

Irresistible Grace

Introduction. I think we have the concept that irresistible grace means that God decides He is going to save one of the elect, and the person does not want to be saved. With clinched teeth he resists; sweat breaks out on his forehead, but in spite of his best efforts, God drags him kicking and screaming, and saves him. What Calvin teaches is that the person has no power to resist because what God does is to change his heart from an unwilling heart to a willing heart. Calvin uses Ezekiel 11:19 to teach this idea. Calvin, of course, teaches that God does this by His Holy Spirit in a direct manner above and apart from the Word. He also teaches that it is a thing wholly of God, that man's will does not cooperate with God; it is completely controlled by God.

The merits of Christ's obedience and suffering are sufficient for, adapted to and freely offered for all men. The question arises, "Why is one saved and another lost?" According to Calvin it is God that makes the difference; He effectively persuades some to come to Him. Calvinists believe 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. The effects of Christ's sacrifice have not been left suspended upon the whims of man's unchangeable and sinful will. The work of God in redemption is rendered effective through the mission of the Holy Spirit who operates on the chosen people so that they are brought to repentance and faith, and thus made heirs of eternal life. The movement toward salvation can no more come from man than his body if dead could originate its own life.

Regeneration is a sovereign gift of God, graciously bestowed upon those whom He has chosen from all eternity. Sinful man stands in need, not of inducements or assistance to save himself, but precisely of saving; and Jesus Christ has come not to advise, or urge, or woo, or help him save himself, but to save him. When one of the elect is called, he immediately responds, and an important effect of this inward, purifying change of nature is that the person loves righteousness and trusts Christ for salvation. This effective and irresistible grace converts the will itself and forms a holy character in the person by a creative act. It removes the man's desire for sinful deeds so that he refrains from sin. The elect now hates evil and prefers good.

As long as people remain in the world they are subject to temptations and still have remains of the old nature clinging to them. Satan is always trying to deceive the elect. Hence, they are often deluded and commit sin; yet these sins are only the death struggles and frenzied writhings of the old nature which has already received a death blow.

This is the fourth step in the system of Calvinism. It ties in with the doctrines of unconditional election, total depravity and limited atonement. The elect are born totally depraved and the special work of the Holy Spirit is necessary in conversion. This work is irresistible and complete. It is affirmed that the scriptures teach that the sinner is so depraved that in his conviction and conversion the Holy Spirit must exercise a power of influence separate from and in addition to the written or spoken word.

I. ***Irresistible Grace Explained By Calvinists***

- A. Faith is given to the elect sinner by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Steele and Thomas, in *The Five Points Of Calvinism*, write, "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."
- B. The Spirit never fails to bring the elect to conversion. Again, Steele and Thomas write, "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!" (ibid.).

II. ***Proof Texts Examined***

- A. "For our gospel came not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost" (1 Thessalonians 1:5).
 - 1. The Word is not a dead letter, it came in "power" (Hebrews 4:12).
 - 2. This verse does not affirm the Holy Spirit came "separate and in addition to the Word."
 - 3. The gospel came in word, power, the Holy Spirit and in much assurance. Was assurance separate from the word?
- B. The Lord opened Lydia's heart (Acts 16:14).
 - 1. Hearing the word opened her heart (Romans 10:17).
 - 2. "Attended" means "to pay heed to, to obey, listen, etc."
 - 3. Her understanding was opened (Psalm 119:130; Ephesians 1:18).

- C. "Pray for us that the word of the Lord may have free course" (2 Thessalonians 3:1).
 - 1. Why pray? He had the gospel, inspiration, etc. Did he need something extra so that the Word itself might have free course and be glorified?
 - 2. The Word was glorified when souls are saved (Acts 13:48).
 - 3. Why pray for bread (Matthew 6:11)? You have strength, soil, sunshine and rain. Do you need extra power?
- D. Apostles preached but God gave the increase (1 Corinthians 3:5).
 - 1. The work is compared to planting seed; one planted, another watered.
 - 2. The increase was the plant produced; not additional power.
- E. Word is a mirror; additional light must shine on mirror to make it effective (James 1:23-24).
 - 1. The Word is light as well as a mirror (Psalm 119:105, 130).
 - 2. For example, we see through the medium of the mirror.
- F. No man can come unless drawn (John 6:44-45; 12:32).
 - 1. But drawing is done through teaching (John 6:44-46; 2 Thessalonians 2:14).
 - 2. The power is in the gospel (Romans 1:16).
- G. Born of the Spirit (John 3:5-6).
 - 1. We must come in actual contact to be born.
 - 2. We are born of God (John 1:13); yet not in actual contact.
 - 3. Our birth is through the Word (1 Peter 1:23; 1 Corinthians 4:15).
Is this actual contact?
- H. Husbands may be won without the Word (1 Peter 3:1-2).
 - 1. Notice that this was by the conduct of wives, not a direct operation of the Holy Spirit (vs. 1).
 - 2. Conversion is the result of the influence of the Word in the life of the wife without a word from her.
- I. The Word is the sword of Spirit (Ephesians 6:17).
 - 1. A soldier must bring additional power on the sword. So does the Spirit.
 - 2. The power exerted is through the sword, not separate from it.

III. **Negative Arguments**

- A. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2). Consider some famous cases of salvation.
 - 1. The Samaritans (Acts 8). The thing that caused the Samaritans to believe was that they heard what Philip said and saw the signs which he did. There is no mention whatever of the Spirit's coming upon them until after they had obeyed the gospel (Acts 8:17).

2. Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9; 22; 26). There was no direct operation upon Saul's heart. What happened was that evidence was presented to him that he could not fail to see was genuine. There is no evidence whatsoever that God sent a first work of grace upon Saul.
 3. Cornelius (Acts 10-11). An angel appeared to Cornelius. The angel did not perform an operation upon Cornelius' heart. He told him to fetch Peter who would come and tell him words whereby he would be saved (Acts 11:14). The only mention of the Spirit's coming upon Cornelius was after all of the above, not before to soften his heart to respond to the Lord's Word.
- B. Law of Spirit makes free (Romans 8:2).
1. Law is the rule of action; the Spirit is not law but the Spirit converts through the law.
 2. The law is perfect converting the soul (Psalm 19:9).
- C. The word of God produces faith.
1. Believe on me through their word (John 17:20).
 2. Faith comes through hearing Word of Christ (Romans 10:17).
 3. These were written that you might believe (John 20:30-31).
 4. Many heard the Word and believed (Acts 4:4).
 5. The Gentiles hear and believe (Acts 15:7).
 6. How can you believe in whom one has not heard (Romans 10:13-14)?
 7. The devil removes the Word lest they believe (Luke 8:12).
 8. God saves by the foolishness of preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21).
 9. The truth makes us free (John 8:32).
- D. In salvation, what is ascribed to the work of the Spirit is also ascribed to the Word of God.

SPIRIT	WORK	WORD
Nehemiah 9:20	<i>Instructs</i>	2 Timothy 3:16-17
John 14:26	<i>Teaches</i>	John 6:44-45
John 16:8	<i>Convicts</i>	Titus 1:9; Romans 3:30, 19
John 3:5	<i>Begets</i>	1 Corinthians 4:15
John 6:63	<i>Quickens</i>	Psalm 119:50
John 16:13	<i>Guides</i>	2 Timothy 3:16-17
John 3:5	<i>Born of</i>	1 Peter 1:23
1 Peter 1:2	<i>Sanctifies</i>	2 Thessalonians 2:13; John 17:17
1 Corinthians 6:11	<i>Saves</i>	Ephesians 5:26; James 1:21
1 Corinthians 6:11	<i>Washes</i>	Ephesians 5:26
Acts 9:31	<i>Comforts</i>	1 Thessalonians 4:18
Ephesians 1:13	<i>Seals</i>	Revelation 7:3-4; 14:1-2
Romans 8:16	<i>Witnesses</i>	John 5:39
Romans 5:5	<i>Gives love</i>	1 John 2:5
John 15:11	<i>Gives joy</i>	1 Thessalonians 1:6

Conclusion. No person in the apostolic age ever received a direct operation of the Holy Spirit in order to make him a Christian. All were saved by grace through faith in the same manner we can be saved today. God wants none to perish (2 Peter 3:9; Acts 10:34-35), but the choice is now ours to make. Whosoever will, can be saved (Revelation 22:17), but all who "obey not the gospel" will be lost (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).