3) And "many of them which heard the word believed" (Acts 4:4).

3. The Holy Spirit can be resisted (Acts 6:10; 7:51-55). He was resisted by refusing the word preached (Acts 13:44-46).

III. Conclusion:

A. Objections to the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace.

1. It makes God responsible for every lost person. All are lost because God did not act on them. See statements in creed.

2. No person has ever been found who was saved, born again, where the gospel has not gone (cf. Jonah and Rom. 10:14).

3. It denies the all-sufficiency of the gospel as God's power unto salvation.

B. What is your reaction to the word of the Spirit? Your reaction will determine your eternal destiny (Rom. 6:16-18; Acts 13:46).

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Series On Calvinism

Irresistible Grace

by Gene Taylor

The fourth basic doctrine of Calvinism is Irresistible Grace. It is also called Efficacious Grace or Invincible Grace. Irresistible Grace is the idea that the elect, those who Calvinists believe have been [unconditionally elected to eternal life](#), cannot resist the grace of God and heaven's determination to save them. As those elected to damnation can do nothing about it, those who are elected to salvation can do nothing to resist. The grace of God overwhelms them in such a way that even if they wanted to they could not repel it.

John Calvin believed that only a direct operation of the Holy Spirit could make one who is "dead in sin" hear the gospel and believe. This means that the gospel would not be sufficient to convict and convert the heart of the sinner. Calvinists say the Lord, through the Spirit, must appear to the sinner in a direct, miraculous way in order to bring about the sinner's conversion. And if the sinner is one whom God had predestinated to life before the foundation of the world, that sinner **must** submit to God's grace as revealed to him by the Spirit.

We will examine this fourth tenet of Calvinism, Irresistible Grace, by seeing how Calvinists themselves express this doctrine, considering the proof texts used to support it, and offering some Scriptural objections to it.

Irresistible Grace Expressed

The Westminster Confession of Faith expresses this doctrine by saying, "All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace." (Chap. X, Sect. 1)

David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, in *The Five Points of Calvinism, Defined, Defended, Documented*, say,

"The *gospel invitation extends a call* to salvation to every one who hears its message. It invites all men without distinction to drink freely of the water of life and live. It promises salvation to all who repent and believe. But this outward general call, extended to the elect and non-elect alike, will not bring sinners to Christ. Why? Because men are by nature dead in sin and are under its power. They are of themselves unable and unwilling to forsake their evil ways and to turn to Christ for mercy. Consequently, the unregenerate will not respond to the gospel call to repentance and faith. No amount of external threatenings or promises will cause blind, deaf, dead, rebellious sinners to bow before Christ as Lord and to look to Him alone for salvation. Such an act of faith and submission is contrary to the lost man's nature.

"Therefore, the *Holy Spirit*, in order to bring God's elect to salvation, extends to them a special inward call in addition to the outward call contained in the gospel message. Through this special call the Holy Spirit performs a work of grace within the sinner which inevitably brings him to faith in Christ ...

"Although the general outward call of the gospel can be, and often is, rejected, the special inward call of the Spirit never fails to result in the conversion of those to whom it is made. This special call is not made to all sinners but is issued to the elect only! The Spirit is in no way dependent upon their help or cooperation for success in His work of bringing them to Christ. It is for this reason that Calvinists speak of the Spirit's call and of God's grace in saving sinners as being 'efficacious,' 'invincible,' or 'irresistible.' For the grace which the Holy Spirit extends to the elect cannot be thwarted or refused, it never fails to bring them to true faith in Christ!" (pp. 48-49)

Proof Texts Used to Support Irresistible Grace

Acts 16:14. The argument Calvinists base on this passage is that God opened Lydia's heart to receive the word. She then heard it and was saved. The answer to this argument is that Calvinists have things out of order. The proper order is that Lydia **began** as a worshiper of God (vv. 13, 14); **after** she heard Paul, Silas and Timothy preaching, her heart was then opened (v. 14); and she responded and obeyed the Lord. (v. 15) It is interesting to note that Calvinists will use this passage as a proof text for Irresistible Grace but exclude reference to Lydia's baptism.

Romans 8:7. The argument here is that the "carnal mind," possessed by those who are depraved, cannot understand, believe or obey the spiritual law of God. The answer here is to consider the verse in context -- verses 1-8. Seen in the context is the free agency of man in choosing whether to obey or disobey God. In reality, the passage is teaching a simple principle: those who are spiritually minded, those who have an interest in spiritual things, will be obedient to the commands of God and those who are carnally minded, those who possess no interest in spiritual matters, will be disobedient.

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God does not force anyone to accept or reject His will. Calvinism simply views people as automatons ("A machine or control mechanism designed to follow automatically a predetermined sequence of operations or respond to encoded instructions" [*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 60]) with no will of their own. While Calvinists teach that since a person is born totally depraved, he cannot even desire to do good, they say that if he is one of those who have been given unconditional election by God, that when God calls him, he cannot do anything to resist.

Scriptural Objections to Irresistible Grace

Irresistible Grace contradicts the Scriptural principle of free agency. This tenet of Calvinism declares that the grace of God cannot be rejected. In contrast, the Bible plainly teaches that one's salvation is conditional upon his obedience -- that one can either reject or accept **salvation** as it is offered through Jesus Christ. The grace of God has appeared to all people (**Titus 2:11**) and yet millions have rejected it. Each person is accountable for his response to the gospel. (**John 12:47-48**) Those who reject the teachings of Jesus are held responsible. (**John 5:24; 8:24**) The Bible states that each individual is free to choose whether or not to take advantage of the grace of God. It clearly demonstrates one may resist God's grace as revealed in His word.

Irresistible Grace mistakenly portrays how people are called by God to salvation. All people are called by the gospel. (2 Thes. 2:14) The Bible does not say that people are called by some still, small voice or by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on them. The Holy Spirit in the conviction and conversion of the sinner does not work apart from the word. (Rom. 1:16)

Irresistible Grace changes the order of belief and salvation. A Calvinist, Loraine Boettner, says, "A man is not saved because he believes in Christ; he believes in Christ because he is saved." (*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*) But in the Bible, salvation always follows belief, i.e., faith always precedes salvation.

John 3:16. Belief then salvation.

Acts 16:31. Belief then salvation.

Mark 16:16. Belief, baptism, then salvation.

Hebrews 11:6. One cannot be saved without faith, thus making it a condition of salvation and causing it to have to precede the salvation of one's soul.

Irresistible Grace has an erroneous view as to when one is made alive spiritually. Steele and Thomas say, "Therefore, the *Holy Spirit*, in order to bring God's elect to salvation, extends to them a *special inward call* in addition to the outward call contained in the gospel message. Through this special call the Holy Spirit performs a work of grace within the sinner which inevitably brings him to faith in Christ. The inward change wrought in the elect sinner enables him to understand and believe spiritual truth; in the spiritual realm he is given the seeing eye and the hearing ear. The Spirit creates within him a new heart or a new nature. This is accomplished through regeneration or the new birth by which the sinner is made a child of God and is given spiritual life. His will is renewed through this process so that the sinner spontaneously comes to Christ of his own free choice. Because he is given a new nature so that he loves righteousness, and because his mind is enlightened so that he understands and believes the Biblical gospel, the renewed sinner freely and willingly turns to Christ as Lord and Saviour. Thus the once dead sinner is drawn to Christ by the inward supernatural call of the Spirit who through regeneration makes him alive and creates within him faith and repentance." (48-49) While that is what they say, the Bible teaches that one is made alive when, after hearing the gospel, he is baptized. (Col. 2:12,13; cf. John 3:3-5)

Conclusion

The Scriptures reveal we are **saved by the grace of God**. (Eph. 2:8) However, using our freedom to choose, we accept this grace by our faith not because God forces us to accept it. (Rev. 22:17)

Irresistible Grace

Does order matter?...

Matthew 7:21-27

²¹ “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’

²⁴ “Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; ²⁵ and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; ²⁷ and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.”

When it comes to God's Word...

We do not read, we **feed!**

No greater respect can be shown for God's Word than making it a part of our lives and living it.

Examples:

- **1 Peter 1:23** – You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;
- **James 1:21** - ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.

Christians are called “through the word”:

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15 – ¹³ But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.

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NOTE: 2 Thessalonians 2:13 explains how Christians will be saved: through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. God chose to select those who would become sanctified by the Spirit and believe in the truth.

God’s word is the source of our salvation.

Psalms 119:41-48

41 Let thy steadfast love come to me, O Lord,
thy salvation according to thy promise;
42 then shall I have an answer for those who taunt me,
for I trust in thy word.
43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,
for my hope is in thy ordinances.
44 I will keep thy law continually,
for ever and ever;
45 and I shall walk at liberty,
for I have sought thy precepts.
46 I will also speak of thy testimonies before kings,
and shall not be put to shame;
47 for I find my delight in thy commandments,
which I love.
48 I revere thy commandments, which I love,
and I will meditate on thy statutes.

Terms and Definitions

Efficacious - capable of having the desired result or effect; effective as a means, measure, remedy, etc.

Effectual – (typically of something inanimate or abstract) successful in producing a desired or intended result; effective.

Terms Used to Describe the Doctrine:

Efficacious Grace

Effectual Calling

Efficacious Call of the Spirit

Transformed by the Holy Spirit

More descriptive as they indicate the intended message of those who teach this doctrine, i.e. their view of the role of the Holy Spirit in man's salvation.

According to “www.gotquestions.org...”

“The doctrine of irresistible grace accurately summarizes what the Bible teaches about the nature of saving faith as well as what must happen to overcome man’s depraved nature. Since natural man is dead in his trespasses and sins, it stands to reason that he must be regenerated before he can respond to the outward call of the gospel. Until that happens, man will resist the gospel message and the grace of God; however, once he has been “born again” and has a heart that is now inclined toward God, the grace of God will irresistibly draw Him to put his faith in Christ and be saved. **These two acts (regeneration and faith) cannot be separated from one another. They are so closely connected that we often cannot distinguish between them.**”

Does order matter?

The model according to Got Questions:

First, we are dead in our sins.

Does order matter?

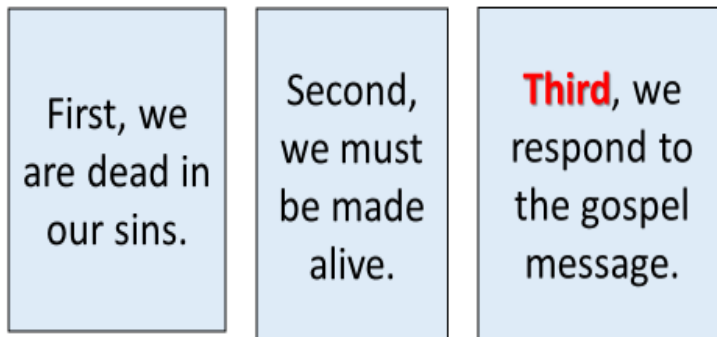
The model according to Got Questions:

First, we are dead in our sins.

Second, we must be made alive.

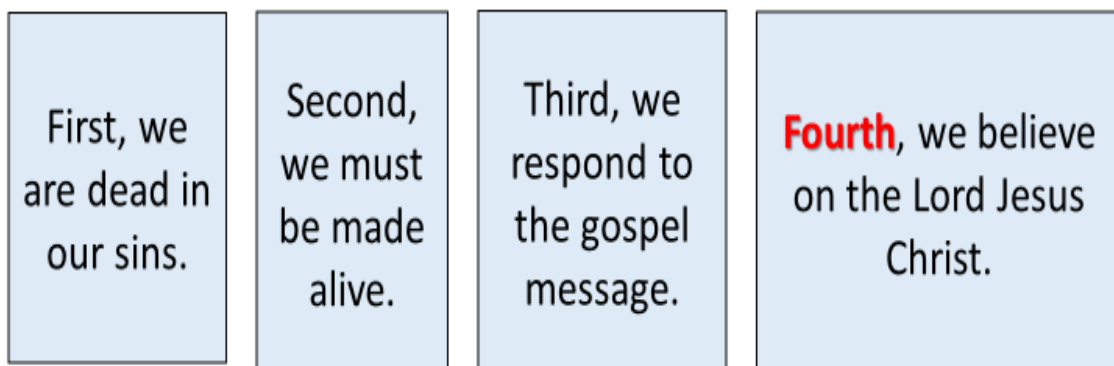
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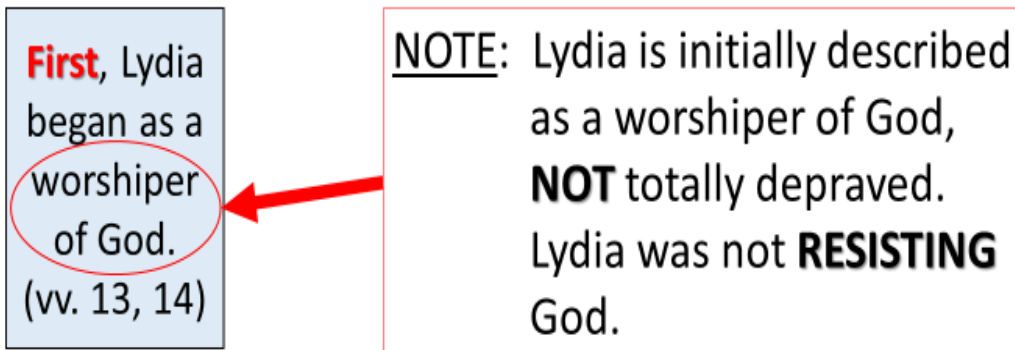


The Conversion of Lydia

Acts 16:11-15 ¹¹ Setting sail therefore from Tro'as, we made a direct voyage to Sam'othrace, and the following day to Ne-ap'olis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedo'nia, and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days; ¹³ and on the sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyati'ra, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And when she was baptized, with her household, she besought us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

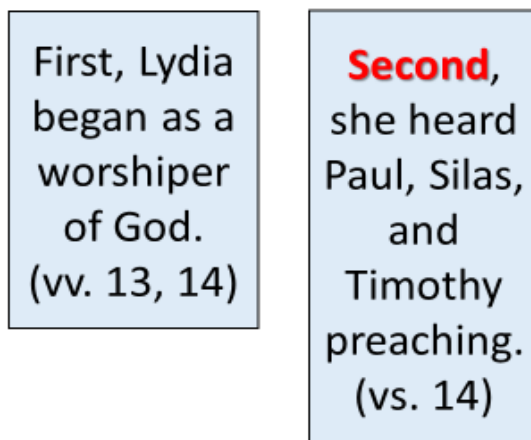
The Conversion of Lydia

The model according to **God's Word**:



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The model according to **God's Word**:



The Conversion of Lydia

The model according to **God's Word**:

First, Lydia began as a worshiper of God.
(vv. 13, 14)

Second, she heard Paul, Silas, and Timothy preaching.
(vs. 14)

Third, her heart was opened and she gave heed to what Paul said
(vs. 14)

The Conversion of Lydia

The model according to **God's Word**:

First, Lydia began as a worshiper of God.
(vv. 13, 14)

Second, she heard Paul, Silas, and Timothy preaching.
(vs. 14)

Third, her heart was opened and she gave heed to what Paul said
(vs. 14)

Fourth, she responded and obeyed the Lord. She was baptized for the remission of her sins
(vs. 15)

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8:26-40 ²⁶ But an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert road. ²⁷ And he rose and went. And behold, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a minister of the Can'dace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure, had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." ³⁰ So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8:26-40 (cont'd) **31** And he said, "How can I, unless some one guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. **32** Now the passage of the scripture which he was reading was this:

"As a sheep led to the slaughter
or a lamb before its shearer is dumb,
so he opens not his mouth.

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken up from the earth."

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8:26-40 (cont'd) **34** And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else?" **35** Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus. **36** And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?" **37**, And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." **38** And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. **39** And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. **40** But Philip was found at Azo'tus, and passing on he preached the gospel to all the towns till he came to Caesare'a.

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

The model according to **God's Word**:

First, the eunuch was a worshiper of God. (vs. 27)

NOTE: The eunuch is initially described as a worshiper of God, **NOT** totally depraved. A totally depraved person would never read God's word or worship him. Got Questions says depraved sinners **RESIST!**

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

The model according to **God's Word**:

First, the eunuch was a worshiper of God. (vs. 27)

Second, he invited Philip to study God's word with him. (vs. 31)

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

The model according to **God's Word**:

First, the eunuch was a worshiper of God.
(vs. 27)

Second, he invited Philip to study God's word with him.
(vs. 31)

Third, he believed the message he received.
(vv. 36-37)

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

The model according to **God's Word**:

First, the eunuch was a worshiper of God.
(vs. 27)

Second, he invited Philip to study God's word with him.
(vs. 31)

Third, he believed the message he received.
(vv. 36-37)

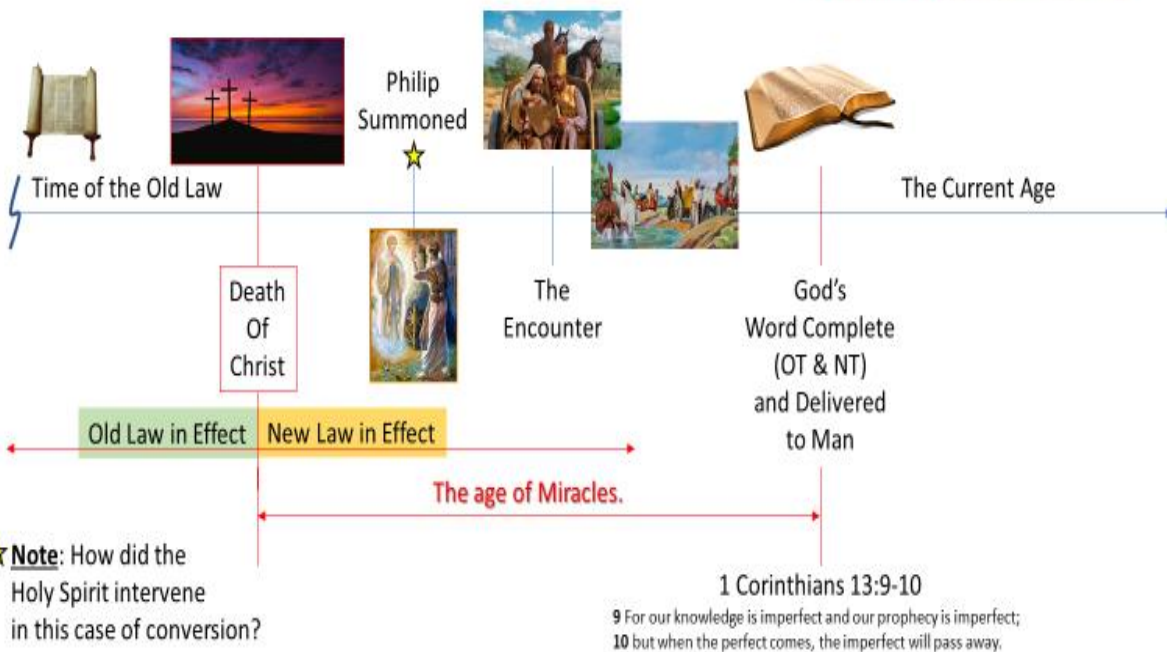
Fourth, he responded and obeyed the gospel. He was baptized for the forgiveness of his sins.
(vs. 38)

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Important question regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in this case of conversion:

- Q.** Why did an angel of the Lord instruct Philip to “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”?
 If the role of the Holy Spirit is miraculous in the transformation of sinners why was an angel of the Lord engaged in this conversion?
- A.** See verses 30-35. The Eunuch’s transformation was due to **God’s word!**
 The Eunuch did not have the complete word to instruct him regarding how to obey the gospel. The Holy Spirit provided him with God’s word.

Consider this story within the context of time.



Observation:

If, as the Calvinists teach, conversion of a sinner is by the “inward call” of the Holy Spirit, why was this case different than any other sinner? Following Calvinist reasoning, the Eunuch did not need Philip’s instruction.

The truth is that God’s word was being presented to the Eunuch so that he could make a choice!

Observation:

Those who teach the doctrine of Irresistible Grace deny the power of the Holy Spirit by depicting Him as only capable of transforming man through miraculous intervention.

They reject the true Bible message that He delivered **God’s Word** to man and that, once properly received, **God’s Word** is fully capable, by it’s divine nature, of producing the transformation they describe.

Romans 8:1-7

¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The Argument...

The “carnal mind,” possessed by those who are depraved, cannot understand, believe, or obey the spiritual law of God.

The Answer according to Romans 8...

1. Consider the verse in context – verses 1-8.
 - a. Seen in the context is the free agency of man in choosing whether to obey or disobey God.
 - b. In reality, the passage is teaching a simple principle:
 - Those who are spiritually minded, those who have interest in spiritual things, will be obedient to the commands of God.
 - Those who are carnally minded , those who possess no interest in spiritual matters, will be disobedient.
2. God does not force anyone to accept or reject His will.

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Scriptural Objections to Irresistible Grace

Irresistible Grace contradicts the Scriptural principle of free agency.

1. This tenet of Calvinism declares that the grace of God cannot be rejected.
2. In contrast, the Bible plainly teaches that ones salvation is conditional based upon his obedience— that one can either reject or accept salvation as it is offered through Jesus Christ.
 - a. The grace of God has appeared to all people (**Titus 2:11**) and yet millions have rejected it.
 - b. Each person is accountable for his response to the gospel.
(**John 12:47-48**)
 - c. Those who reject the teachings of Jesus are held responsible.
(**John 5:24; 8:24**)

Scriptural Objections to Irresistible Grace

Irresistible Grace contradicts the Scriptural principle of free agency.

3. The Bible states that each individual is free to choose whether or not to take advantage of the grace of God. It clearly demonstrates one may resist God's grace as revealed in His word.

Scriptural Objections to Irresistible Grace

Irresistible Grace mistakenly portrays how people are called by God to salvation.

1. All people are called by the gospel. (**2 Thessalonians 2:14**)
2. The Bible does not say that people are called by some still, small voice or by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on them.
3. The Holy Spirit, in the conviction and conversion of the sinner, does not work apart from the word. (**Romans 1:16**)

Scriptural Objections to Irresistible Grace

Irresistible Grace changes the order of belief and salvation.

1. "A man is not saved because he believes in Christ; he believes in Christ because he is saved." (Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*)
2. In the Bible, salvation always follows belief, i.e., faith always precedes salvation.
 - a. **John 3:16**. Belief then salvation.
 - b. **Acts 16:31**. Belief then salvation.
 - c. **Mark 16:16**. Belief, baptism, then salvation.
 - d. **Hebrews 11:6**. One cannot be saved without faith, thus making it a condition of salvation and causing it to have to precede the salvation of one's soul.

Scriptural Objections to Irresistible Grace

Irresistible Grace has an erroneous view as to when one is made alive spiritually.

The Bible teaches that one is made alive when, after hearing the gospel, he is baptized (**Col. 2:12,13; cf. John 3:3-5**).

Conclusion

1. The Scriptures reveal we are saved by the grace of God. (**Eph. 2:8**)
2. However, using our freedom to choose, we accept this grace by our faith not because God forces us to accept it. (**Rev. 22:17**)

YES TO GRACE; NO TO IRRESISTIBLE GRACE/MONERGISM

Even though I had proven to him that my theology, classical Arminianism, does *not* say persons save themselves through their good works or contribute anything meritorious to their salvation, my Calvinist interlocutor wasn't convinced. "Your theology," he accused, "is still semi-Pelagian if not fully Pelagian."

Somewhat offended because I regard these as heresies, I asked him to explain more fully. I thought he had come to realize Arminians *do not* believe in works righteousness and *do* believe salvation is all of grace and has nothing to do with meritorious works. But he responded: "Because you make the decisive factor in salvation your own free will decision."

At that time, years ago, I had never heard that accusation, but I knew for sure that no Arminian says that. When pressed, my Calvinist friend said: "You see, if salvation isn't all God's work and has nothing whatever to do with anything we do, it isn't by grace and it isn't a gift. By making it dependent on the person's free acceptance of God's grace, you make salvation a good work and therefore not a gift; and that contradicts Ephesians 2:8–9." I've encountered this accusation against Arminianism (and all non-Calvinist theologies) many times since. Somehow this notion that non-Calvinists make their free will decision the "decisive factor in salvation" has become a mantra for many Calvinists.

While I do think this specific charge has a suitable answer (which I will explain below), the underlying issue in this conversation was really about grace as either resistible or irresistible. Close examination suggests this is exactly the issue underlying the charge that Arminianism amounts to "works-righteousness." How does the saving grace of God bring the benefit of Christ's atoning death, forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and justification into a person's life? Is it a gift imposed or a gift freely received?

The Calvinist view is called *monergism*—from two Greek words that mean "one" and "energy" or "action." Monergism is the belief that salvation is all God's doing from beginning to end without any cooperation from the person being saved other than what God instills in that person. The alternative is "synergism"—the belief that salvation is all of grace but requires free cooperation for it to be activated in a person's life.

THE CALVINIST DOCTRINE OF IRRESISTIBLE OR EFFECTUAL GRACE/MONERGISM

There's a reason why the "I" follows the T, the U, and the L in TULIP, and it's not just because that's how the flower is spelled. For Calvinists, irresistible grace, which many prefer to call "effectual grace," is both biblical and logically necessary because of total depravity, unconditional election, and limited atonement. For biblical support they usually point to John 6:44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them." They interpret "draws" as "compels" but without the connotation of external force against the person's will. In other words, God bends the elect person's will so that he or she *wants* to come to Jesus with repentance and faith.

As for logic, the argument is that because people are totally depraved and dead in trespasses and sins, unless God elects him or her, the person will never respond to the internal calling of the Holy Spirit. So, the Holy Spirit has to change the person inwardly in an effectual manner, which is regeneration. Then the born again person desires to come to Christ, in which case he or she is given repentance and faith (conversion) and justification (forgiveness and imputation of Christ's righteousness). This process is called "monergistic grace" or just "monergism."

Reformed theologian Henry Meeter, in *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*, defines monergism this way:

One might say, *God planned salvation, and he earned it in Christ*. Now the choice of acceptance or rejection is mine alone. In a sense it is so. But who causes a Christian to accept Christ? “For we are all gone astray. There is none that seeketh after God.” So Christ sends the Holy Spirit into our stubborn hearts, regenerates us, and puts faith and love to God there, as well as new ambitions and desires. This he does with irresistible power—not, as the Arminians say, if we let him; we would never spontaneously let him. We only work out our own salvation because it is God that worketh in us.... Thus, the entire work of redemption in its essentials is the work of God. God the Father planned it. God the Son earned it. And God the Holy Spirit applies it, regenerating heart and life.

Whether Meeter has Arminianism right is debatable, and I have challenged similar descriptions in my *Arminian Theology*. Nevertheless, his is a clear and concise expression of the monergism universally held and taught among Calvinists.

The point is that, for the Calvinist, any contribution that the human person makes to his or her salvation is really, however unnoticed, a work of God in him or her. Meeter partially quotes Philippians 2:12, which says: “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” Verse 13, which Meeter omits (possibly by mistake), says, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” For him and all Calvinists whom I have encountered, what Paul meant is this: “If you are working out your salvation with fear and trembling, remember it is God doing it all in and through you.” Only in this way can all glory for salvation be given to God alone.

Did Calvin believe in monergistic grace? That he did is revealed in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* where he referred to the “inner call.” He declared: “The manner of the call itself clearly indicates that it depends on grace alone.” He continues:

Even the very nature and dispensation of the call clearly demonstrates [that] it consists not only in the preaching of the Word but also in the illumination of the Spirit.... When he first shines with the light of His word upon the undeserving, he thereby shows a sufficiently clear proof of his free goodness. Here, then, God’s boundless goodness is already manifesting itself but not to the salvation of all; for a heavier judgment remains upon the wicked because they reject the testimony of God’s love. [Of course, Calvin has previously made clear that this is because they were predestined to do so!] And God also, to show forth his glory, withdraws the effectual working of his Spirit from them. This inner call, then, is a pledge of salvation that cannot deceive us.... But lest the flesh boast that it did at least answer him when he called and freely offered himself, he declares that it has no ears to hear, no eyes to see, unless he makes them. Furthermore, he makes them not according to each person’s gratefulness but according to his election.

Here Calvin clearly expresses monergism or irresistible grace. God “makes” the elected sinner’s ears to hear and eyes to see the gospel, and he “withdraws” that “effectual working” (irresistible grace) from the non-elect, the reprobate.

As I will explain later, most Calvinists claim that synergists want to be able to boast, even if just a little, that they contributed something to their salvation and/or are so in love with free will that they cannot bring themselves to accept that God does everything in salvation and they contribute nothing. That does not reflect the real statements made by synergists, however. The fact is, most synergists object to monergism because of the necessary implication stated plainly by Calvin that it requires God to withhold or withdraw monergistic grace from many of the very

people he created in his own image and likeness to their eternal damnation and suffering “for his glory.” This Calvin states clearly about the reprobate: “They are raised up to the end that through them God’s glory may be revealed.” Lest anyone misunderstand the source of their reprobation: “For when it says that God hardens or shows mercy to whom he wills, men are warned by this to seek no cause outside his will.”⁴ The *sole reason* non-Calvinist evangelical Christians object to monergism is because it makes God the ultimate, even if indirect, cause of the reprobates’ unbelief and damnation. It does serious harm to God’s reputation.

Lorraine Boettner follows Calvin closely by attributing everything in salvation to God to the exclusion of any free human cooperation with grace. He bases this on the doctrines of total depravity and unconditional election. “If man is dead in sin, then nothing short of ... supernatural life-giving power of the Holy Spirit will ever cause him to do that which is spiritually good.” So, regeneration must precede conversion: “Regeneration is a sovereign gift of God, graciously bestowed on those whom He has chosen.”⁶ It involves a fundamental change of character so that the person regenerated wants to repent and believe and serve God. Boettner avers that this doctrine of irresistible grace is *the only* evangelical theology because only it ascribes all the work of salvation to God, thus giving God alone the glory. Arminianism is not evangelical, he claims, because it makes man and not God “ultimately the deciding factor” in salvation.⁸ This is why he and other Calvinists attack Arminian theology as “man-centered” rather than “God-centered.”

One has to wonder, however, who is the God at the center of this theology. Boettner admits that God could save everyone, because election to salvation is unconditional and regeneration and faith are solely gifts of God given only to the elect: “But for reasons which have been only partially revealed, He leaves many impenitent.” While non-Calvinists are willing to admit that high Calvinism is God-centered, they have good reason to wonder how exactly to distinguish between the God it centers itself on and Satan—except that Satan wants all people damned to hell and God wants only a certain number damned to hell. That may sound harsh, but it is the reason most Christians are not Calvinists. And it is no less harsh than Calvinists’ frequent accusation that Arminians (and other non-Calvinists) place man, not God, at the center of their theology because they want to boast and rob God of his rightful glory.

Ironically and confusingly, Boettner goes on to claim that monergism involves no violation of the sinner’s free agency. “This change [viz., regeneration] is not accomplished through any external compulsion but through a new principle of life which has been created within the soul and which seeks after the food which alone can satisfy it [viz., God’s word].” Then he compounds the confusion by saying that “the elect are so influenced by divine power that their coming is an act of voluntary choice.”¹¹ One can only wonder what “voluntary choice” means in this context; I assume Boettner is referring to the compatibilist freedom of Edwards and other Calvinists—freedom compatible with determinism.

Steele and Thomas weigh in on this doctrine that they call “the efficacious call of the Spirit”: “Simply stated, this doctrine asserts that the Holy Spirit never fails to bring to salvation those sinners whom He personally calls to Christ. He inevitably applies salvation to every sinner whom He intends to save, and it is His intention to save all the elect.” Like Calvin, Boettner, and most Calvinists, they distinguish between a “general, outer call” of the gospel, which is a universal invitation to all people to be saved, and a “special, inward call” that goes out only to the elect and effects their regeneration before they respond with repentance and faith. This special call is irresistible: “The grace which the Holy Spirit extends to the elect cannot be thwarted or refused, it never fails to bring them to true faith in Christ.” For biblical support Steele and Thomas turn to Romans 8:30: “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those

he justified, he also glorified.” The omission of 8:29 appears convenient to their purpose of showing God utterly and solely responsible for regeneration. That verse says: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” There election is based on God’s foreknowledge—something Calvinists reject as an error. Also, verse 30 says nothing at all about grace being irresistible. Moreover, Paul skips over regeneration to justification. This verse, in its context and not treated eisegetically (reading meanings into a text that are not there), does not support irresistible grace.

Calvinist Palmer agrees entirely with Calvin, Boettner, and Steele and Thomas about irresistible grace, and for the same reasons; but he emphasizes more the active response to grace that is necessary on the elect person’s part if he or she is to be saved. As we have already seen, like some Calvinists, Palmer revels in paradox. Here is another case:

Although it is true that none would be saved were it not for the irresistible grace of God, no one may ever fall into the rationalistic trap of saying that he has nothing to do. He may not reason that since all depends on the Holy Spirit, he does not need to believe; or that he must simply wait for the Spirit to move him, and there is nothing that he can do to be saved.

This warning sounds Calvinist and Arminian at the same time; Palmer apparently wants to have his cake and eat it too. Note especially the final words of his statement where he warns against believing there is nothing a person can do to be saved. Afterwards he writes: “If you do [believe], thank God for causing you to do so.” So, on the one hand, God “causes” the elect person to believe, and we are forbidden to suggest that is in any way an act of free will.¹⁶ On the other hand, we are forbidden to suggest there is nothing a person can do to be saved. These ideas are difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile.

R. C. Sproul also champions irresistible grace: “God unilaterally and monergistically does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.” He prefers to call it “effectual grace” lest anyone misunderstand by thinking that in this belief God forces someone to be saved against his or her will. Rather, God graciously imparts the gift of faith so that the person wants to believe: “The faith by which we [the elect] are saved is a gift. When the apostle says [in Eph. 2:8–9] it is not of ourselves, he does not mean it is not our faith. Again, God does not do the believing for us. It is our own faith but it does not originate with us. It is given to us. The gift is not earned or deserved. It is a gift of sheer grace.” Also, “the whole point of irresistible grace is that rebirth quickens someone to spiritual life in such a way that Jesus is now seen in his irresistible sweetness.”¹⁹

For Sproul, then, God “monergistically and unilaterally” saves the elect person by giving him or her the gift of faith, which then is the person’s own faith *and* God regenerates the person so that they, for the first time, see Jesus “in his irresistible sweetness.” All this without violating the person’s will. Like Boettner, Sproul regards irresistible grace or effectual calling as an even more basic and fundamental issue of Protestant (and therefore evangelical) theology than justification by faith alone. After all, he argues, if a person contributes anything to salvation, including a bare permission to allow God to work, then justification is not solely by grace alone. The issue of the graciousness of salvation is more important because it is more basic than the issue of salvation by faith alone. “Here we reach the ultimate point of separation between semi-Pelagianism and Augustinianism, between Arminianism and Calvinism, between Rome and the Reformation.”

Notice how Sproul is putting Arminianism, by which he means any Protestant view other than high Calvinism, on the side of “Rome”—meaning Roman Catholicism—over against the Reformation. What he is saying here is that Arminianism (i.e., any view other than his) is not really

Protestant and therefore not really evangelical either. I live in Texas and around here we might say, “Them’s fightin’ words!” Seriously, one has to wonder why Sproul would be so blatantly offensive to fellow Protestant Christians, including everyone in the Wesleyan tradition, all Pentecostals, many if not most Baptists, and many other evangelical Christians who, for very good reasons, do not accept his point of view.

Sproul continues:

In the Reformation view, the work of regeneration is performed by God and by him alone. The sinner is completely passive in receiving this action. Regeneration is an example of operative grace. Any cooperation we display toward God occurs only *after* the work of regeneration has been completed.

The only support Sproul gives for his claim that this is “the Reformation view” is Luther’s vicious response to Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) entitled *On the Bondage of the Will*. There, admittedly, Luther expressed this view. Does that make it “the Reformation view”? Hardly. Luther’s right-hand man, Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), was more of a synergist, agreeing with Erasmus that salvation involves some cooperation with God’s grace by the human person even though he adamantly insisted there is no merit in this cooperation. Reformation Anabaptists such as Balthasar Hubmaier (1480–1528) and Menno Simons (1496–1561) emphasized free will over against monergistic grace. For Sproul to pit his monergistic view of salvation as the only Protestant one over against all others as Roman Catholic is misleading at best and disingenuous at worst.

John Piper can be counted on to agree with Calvin, Boettner, Steele and Thomas, Palmer, and Sproul. Diving into paradox with them, he writes: “God will see to it that his elect hear the invitation and respond the way they should.... But he does not do this in a way that lessens our accountability to hear and believe.” He also argues that irresistible grace, together with unconditional election, forms the only reasonable motive for intercessory prayer and spiritual warfare. That is because, he argues, there is no point in praying for the salvation of the lost or the defeat of Satan, who he admits is “the god of this world,” unless God intervenes powerfully to make these things happen. If people have free will, Piper argues, there is no point in praying for their salvation or that they not support Satan in his “devastation” of the world. “Either you give up praying for God to convert sinners or you give up ultimate human self-determination.”²⁴

Of course, anyone can see the profound irony in such claims. Elsewhere Piper has stated unequivocally that God ordains, governs, and even causes everything that happens. Whatever is the case, God has foreordained it. If he responds to a prayer—for example, for the salvation of a lost loved one—it is because he has foreordained it. The prayer does not actually change anything; it is simply a foreordained means to a foreordained end. Piper is a divine determinist, whether he likes that label or not. So what role does prayer or spiritual warfare really play in his theology? Certainly not that they can actually bring it about that God acts in any other way than he already planned to act and necessarily will act.

MORE INJURY TO GOD’S REPUTATION

In the next section of this chapter, “Alternatives to Irresistible Grace/Monergism,” I will show that many of the accusations by Calvinists such as Sproul against non-Calvinist and especially Arminian views miss their targets entirely. In this section, I want once again to expose the fallacies of the Calvinist arguments for monergism and demonstrate that monergism actually injures God’s reputation by necessarily undermining God’s goodness and love.

I begin with refutations of typical Calvinist interpretations of Scriptures that supposedly require monergism. The most important such verses are John 6:44 and 65, where Jesus says that no one comes to him unless the Father “draws” him. Sproul and other Calvinists argue that the Greek verb here translated “draws” always and only means “compels.” In a brilliant but unpublished 2003 paper entitled “The ‘Drawings’ of God,” pastor-theologian Steve Witzki conclusively proves that Sproul is wrong. He cites numerous Greek lexicons saying that the Greek word does not always mean “compels” but often means “draw, attract.”

Sproul cites a reference work many consider definitive in matters of interpreting the Greek New Testament—Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*—to support his definition of the term throughout the New Testament, including John 6:44 and cognate passages. However, Witzki quotes Kittel as allowing a broader range of possible meanings. With reference to John 6:44 and 12:32 the author of Kittel’s article (Albrecht Oepke) writes:

There is no thought here of force or magic. The term figuratively expresses the supernatural power of the love of God or Christ which goes out to all ... but without which no one can come.... The apparent contradiction shows that both the election and the universality of grace must be taken seriously; the compulsion is not automatic.

The most devastating argument against Sproul’s case that the term always means “compels” is John 12:32. There Jesus says that if he is lifted up from the earth, he will “draw all people” to himself. The Greek verb translated “draw” there is the same as in John 6:44 and 65. If Sproul is right and the verb must always mean “compel,” then this verse teaches universalism. In fact, however, the word *can mean* simply draw or attract rather than compel or drag. The Arminian interpretation of these verses in John 6 and 12 is reasonable: that nobody can come to Jesus Christ unless he or she is drawn by God’s prevenient grace that calls and enables but does not compel.

Are there Scriptures that contradict irresistible grace? Steve Lemke marshals many passages that disprove it. For example, Matthew 23 and Luke 13 describe Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Matt. 23:37–39)

Lemke rightly notes that if Calvinism is correct, “Jesus’ lament would have been over God’s hardness of heart.” There are so many passages like this throughout the Bible, where God or Jesus or a prophet decries the people’s hardness of heart sorrowfully as if it could be otherwise. If irresistible grace were true, of course, Jesus could have simply drawn the people of Jerusalem effectually to himself. Why didn’t he if he was so sorrowful about their rejection? And why would he be sorrowful about their rejection if it, like everything else, was foreordained by God?

The usual Calvinist response to these passages is that God is sorrowful over people’s hardness of heart and rejection of him. That he doesn’t do anything about it can only be because he chooses not to, and that he chooses not to can only be because his strongest motive (Edwards’ definition of free will) is not to. In brief, he doesn’t want to but wishes he could. The only hint Calvinists give us as to why God doesn’t do what he wishes is “for his glory.” What kind of God is glorified by people rejecting him when he chooses not to overcome that rejection when he could?

Moreover, why would God be sad or sorrowful about what glorifies him? What possible analogy could there be to this in human experience? Suppose a father has a love potion that would cause all of his children to love him and never rebel against him. He gives it to some of his children but not others and then weeps because some of his children reject him and don’t love him. Who

would take him seriously? Or, if they took him seriously, who wouldn't think him insincere or a bit mad? Lemke concludes from the story of Jesus' lament over Jerusalem:

If Jesus believed in irresistible grace, with both the outward and inward calls, His apparent lament over Jerusalem would have been just a disingenuous act, a cynical show because He knew that God had not and would not give these lost persons the necessary conditions for their salvation.

Another interesting biblical passage mentioned by Lemke is Matthew 19:24, where Jesus says to his disciples: "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." What sense does this verse make in light of irresistible grace? Is Jesus saying it is harder *for God* to save a rich man than a poor one? How could that be? If everyone, without exception, only gets into the kingdom of God by God's work alone without any required cooperation on his or her part, then Jesus' saying makes no sense at all. Again, Lemke's comment is spot on:

Of course, if Jesus were a Calvinist, He never would have suggested that it was harder for rich persons to be saved by God's irresistible grace than poor persons. Their wills would be changed immediately and invincibly upon hearing God's effectual call. It would be no harder for a rich person to be saved by God's monergistic and irresistible calling than it would be for any other sinner. But the real Jesus was suggesting that their salvation was tied in some measure to their response and commitment to His calling.

Lemke also points to the numerous all-inclusive invitations for people to come to God and to Christ in Scripture, especially to the already discussed "all" passages that express God's desire for everyone to be saved and none to perish (Matt. 18:14; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 2:2). As I have already shown, these cannot be interpreted as referring only to some people.

Most devastatingly of all, Lemke rightly points out that "the Calvinists essentially blame God for those who do not come [to salvation]." After all, while they would say that those who reject the gospel merely receive their just deserts when they are condemned, "there is really more to it than that. Calvinists say that God elected some to glory for His own reasons from before the world began, and He gave them irresistible grace through His Spirit so they inevitably would be saved." This is the main point against this doctrine of Calvinism (as it is the main point against all of them!). It portrays God as a respecter of persons because he chooses some to save irresistibly and others not to receive that crucial gift, with the result that they are damned forever. That they deserve condemnation is not the issue. The issue is that *everyone* deserves it, but God is selective about saving some irresistibly and leaving others to die an eternal separation from him in hell. Calvinists offer no reason for this other than "God's good pleasure" and/or "God's glory."

Yet, all Calvinists claim that God is good and loving. What goodness and love is this? In fact, to put it bluntly, Calvinism necessarily implies, whether any Calvinist would say so or not, that God requires a better quality of love from us than he himself exercises! In Luke 6:35 and parallel passages Jesus commands us to love our enemies; there is no hint of any exception. But according to Calvinism, God doesn't do that. Of course, some Calvinists insist that God *does* love even his reprobate enemies. But there is no analogy to *that* kind of love in human experience. It would be a love in which a person could rescue some from terrible deaths but chooses not to in order to show how great he is. Is there any analogy to this "goodness" and "love" in human experience? If not, then I suggest, with Paul Helm, it is meaningless.

Walls and Dongell offer an analogy to test whether any human being would be considered loving or good if he or she acted as Calvinism says God acts in giving irresistible grace only to some of his fallen human creatures. (Remember, he created all in his own image and likeness.) In

their illustration, a doctor discovers a cure for a deadly disease killing a group of camp children and gives it to the camp's director. The director administers it to some sick children so that they are cured and withholds it from others so that they die terribly. He has no shortage of the cure; nothing at all hinders him from curing all the children. Even though some of the children resisted the cure, the director had the ability to persuade all of them to take it; he only persuaded some. When the parents confront the director, he passionately contends that he loved all the children—even the ones who died. He cared for them while they were sick and made them as comfortable as possible. Walls and Dongell rightly conclude:

The director's claim to love all the children rings hollow at best, deceptive at worst. If love will not employ all available means to rescue someone from ultimate loss, it is hard to hear it as love at all. In our judgment, it becomes meaningless to claim that God wishes to save all while also insisting that God refrains from making the salvation of all possible. What are we to make of a God whose walk does not match his talk?

The plain fact of the matter is that the doctrine of irresistible grace, *without universal salvation which most Calvinists reject*, leads to the "good and necessary consequence" that God is not good and not loving. Now, of course, no Calvinist would admit that! But their teaching should lead a thinking person to that conclusion. And what they say is inconsistent and therefore highly problematic, if not downright incoherent. When I hear or read a high Calvinist saying that God loves everyone and is a good God, I really have no idea what that means.

Another problem with irresistible grace is that personal relationships require mutuality. Dutch philosopher-theologian Vincent Brümmer has demonstrated this conclusively in his *Speaking of a Personal God*, where he presents a step-by-step logical argument that mutuality, in the sense of free response that is resistible, is part of any personal relationship. Without freedom of will, which includes ability to resist, a person's acts are not really "acts" at all but "events." By definition, realization of a personal relationship requires free acts of both parties toward the other:

For the realization of a *personal relationship* the initiative of *both* partners in the relationship is necessary. Given that both partners in such a relationship are persons, both have by definition the freedom of will, by which it must be *factually possible* for both of them to say "no" to the other and so to prevent the relationship from coming into existence. It is only by means of the "yes" of one partner that the other receives the freedom of ability to realize the relationship. In this respect personal relationships are symmetrical and differ from purely causal relationships which are asymmetrical, because only one partner (the cause) can be the initiator. The other partner in a purely causal relationship is an object of causal manipulation and therefore lacks the freedom of will to be able to say "no" with respect to what happens to him or her.

Brümmer argues further that in our relationship with God, God can be the initiator and must be because of our lack of "freedom of ability" due to our sinfulness. However, "a personal relationship with God assumes that the human partner also remains a person in the relationship and that his or her free choice is equally a necessary condition for the relationship to be brought about." Finally, Brümmer negates the idea of irresistible grace by saying that even

God cannot bring about our choice without it ceasing to be ours. By definition, a *personal* relationship with God cannot be factually unavoidable for the human partner. For this reason the doctrine of factual irresistibility excludes a personal relationship between God and human persons.

It doesn't take a philosopher to establish these facts; they are common sense. But it helps for a philosopher to support them. And it won't do for Calvinists to complain about critics appealing to

philosophy; they are good at using philosophy when it helps their arguments. Common sense alone dictates that a truly personal relationship always involves free will; insofar as one party controls the other such that the other has no real choice whether to be in the relationship or not, it is not a real relationship. It makes no difference that both parties *want* to be in the relationship. Imagine a friendship where one person has manipulated the other one into being his friend. Perhaps he has plied him with money or even given him a drug that makes him friendly. Any objective observer of such a “friendship” would say it is really not a legitimate friendship—at least not a healthy one. Mutual, informed consent is a prerequisite to any good relationship. But Brümmer doesn’t leave the matter there. He aims his critique straight at high Calvinism’s notion of salvation itself. Referring to high Calvinism with the metonymy of “Dordt” (referring to the 1618/1619 Synod of Dort) he says:

It strikes me that the difficulties here have their source in the fact that the Dordt theologians did not view human salvation in terms of a personal *relationship* with God but in terms of a reborn *condition* in us. The only question then concerns the *cause* of this condition: is it God or us, grace or human will?

But when salvation is regarded not as a mere causal condition but also, and even more, as a personal relationship, as most evangelicals do regard it, the idea that it can be founded on *both* grace *and* human will (with grace having priority) is compelling.

I will round out this description and critique of Calvinism’s doctrine of irresistible grace, monergism, with an appropriate quote from Vernon Grounds, an evangelical theologian who agrees completely with Brümmer: “God deals personally with personal beings.... Grace that left no option whatever would not be grace, it would be something else. We should have to say, ‘By force were ye saved, and not of yourselves.’ ”

ALTERNATIVES TO IRRESISTIBLE GRACE/MONERGISM

Now I will tackle some of the objections to “evangelical synergism” raised by Calvinists. By “evangelical synergism” I mean roughly Arminian theology, although many who hold this view of salvation do *not* wish to be called Arminians. I respect that while also respectfully asking them to consider whether the label may be more appropriate than they think.

Over the centuries Calvinist theologians, by sheer repetition and misrepresentation, have brought about a situation where the term “Arminian” is widely thought of as designating a heresy. I have demonstrated conclusively in my *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* that it is *not* what they say. For example, contrary to Sproul and other misinformed or disingenuous Calvinist critics, it is not semi-Pelagian. Semi-Pelagianism is the heresy that says the initiative in salvation is ours, the human person’s, and not God’s. Arminianism has always insisted that the initiative in salvation is God’s; it is called “prevenient grace,” and it is enabling but resistible. It would come as a shock to many Calvinists to know how much of salvation and the whole Christian life both Arminius and Wesley attributed to grace—*all of it*.

But Arminian theology assumes, because the Bible everywhere assumes, that God limits himself out of love so that his initiating, enabling grace is resistible. It is powerful and persuasive but not compelling in the determinative sense. It leaves the sinner a person, not an object. Baptist theologian Robert E. Picirilli says:

What Arminius meant by “prevenient grace” was that grace that precedes actual regeneration and which, except when finally resisted, inevitably leads on to regeneration. He was quick to observe

that this “assistance of the Holy Spirit” is of such sufficiency “as to keep at the greatest possible distance from Pelagianism.”

Another Baptist theologian, Stanley J. Grenz, was an Arminian without labeling himself such. In his systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God*, he describes prevenient grace in three ways: as illuminating, as convicting, and as calling and enabling. He makes clear it is always resistible because it comes to persons and not machines through the hearing of God’s Word. The point here is simply this: Arminian theology (and many non-Calvinist theologies that are not so labeled)⁴⁶ places the initiative in salvation and all the work of salvation squarely on the divine side of the equation. God’s grace is the effectual cause of salvation, but the human person’s faith as response to prevenient grace is the instrumental cause of salvation. What is that faith? Simply trusting God; it is not a “good work” or anything meritorious of which the saved sinner could boast. But what about the Calvinist attacks on Arminian theology as a form of self-salvation and works righteousness akin to (they would say) Roman Catholic theology? Knowledgeable Calvinists do not say that Arminians believe they have to work for their salvation; they say that Arminians and other non-Calvinists make the human decision of faith the “decisive factor” in salvation and therefore bring it back, however unintentionally, to salvation by good works.

To Arminians, however, this accusation is ridiculous. Imagine a student who is starving and about to be evicted from his room due to lack of money. A kindly professor *gives* him a check for \$1,000—enough to pay his rent and stock his kitchen with food. Imagine further that the rescued student takes the check to his bank, endorses it, and deposits it in his account (which brings his balance up to \$1,000). Imagine also that the student then goes around campus boasting that he *earned* \$1,000. What would everyone’s response be who knew the truth of the situation? They would accuse the student of being an ungrateful wretch. But suppose the student said, “But my endorsing the check and depositing it was the decisive factor in my having the money, so I did a good work that earned at least part of the money, didn’t I?” He would be ridiculed and possibly even ostracized for such nonsense.

In what situation in human experience is merely *accepting* a gift “the decisive factor” in having it? It is *a* factor, yes—but hardly the decisive one. Merely accepting a gift does not give one the right to boast. Oh, but the Calvinist will say, the student in the above illustration *could* boast *if* the professor offered a similar gift of money to *other* starving students and they rejected it. He could boast that in some way he is better than they are. I doubt it. He might try, but who would believe him? People would say to him: “Stop trying to take some credit for being rescued! That others didn’t accept the money and were evicted and are begging for food on the street says nothing at all about you. Give all the credit where it belongs—to the kindly professor.” Who can really argue with that?

Why do Arminians and other non-Calvinists reject irresistible grace? Because they love free will and don’t want to give all the glory to God, as some Calvinists suggest? Not at all. That’s a calumny unworthy of anyone who has bothered to study the matter. Every Arminian from Arminius to the present has always made clear the real motive behind rejecting the doctrine of irresistible grace: preserving the good and loving character of God. Of course, *if* a person could be a universalist, there would be no necessary obstacle to irresistible grace except possibly the one raised above about the nature of personal relationships. However, *if* the only possible way in which people could be saved was for God to overwhelm them and compel them to accept his mercy, I would have no fundamental objection to believing in it *so long as God did it for everyone*. Fortunately, there is another way: prevenient grace. And since I cannot believe in universal

salvation, that is the only alternative to monergism that preserves God’s character of perfect love, revealed in Jesus Christ.

Another common Calvinist objection to evangelical synergism/Arminianism is that it does not take human depravity seriously enough. After all, Calvinists aver, fallen human persons are literally dead in trespasses and sins. Their only hope is for God to resuscitate them. Indeed, but God’s resuscitation does not include leaving them no option whether to accept him or not. Actually, Arminians and other synergists *do* believe that prevenient grace restores life to the person dead in trespasses and sins. However, it does not compel them to accept God’s mercy unto salvation, which requires free repentance and faith (conversion).

So, in Arminian theology, a partial regeneration does precede conversion, but it is not a complete regeneration. It is an awakening and enabling, but not an irresistible force. This is how evangelical synergists interpret the “drawings” of John’s gospel, including Jesus’ words about drawing all people to himself if he be lifted up. In fact, *only* this interpretation of these drawings keeps them together meaning the same thing—God’s powerful attracting and persuading power that actually imparts free will to be saved or not. Being saved is not a matter of doing a work; it is only a matter of *not resisting*. When a person decides to allow God’s grace to save, he or she repents and trusts only and completely in Christ. That is a passive act; it could be compared to a drowning person who decides to relax and let his rescuer save him from drowning.

This is how Arminians/evangelical synergists understand Philippians 2:12–13 quoted earlier. The apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells his Christian readers to remember to “work out” their salvation “with fear and trembling.” Critics think Arminians and evangelical synergists generally stop there and ignore the next verse. But they don’t. They realize and teach that *if* people are working out their salvation, from beginning to end, it is only because “God is at work” in them. That’s prevenient, assisting grace: prevenient leading up to conversion and assisting throughout the entire Christian life. But it would be pointless for Paul to urge his readers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling if God were doing everything and they did not even have to cooperate by allowing God’s grace to work in them.

I ask the reader’s indulgence as I close this chapter by providing two rather homely illustrations of evangelical synergism that I believe do more justice to the biblical text and Christian experience *and the character of God* than Calvinist images and analogies. First, imagine a deep pit with steep, slippery sides. Several people are lying broken and wounded, utterly helpless, at the bottom of the pit.

- *Semi-Pelagianism* says that God comes along and throws a rope down to the bottom of the pit and waits for a person to start pulling on it. Once he does, God responds by yelling, “Grab it tight and wrap it around yourself. Together we’ll get you out.” The problem is, the person is too hurt to do that, the rope is too weak, and God is too good to wait for the person to initiate the process.
- *Monergism* says God comes along, throws a rope down into the pit, and climbs down it, wrapping it around *some* of the people and then goes back out of the pit and pulls them to safety without any cooperation. The problem is that the God of Jesus Christ is too good and loving to rescue only some of the helpless people.
- *Evangelical synergism* says that God comes along and throws a rope down and yells, “Grab onto it and pull and together we’ll get you out!” Nobody moves. They are too wounded. In fact, for all practical purposes they are “dead” because they are utterly helpless. So God pours water into the pit and yells, “Relax and let the water lift you out!” In other words,

“Float!” All a person in the pit has to do to be rescued is let the water lift him or her out of the pit. It takes a decision, but not an effort. The water, of course, is prevenient grace.

Second, here is an illustration of grace and “working out your salvation” throughout the Christian life. During the hot summers I have to water my plants often. So I go to the outdoor faucet where the hose is attached, turn it on all the way, and then walk to the end of the hose and drag it around the side of the house to water a bush. Invariably when I get to the bush and press the handle of the attachment at the end of the hose, nothing comes out. I go back to the faucet and discover everything’s fine there. The water pressure is strong; the water is flowing into the hose full force. Ah, I realize, there’s a kink in the hose. So I go and find the kink that is keeping the water inside the hose from flowing and work it out.

In this illustration, the water represents God’s assisting grace; it is always “full force” in a Christian’s life. There are no “grace boosters.” Grace is full and free from conversion and regeneration on into the life of sanctification. But if I am not experiencing the flow of God’s grace in confidence and power for service, it isn’t due to any lack of grace; it is due to kinks in the hose of my life. What are the kinks? Attitudes, besetting sins, lack of prayer. All I have to do is decide to remove those kinks and the grace that is already there is allowed to flow.

This is an imperfect illustration of Philippians 2:12–13 from an evangelical synergist perspective. The one alteration needed to make the illustration really “work” is that even my ability to remove those “kinks” is a gift of God. But I do have to do something—not a good, meritorious work of which I can boast but merely admitting my helplessness and utter dependence on God’s grace and asking God to give me the ability and desire to remove the kinks.

The best exposition of this evangelical synergistic/Arminian soteriology in modern language is *The Transforming Power of Grace* by Thomas Oden. By all accounts an orthodox, biblically serious, and evangelical theologian, Oden winsomely and biblically articulates the theology briefly outlined above that I call evangelical synergism. Of grace Oden says: “God prepares the will and co-works with the prepared will. Insofar as grace precedes and prepares free will it is called prevenient. Insofar as grace accompanies and enables human willing to work with divine willing, it is called cooperating grace.”⁴⁹ “Only when sinners are assisted by prevenient grace can they begin to yield their hearts to cooperation with subsequent forms of grace.” “The need for grace to prevene is great, for it was precisely when ‘you were dead in your transgressions and sins’ (Eph. 2:1) that ‘by grace you have been saved’ (Eph. 2:8).”¹

¹ Olson, R. E. (2011). *Against Calvinism* (pp. 155–174). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Truly it is an evil to be full of faults," said Pascal, "but it is a still greater evil to be full of them, and to be unwilling to recognize them." People divide into two types: not the guilty and the "righteous," as many people think, but rather two different types of guilty people. There are guilty people who acknowledge their wrongs, and guilty ones who do not, two groups who converge in a scene recorded in John 8.

The incident takes place in the temple courts, where Jesus is teaching. A group of Pharisees and teachers of the law interrupt this "church service" by dragging in a woman caught in adultery. Following the custom, she is stripped to the waist as a token of her shame. Terrified, defenseless, publicly humiliated, the woman cowers before Jesus, her arms covering her bare breasts.

Adultery takes two, of course, but the woman stands alone before Jesus. John makes clear that the accusers have less interest in punishing a crime than in setting a trap for Jesus, and quite a clever trap it is. Moses' law specifies death by stoning for adultery, yet Roman law forbids the Jews from carrying out executions. Will Jesus obey Moses or Rome? Or will he, notorious for his mercy, find some way to let this adulteress off the hook? If so, he must defy Moses' law before a crowd assembled in the very courts of the temple. All eyes fix on Jesus.

At that moment crackling with tension, Jesus does something unique: he bends down and writes on the ground with his finger. This is, in fact, the only scene from the Gospels that shows Jesus writing. For his only written words he chose as his medium a palette of sand, knowing that footsteps, wind, or rain would soon erase them.

John does not tell us what Jesus wrote in the sand. In his movie of Jesus' life, Cecil B. DeMille depicts him spelling out the names of various sins: Adultery, Murder, Pride, Greed, Lust. Each time Jesus writes a word, a few more Pharisees file away. DeMille's guess, like all others, is conjecture. We know only that in this moment freighted with danger Jesus pauses, keeps silent, and fingers words on the ground. Irish poet Seamus Heaney comments that Jesus "marks time in every possible sense of that phrase," concentrating everyone's attention and creating a rift of meaning between what is going to happen and whatever the audience wishes to happen.

Those in the audience no doubt see two categories of actors in the drama: the guilty woman, caught red-handed, and the "righteous" accusers who are, after all, religious professionals. When Jesus finally speaks, he demolishes one of those categories. "If any one of you is without sin," he says, "let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

Again, he stoops to write, marking more time, and one by one all the accusers slink away.

Next, Jesus straightens up to address the woman, left alone before him. "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she says.

And to this woman, dragged in terror to her expected execution, Jesus grants absolution: "Then neither do I condemn you.... Go now and leave your life of sin."

Thus, in a brilliant stroke Jesus replaces the two assumed categories, righteous and guilty, with two different categories: sinners who admit and sinners who deny. The woman caught in adultery helplessly admitted her guilt. Far more problematic were people like the Pharisees who denied or repressed guilt. They too needed hands empty for grace.

Dr. Paul Tournier expresses this pattern in the language of psychiatry: "God blots out conscious guilt, but He brings to consciousness repressed guilt."

That stance of openness to receive is what I call the “catch” to grace. It must be received, and the Christian term for that act is *repentance*, the doorway to grace. C. S. Lewis said repentance is not something God arbitrarily demands of us; “It is simply a description of what going back is like.” In terms of the parable of the Prodigal Son, repentance is the flight home that leads to joyful celebration. It opens the way to a future, to a relationship restored.

The Bible’s many fierce passages on sin appear in a new light once I understand God’s desire to press me toward repentance, **the doorway to grace**. Jesus told Nicodemus, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” In other words, he awakes guilt for my own benefit. God seeks not to crush me but to liberate me, and liberation requires a **defenseless spirit** like that of the woman caught red-handed, not the haughty spirit of the Pharisees.²

² Yancey, P. (2009). [*Where is god when it hurts/what’s so amazing about grace?*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Receiving God's Grace In Vain

W. C. Hinton, Jr.

IN THE POWERFUL FIFTEENTH CHAPTER OF 1 Corinthians Paul refers to certain basics of the gospel, to his preaching to those brethren, and to the appearances of the Lord. Then he gives an exclamatory statement of his own condition: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not found vain" (verse 10). God has favored mankind exceedingly by making it possible for him, as well as Paul, to learn to love and obey the truth that makes men free. How grateful we ought to be!

God's grace meets our greatest need—salvation. "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men" (Titus 2:11). Urgings, facts and beauties of this salvation are communicated through the Word "which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Demands are made of the committed so that they are neither dull nor bored. A life of labor must follow one into the realm of salvation (see 1 Corinthians 15:10; Galatians 2:20–21; Titus 2:11–12; Ephesians 2:10). What God does, He does extremely well; so that His grace is sufficient—more than adequate to meet our needs as seen from Romans 5.

But our attention needs to focus on Ephesians 2:8–10. In speaking of salvation, Paul says "for by grace have ye been saved through faith." We must appreciate the stress made on the fact of the two sides of salvation. **Salvation in God's way clearly takes two.** A clear-cut example is seen in Jesus' lament over the city of Jerusalem: "I would have gathered ... but ye would not" (Matthew 23:37). Or again, in the familiar story of Naaman, the cleansing (grace, if you please) was effected only after the one in need had complied with the specified conditions. Grace—the divine side—shows us God's love. He planned/purposed and developed the means to redemption and spiritual blessings found in His Son. But Paul also said "through faith"—and here we see the human element. Rewarded faith is always live, active, working and obedient. It is by the means of this faith that we gain for ourselves the divine blessings. By the grace of God adequate provisions have been made, but men are not saved by mere provisions. God provides food and water for man but if he will not, for whatever reason, eat or drink—he will die. In Acts 2, Peter declared the provisions made by God and then urged them to "save yourselves." Peter also observed, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34–35).

It is hard for people to admit that they are, or might be, lost. *Lost* is a dreadful word that stirs up chilling thoughts. Lost in the midst of a blinding blizzard, off the charted path in the churning, raging seas, or the lone pilot with dead instruments in the center of a storm cloud frantically searching for the airport are mild and can in no way be compared to one being lost eternally. But what does it mean to be lost? It means all the forethought, energy and yearning of the heavenly Father and His Son is thwarted by one refusing to accept God's loving offer in His Son to renew a relationship, to pick up the pieces of life and self and become a child of the King—worthy of life eternal. On the other hand, we see that punishment of the lost is demanded by the righteousness of God—justice must be served.

Two powerful forces act upon the stubborn will of man—love and goodness. “For the love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Romans 2:4). Both of these forces are seen in the scene of the cross and thus make its drawing power tremendous (John 12:32). Yet, some hearts are too tough to be touched by the tenderness of love and need to be shocked. To so move people was Jonah’s task in Nineveh; “in forty days Nineveh will be overthrown” brought them all, king to peasant, to repentance. The punishment of the impenitent makes us know that “God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

And it means that the sinner is ruined. You know, life is not easy. There are bitter trials, financial reverses, sicknesses, accidents, disloyalty of trusted friends, unrequited love and other trying experiences. Still, these cannot be compared with the horrors of hell. Standing there on the brink of eternity, lost, one might well reflect on Jesus’ penetrating question: “What will a man give in exchange for his soul?” The rich man of Luke 16 cried out in pain, being in torment. It does not cease—“they have no rest day and night” (Revelation 14:11). And, although millions will be in hell, there will be the utter and complete loneliness, each engrossed in his own suffering with no thought or time for others. The final decree will echo in one’s ears, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into eternal fire” (Matthew 25:41). Then think of the regret and remorse. Abraham told the rich man of Luke 16, “Son, remember.” Memories will drive us up the walls! Wasted years! Unaccepted opportunities! And worst of all, perhaps, is the hopeless despair of no relief or end in sight. Hell is eternal!

It is a frightful thing to think that God has made such abundant provision of His grace, and yet we can void it all. Paul said, “We ... beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain” (2 Corinthians 6:1). Being lost is such a tragedy, such a waste, so unnecessary—for Christ died to prevent it from coming to pass in our lives. What are *you* doing about it? Are you maybe not far from the kingdom? Hasten to activate your faith, commit your life, strike out for the high ground of mountain-top living. Or have you once been in the kingdom, enjoyed the blessings, experienced God’s generous grace—and for thoughtless reasons of little value turned your back on God? If so, it was the poorest decision you ever made. Retrace your steps and reclaim the crown so that you will not disappoint yourself or God. Dedicate your life to helping others, “snatching them from the fire”—and give thanks to God that you had the disposition and determination to come to your senses and set in order the proper priorities. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift—the Son of His love!

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³ Hinton, W. C., Jr. (1984). [Receiving God’s Grace In Vain](#). (B. Lewis, Ed.) *Christianity Magazine*, 1(6), 22.

Calvinism (IV) Irresistible Grace

By Harry E. Ozment

Definition

It is true that certain physical blessings of the grace of God are given to the believer and unbeliever alike. Jesus said, “For he maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.” (Matt. 5:45) Paul explained in I Tim. 4: 10 that God “is the Savior of all men,” i.e., God sustains all life upon this earth through the bestowal of certain physical blessings (e.g., sunshine, rain, air, etc.). No one denies this. Notice, however, what Paul next says, “For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those who believe.” Paul, in the last clause of v. 10, is speaking of the spiritual blessings of God which contribute to the eternal salvation of man; this grace is given to believers.

Calvinism denies that any “special, grace is shown to believers as opposed to unbelievers. The doctrine of “irresistible grace” is a branch off the vine of “predestination.” God’s grace to salvation, according to Calvinism, is given only to the elect—whether the elect desire it or not. The Presbyterian Confession of Faith states: “This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.” (Chapter 10) This doctrine, as you can see, provides for a direct and mysterious indwelling of the Spirit. This doctrine, together with its foundation doctrine (predestination), teaches that an “elected” person is saved at the very beginning in the mind of God, and he is saved “in fact” when God arbitrarily sends His Spirit into the heart of that individual.

Errors of the Doctrine

Because the existence of this doctrine depends to a great extent on the existence of “predestination,” errors of the two doctrines could be interchanged. However, as we specifically consider the Calvinistic concept of “irresistible grace,” many errors are glaringly evident, for this doctrine:

(1) Negates the importance of man’s obedience. This doctrine would have people believe that the grace of God to salvation is given to the obedient and disobedient alike provided they have been elected. According to Calvinism, God, in His own time, arbitrarily sends the Spirit upon whomsoever He will, while totally disregarding (a) the kind of lives these people live, and (b) the desire (or lack of it) that these people have for His grace. Such a doctrine can only do one thing: consign obedience to the realm of the “non-essential.” And when Calvinism does this, it is in complete contradiction with the Bible. The Bible teaches that man’s obedience is essential to his salvation. Jesus stated: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 7:21)

When the Bible teaches the essentiality of obedience, it does not imply that man’s obedience earns salvation. On the contrary, our active obedience to God’s will indicates that we cannot save ourselves, and thus makes us openly admit that we must submit to Him to be saved. Of course, this would not be the case if we were to try to be saved by obeying our will. We read in Acts 10:34-35: “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” Paul states the case well by contrasting the works of God with the works of man in Eph. 2:8-10 (notice the intensive words emphasis mine, HEO):

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Neither does the Bible imply that man’s obedience displaces God’s grace. The Bible teaches that God’s grace, coupled with man’s obedience, produces the promised blessing. This Bible principle is illustrated several times in Heb. 11: “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet (grace), moved with fear, prepared an ark (obedience) to the saving of his house (promised blessing)” (v. 7); “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place (grace), which he should after receive for an inheritance (promised blessing), obeyed (obedience)” (v. 8); “Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed (grace), and was delivered of a child when she was past age (promised blessing), because she judged him faithful who had promised (obedience).” (v. 11) This same principle is true today, as is shown by the statement found in Heb. 5:9: “He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” “Eternal salvation” is the promised blessing. Through the grace of God, Jesus shed his blood (“became the author”), which purchased the church and put into effect God’s will. Man’s obedience, though, must be coupled to God’s grace, as is shown in the last clause: “unto all them that obey him.” Hence, if obedience is essential to salvation, “irresistible grace” cannot be possible.

(2) Denies the true nature of grace. Paul explains the nature of grace in Eph. 2:8, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Grace is a gift. A gift necessarily involves two ideas: (a) the will of the giver to give; and (b) the consent of

the receiver to receive. If either of these conditions is missing, the item given is not a gift.

The word “irresistible” means “impossible to successfully resist” (Webster). Therefore, to state that God’s grace is “irresistible” is to say that the “consent of the receiver” is not necessarily involved in the giving of grace. Hence, this would deny that the grace of God is a gift. Such is the sad consequence of believing Calvinistic theory!

(3) Destroys the free agency of man. One of the great truths of the Bible is that man is a free moral agent. He has enough intelligence to determine his course of action. God said in Deut. 30:15-18: “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; in ..that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish.” This was true of Adam and Eve in the very beginning. They were given intelligent minds which were capable of making decisions. Two ways were set before them-the way of right and the way of wrong. God coaxed them to go the way of right and warned them against going the way of wrong-but the final decision was made by Adam and Eve. Therefore, when man decided to go the way of wrong, he was held accountable for it. The same is true today. Jesus said, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, he shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.” (Jn. 15:6-7) The vine is provided by the grace of God. But we, as branches, exercise free determination in choosing whether to abide in this vine’. Calvinism denies this.

This theory would have us to believe that the elect must receive the grace of God-they have no choice about the matter. God's grace is irresistible! God certainly could not hold unsaved individuals accountable if their condition was in no way due to their own free choice. Such a theory! - it denies the most, evident truths of the Bible!

It is sad but true that the grace of God can be resisted -many millions resist His grace every day. God's power to save our souls is His word (Rom. 1: 16; Jas. 1:21). When men spurn this word for their divisive human creeds, they are most surely resisting the grace of the Almighty!

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COUNTERING THE COUNTERFACTUAL TEST

❖ Bible Says You Are In Charge Of Your Own Heart

❖ *Jeremiah 4: 4 – “Remove the foreskin of your hearts”*

❖ *Jeremiah 9: 13 – “Stubbornly followed their hearts”*

❖ *Jeremiah 18: 11 – “Act according to his evil heart”*

❖ *Ezekiel 18:31 – “Make Yourselves
A New Heart & A New Spirit!”*

Conditional Salvation

Charles L. Morton

“FOR THE GRACE OF GOD THAT BRINGETH salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:11–12). Man’s need of divine grace is affirmed in the foregoing passage, for it is by the grace of God that salvation is brought to a lost and dying world. Salvation is restricted, however, to those who *receive* God’s grace—and all other accountable people are yet lost in sin. Divine grace is universally available, for the text affirms that the “grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to *all men*.”

It must also be emphasized that our text, Titus 2:11–12, affirms with equal force that salvation by divine grace is conditional, for the grace of God *teaches* that we should deny ungodly lusts and live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. Uninspired men cannot improve upon the text for plainness of speech and clarity of language. To be saved by grace, saint and sinner alike must respond to God’s teaching by renouncing the allurements of this world and living in a positive, forthright manner as children of God by their obedience to the gospel of Christ. Jesus said, “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

That salvation by grace is *conditional* is a major New Testament doctrine. Along with the text cited above, we invite attention to some additional passages:

1. **In Titus 3:5, Paul declared,** “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” The “works of righteousness” of this passage are *not* the conditions of obedience to the gospel, but are the works of human merit—the “works of righteousness which we have done.” These are the type of works of which Paul wrote in his condemnation of the Jews: “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3). When Paul declared in Titus 3:5 that “according to his mercy he saved us,” it is evident that this salvation is conditional, for in the same passage while on the same subject, the apostle wrote: “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men” (Titus 3:8). Indeed, salvation by grace is conditional.

2. In Ephesians 2:8–9, Paul wrote, “For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” This passage affirms (1) that there is the divine side to salvation: “By *grace* are ye saved;” and (2) there is a human side to salvation: “By grace are ye saved *through faith*.” Now this passage does *not* teach salvation by grace *unconditionally*, nor does it teach salvation by faith *only*, for it must be understood in the light of all New Testament teaching. The Bible says, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:26). Indeed, salvation by grace through faith requires obedience.

Consider the case of the Ephesians themselves. The New Testament declares that the Ephesians had heard and believed the gospel (Ephesians 1:13). These same Ephesians had repented of their sins and confessed their faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 19:17–20). They had also been baptized into Christ (Acts 19:1–5). These were the ones of whom Paul wrote, “For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9).

3. A clear illustration of the fact that salvation by grace is conditional is the case of Cornelius. Now Cornelius was a Gentile, and the Bible teaches that Jew and Gentile alike are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:11–18). When the apostle Peter preached the gospel to this Gentile, his inspired sermon was introduced with the statement: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, *and worketh righteousness*, is accepted with him (Acts 10:34–35).

On the day of Pentecost, the Bible says of the apostle Peter, “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40). All today are likewise exhorted to respond obediently to the grace of God.

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⁴ Morton, C. L. (1984). [Conditional Salvation](#). (B. Lewis, Ed.) *Christianity Magazine*, 1(6), 17.