

## IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

Unconditional election is a work of God the father, limited atonement is a work of Jesus the son, irresistible grace is a work of the holy spirit.

Irresistible grace is the I in the acrostic tulip. However, the term irresistible grace is somewhat misleading. It suits Our acrostic, but it is not the best way to describe it.

There is an iconic scene in the film the Godfather where Don Corleone says, "I will make him an offer, he can't refuse it" This was a threat to someone else. Unfortunately, many Christians hear Irresistible Grace they get the picture God drags us kicking and screaming into his kingdom. They have the idea that God makes us an offer and we cannot refuse it. Stop right there. God never makes an offer of salvation, he commands it. Unlike the Don Corleone God does not persuade us with threats. He changes our hearts so we desire the things of God rather than our own evil ways. The German priest Johann von Staupitz put it eloquently, "God's grace does not make us acceptable to God. Rather his grace makes God acceptable to us". The doctrine of Irresistible Grace is not saying we don't resist the grace of God but rather we don't resist effectively. Or, to put it another way, they mean that when God calls us to faith in Christ he calls effectively succeeding in his purpose to save us. This is why some refer to this doctrine as efficacious grace.

A good way of expressing this is to say that the Holy Spirit regenerates us, giving us a new nature. As a result, we naturally want to do what the new nature wants. That is, we believe the gospel, repent of our sins, and trust in Christ for our salvation. This puts the determining factor for a person's salvation in God's hands where it clearly belongs. When Jewish authorities opposed Jesus they were allowed to do so to the very last. But although the apostle Paul resisted, he was only allowed to do so to a point, after which God brought his resistance to an end (on his way to Damascus).

Irresistible grace is not specifically defined in the 39 articles but the articles themselves do allude to it. For instance:

### Article 10

Hence we have no power to do good works which are pleasing and acceptable to God, unless the grace of God through Christ goes before us so that we may

have a good will, and continues to work with us after we are given that good will.

#### Article 17 predestination and election

Hence those granted such an excellent benefit by God are called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working at the appropriate time. By grace they obey the calling; they are freely justified, are made sons of God by adoption, are made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, they walk faithfully in good works and at the last by God's mercy attain eternal happiness.

The Westminster confession is even more explicit than these statements but that is outside the scope of my message.

The doctrine am looking at today is irresistible grace also known as efficacious grace. Specifically, I look at the question why, if the gospel is freely offered to all men (as it is) some respond to it and are saved, whilst others reject it and are lost. The Arminians says this is because of something in the individual so that the individual is ultimately responsible for his own destiny. The Reformed says that it is God alone who makes a difference and that this is entirely due to his grace.

#### Two kinds of calls

Picture this: A father and daughter are in a crowded place, for example the Arndale shopping centre. There's lots of people milling around. Suddenly the little girl gets distracted and wanders off, realises she's lost and calls for help she called help saying, 'daddy. Help me'! Let's say that 10 people heard the call including other men. They all go about their business thinking, it's not for me, I am not her daddy, I don't want to be me twood. But one person hears the voice and responds saying, 'here I am darling'. Her father responds to her call for help. What this illustrates is the word we need to look at first. The word is 'called'. It occurs in the statement, "those he (that is God) predestined, he also called .....(Romans 8:30). The point of this word is that, like the girl in the story, those whom God calls effectively not only hear his call but actually respond to it by turning around and committing their lives to Jesus. Many would have heard the little girl's cry for help, but it had no meaning for them. Yet for the one it was intended; the call was effective for him and him alone-her father.

#### The general call.

There are two kinds of call in scripture. The first is external, general and universal. It is an invitation to all people to repent, turn to Jesus and be saved. It is the call Jesus gave when he cried, “come to me all who are weary and burdened and I’ll give you rest”. (Matthew 11:28).

Similarly, when Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost he addressed the crowd saying, “repent and be baptised everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the promise of the holy spirit: (Acts 2:38). During this inaugural message the Bible says there was a crowd from all over – God-fearing Jews in Jerusalem, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Arabs and so on. This was a general call for them to repent and believe in Jesus. Anyone wanted could come to Jesus and be saved. The same call flows from every true Christian pulpit and all who bear witness to Jesus as lord and saviour in every land. The problem with this external, universal call is that in itself it is ineffective. Left to their own devices no one ever responds to it. People hear the gospel, they may even understand it to a point, but that God who issues the call is undesirable to them, so they turn away. (Luke 14:15-24), Jesus told a story about a man who prepared a great banquet and invited many guests. When the feast was prepared, he sent servants with the invitation, “Come, for everything is now ready”. But they began to make excuses, “I have just bought a field and I must go and see it,” said one. “I have just bought a yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to try it out”, or “I just got married so I can’t come”, said another. Jesus was not just making this story up, out of thin air. This is the way the people of his day responded to his call. They would not receive his invitation.

[Anybody know this guy?](#)

In 1996 during the Labour Party conference Tony Blair gave a speech where he declared that his government’s priorities would be education, education, education. There was almost no end to the problems that will be solved if people were given better education. The basic idea is that given the right education people make good choices thereby alleviating poverty, exclusion, inequality or any other evil. However this is not how the Bible describes our spiritual condition. When Jesus was in the world he was described as the light of the world. The light was shining. He was preaching (educating) to them the good news of the kingdom. Yet they did not respond to Jesus by walking in the right path. They hated the light and tried to put it out. They crucified him. John

was there. He saw what happened and he had this damning observation: “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil”. (John 3:19)

### The specific call

What is required is a second kind of call which we described as internal specific and effectual. It not only issues the invitation to sinners but also provides the ability to respond. By the specific call God brings to life those who are spiritually dead. Exhibit A. Lazarus in John 11 was not just spiritually dead but also physically dead. When Jesus had reached Bethany at the request of the dead man’s sister, he was told that Lazarus had been dead for three days and he was already putrefying.

His case was not serious or grim. It was hopeless-hopeless to man, that is. Jesus called, “Lazarus, come out”. (John 11:43) and the call of God brought the dead man to life. This is what the Holy Spirit does today. The holy spirit operates via the preaching and teaching of the word of God to call to faith those whom God previously has elected to salvation. Apart from these three actions—the act of God in electing; the work of Christ in atoning; and the power of the holy spirit in calling, there would be no hope for anyone. No one would be saved.

### Scripture references

Romans 11:29

for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.

1 Corinthians 1:9

God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ephesians 4:1

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

2 Timothy 1:8-9

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. 9 He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done

but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

In each of these texts, the call of God effectively saves those to whom it is addressed.

### The Ordo Salutis (The Order of Salvation)

The internal or effective call as decisive as it is, is not all that is involved in God's Irresistible Grace. The effective call is only one link in a long series of actions and responses by which God saves the individual sinner. There is a sequence of steps which theologians have called the Ordo Salutis (the Order of Salvation).

The basic difference between Reformed theology and non-Reformed theology is the order of salvation with respect to the relationship of faith and regeneration. The vast majority of Evangelical Christians today believe that faith comes before regeneration that is in order to be born again you have to believe and choose Christ. Only then will God make you reborn. The Reformed however believes that regeneration precedes faith. That is to say God changes our hearts and then gives us the ability and desire to receive him. Without of God performing the initial heart surgery no one would reach out for him.

What are the steps to salvation? Romans 8:28-30 is a good place to start.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who[i] have been called according to his purpose. 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. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

There is a word implied in this passage. That word is ALL. Therefore, we can say, all who are foreknown are predestined, ALL predestined are called, All the called are justified, and ALL the justified are glorified. The key point I want to make is that all who are called are justified. Therefore the call referred to here cannot be the general call which is ineffective. It is the effectual call which saves everyone who hears it.

Another link in the sequence of the order of salvation is the electing choice of God. I refer you to my previous message on Sovereign Election. In that message I showed from the scriptures that God alone is the one who chooses a select few from all humanity to receive his salvation. The rest of humanity he leaves to their

own devices, and they always choose evil. They could be saved if they want to, but they never want to apart from God's sovereign election. God is the cause of our spiritual birth..

John 11:3 says we are children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

John 3:3 tells us that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of the water and the spirit. In other words, we must be born again before we are able to believe in Christ's and be saved. Putting it altogether, the complete Ordo Salutis looks like this:

Foreknowledge>>> predestination>>> the effectual call>>> regeneration>>> repentance and faith >>> justification>>> adoption>>> sanctification>>> and finally glorification.

Don't worry too much about the final order. What I want to draw your attention to the fact that regeneration precedes faith. This is the key doctrinal distinctive between the Reformed theology which I advocate and non-reformed theology. The majority report in the evangelical will today is the reverse: if you have faith in God, you believe then God regenerates then saves you. The problem with this is that this is a hopeless doctrine. The Bible does not say we are very sick in our trespasses. It says we're dead in our sins. Dead people can't do anything to help themselves. Therefore for anyone to be saved God almighty must initiate the process. Our hearts must be regenerated before we can call on God to be saved. Ladies and gentlemen this is the minority report, but it is the correct one.

### Summary And Conclusion

You might be wondering why bother with such an esoteric topic? After all many Christians happily get it wrong on these and other issues and, at least on the surface, it doesn't seem to do any harm. They will make it to heaven because God will uphold them. One reason is because Jesus commanded us to pay attention to doctrine. He said his words are spirit and they are (our) life so we must be careful. Another reason is because ideas have consequences. Very bad ideas tend to have very bad consequences. Any areas where our theology is deficient we will suffer in those areas.

Irresistible Grace describes the sequence by which the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Jesus. It is a doctrine that should comfort us and give us confidence. Through this Christian journey you will have many battles, you will lose some

battles, but rest assured you will not lose the war. If our salvation was initiated by God and sustained by God, it stands to reason we will never lose it, so the true Christian can never wind up in hell. This will be my final message in this series on the Doctrines of Grace – The Perseverance of The Saints.

By the grace of God, I will see you then. Amen

#### References

- [The 39 Articles of Religion in Modern English](#)
- The Doctrines of Grace by James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken Pg 135-154
- [R.C. Sproul Irresistible Grace, Ligonier Ministries](#)