

Irresistible Grace

Introduction. Most of us 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 God changes his heart from an unwilling heart to a willing heart. Calvin uses Ezekiel 11:19 to promote this idea. Calvin, of course, teaches that God does this by the Spirit in a direct manner above and apart from the Bible. He also teaches that it is completely controlled by God; man's will does not cooperate with God.

Most agree that the scriptures were revealed by the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 1:1; 2 Peter 1:19-21). Inspired revelation was supernatural, verbal, and final (1 Corinthians 2:9-13; Galatians 1:6-8). They also agree that miracles bore witness of true revelation; that is, they proved that men were sent by God. This was true of Christ (John 3:2; 20:30-31; Acts 2:22) and of His disciples (Mark 16:20; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4). In the first century miracles were necessary because revelation and confirmation were both necessary. Today neither are necessary, for this work is completed. Therefore, miracles ceased soon after the apostles died (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). But to say miracles have ceased does not mean that the Holy Spirit is no longer active. We say Christ has completed His personal ministry on the earth, but we understand He continues to be involved in man's salvation. Even so, the Holy Spirit continues to work in converting the lost and giving power to the saved. But the question is how does He work?

This is the fourth step in the system of Calvinism. It ties in with the doctrines of total hereditary depravity, unconditional election, 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!”

II. ***How The Spirit And Word Work Together***

- A. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2). The world needs convicting of sin, righteousness, and judgment.
1. The Holy Spirit was the advocate, or one who argued in favor of Christ. He would convict the world of sin (John 16:7-8).
 2. As the advocate of Christ, He would be furnished with sufficient evidence and competent arguments to accomplish this task (John 16:13).
 3. He would argue the case from three vantage points.
 - a) The world stands condemned because of unbelief in Jesus Christ as God’s Son.
 - b) Righteousness or justification may be obtained through faith because Jesus as Christ has gone to heaven.
 - c) Judgment is sure because the prince of this world has been judged.
- B. The work continues through the revealed word of truth.
1. The testimony to establish these points and convince the world was revealed and confirmed by the Holy Spirit, recorded by inspired writers, and stands today with the same force and power.
 2. If mankind is convinced today, it will be by the gospel.
 - a) Sin (John 8:24; Romans 3:23-26).
 - b) Righteousness (Romans 1:16-17; Titus 2:11-12).
 - c) Judgment (John 12:48; Acts 17:30-31).
- C. Every case of conversion recorded was accomplished through gospel preaching.
1. The Samaritans (Acts 8). What caused the Samaritans to believe was that they heard what Philip said and saw him work miracles.

- There is no mention whatsoever 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 it was genuine. There is no evidence whatsoever that God sent a first work of grace upon Saul's heart.
 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.
 4. Everything necessary to move people to accept Christ and be saved is set forth in the gospel: love of God, sacrifice of Christ, forgiveness of sins, hope of heaven, eternal inheritance, fear of hell, and certainty of judgment. Instances of salvation in Acts will show us what the word and Spirit did in these cases.
- D. The law of the 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).
- E. The word of God produces faith.
1. The devil removes the word lest they believe (Luke 8:12).
 2. The truth makes us free (John 8:32).
 3. Believe on me through their word (John 17:20).
 4. These were written that you might believe (John 20:30-31).
 5. Many heard the word and believed (Acts 4:4).
 6. The Gentiles hear and believe (Acts 15:7).
 7. Faith comes through hearing word of Christ (Romans 10:17).
 8. One cannot believe in whom one has not heard (Romans 10:13-14).
 9. God saves by the foolishness of preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21).
- F. In the scriptures, regarding salvation, there are many instances where what is ascribed to the work of the Spirit is also ascribed to the word of God.
1. Instructs (Nehemiah 9:20; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
 2. Teaches (John 14:26; John 6:44-45).
 3. Convicts (John 16:8; Titus 1:9).
 4. Begets (John 3:5; 1 Corinthians 4:15).
 5. Quickens (John 6:63; Psalm 119:50).
 6. Guides (John 16:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
 7. Born of (John 3:5; 1 Peter 1:23).

8. Sanctifies (1 Peter 1:2; John 17:17).
9. Saves (1 Corinthians 6:11; James 1:21).
10. Washes (1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26).
11. Comforts (Acts 9:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:18).
12. Seals (Ephesians 1:13; Revelation 14:1-2).
13. Witnesses (Romans 8:16; John 5:39).
14. Gives love (Romans 5:5; 1 John 2:5).
15. Gives joy (John 15:11; 1 Thessalonians 1:6).

III. **Prooftexts Examined**

- A. 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 that 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. Acts 16:14.
 1. Hearing the word opened Lydia's 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. 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. 1 Corinthians 3:5.
 1. The work is compared to planting seed; one planted, another watered. Calvinists say that someone may preach, but the Holy Spirit has to "water."
 2. The apostles preached but God gave the increase. The increase was the plant produced; not additional power.
- E. James 1:23-24.
 1. The idea is that the word is a mirror; additional light must shine on mirror to make it effective.
 2. But the word is light as well as a mirror (Psalm 119:105, 130). For example, we see through the medium of the mirror.
- F. John 3:5-6.
 1. Calvinism argues that when being born of the Spirit, we must come in actual contact to be born.
 2. We are born of God (John 1:13), but we are not in actual, physical contact with God.

3. Our birth is through the word (1 Corinthians 4:15; 1 Peter 1:23). Is this actual contact?
- G. John 6:44-45; 12:32.
1. No man can come unless drawn, but the drawing is done through teaching the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14).
 2. The gospel was committed to Paul's trust because only the gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16; 1 Timothy 1:11).
- H. 1 Peter 3:1-2.
1. Notice that the husbands were won without the word by the conduct of wives, not a direct operation of the Holy Spirit.
 2. Conversion is the result of the influence of the word in the life of the wife without a word from her.
- I. Ephesians 6:17.
1. Calvinists say 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.

Conclusion. It was not the intent of this lesson to say that the Holy Spirit does absolutely nothing today. The Holy Spirit continues to work through a confirmed revelation to produce conviction, conversion, and sanctification. The Holy Spirit does the work, but He does it through the means of teaching and the medium of the gospel, not miraculous intervention.

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).

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