

Irresistible Grace

*One of the most dramatic moments in my life for the shaping of my theology took place in a seminary classroom. One of my professors went to the blackboard and wrote these words in bold letters: “**Regeneration Precedes Faith.**” – R.C. Sproul*

Ordo Salutis (Order of Salvation)

- Reformed – (monergism)
 - Predestination – Effectual Call – **Regeneration** (Union with Christ) – Faith/Repentance – Justification – Adoption- Sanctification – Assurance – Perseverance – Glorification
- Arminian – (synergism)
 - Prevenient Grace – Calling – Faith and Repentance - Union with Christ – Justification – **Regeneration** / Sanctification / Adoption / Glorification
- Irresistible Grace -
 - Irresistible Grace means God has chosen some to be saved absolutely
 - Irresistible Grace is when God sends his Spirit to change a person from being a hater of God to a lover of God
 - Irresistible Grace means no one can resist God in salvation
 - God accomplishes exactly what He sets out to do
 - **Isa 55:11** - *so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but **it shall accomplish** that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*
 - **Question** – how can this verse be true if human free will is capable of thwarting God’s attempt to save a person?
- What Irresistible Grace IS NOT:
 - It does not mean God forces someone to do something against their will
 - God works **through** a person’s will
 - By regenerating the individual
 - Giving them a new heart and renewing their wills to believe
 - **Ezekiel 36:26 -27** - *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules*
 - **Question:** What comes first in the order of salvation:
 - Regeneration or Faith?
 - Does a person first believe and then become regenerated?
 - Is a person first regenerated, and then as a result believe?
 - Faith and repentance are not actions that we take **in order** to be saved
 - They are the actions we take **because we have been** united to Christ
 - **1 John 5:1** - *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ **has been born** of God*

- This is also referred to as the **Effectual Call** –
 - **WSC #31** - *Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, **convincing** us of our sin and misery, **enlightening** our minds in the knowledge of Christ (Acts 26:18), and **renewing** our wills (Deuteronomy 30:6), he doth **persuade and enable** us to embrace Jesus Christ (Acts 16:14), freely offered to us in the gospel.*
 - **Acts 26:18** – *to **open their eyes**, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*
 - **Deuteronomy 30:6** – *And the LORD your God will **circumcise your heart** and the heart of your offspring, **so that** you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live*
 - **Acts 16:14** – *One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. **The Lord opened her heart** to pay attention to what was said by Paul*
- **What about the Philippian Jailor (Acts 16:30-31)?**
 - ³⁰ *Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* ³¹ *And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”*
 - The divine command from God – our responsibility
 - The divine action of God – regeneration
- **Irresistible Grace Illustrated - John 6**
 - Jesus just performed the miracle of feeding the 5,000.
 - Because of this, a large crowd has gathered and started to follow Him
 - Jesus knows that they are following Him because of their stomachs were full and not because they actually believed in Him
 - **John 6:26** - ²⁶ *Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, **not** because you saw signs, **but** because you ate your fill of the loaves.*
 - **John 6:36** - ³⁶ *But I said to you that you have seen me **and yet do not believe***
 - On what basis did they not believe in Him?
 - Lack of evidence? / not enough miracles?
 - **John 6:37** - ³⁷ *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and **whoever** comes to me I will never cast out.*
 - The basis for a person believing in the Son is whether or not the Father has given him to the Son
 - Not human will
 - Believing -
 - is not just understanding the gospel
 - is not just agreeing with the gospel
 - It is exercising one’s trust in regard to salvation
 - No one will commit / trust themselves to Christ unless the person has been given by the Father to the Son and regenerated
 - = Irresistible grace
 - **Question:** Does “*seeing*” always result in “*believing*?”

- **Question:** Who does the Father give to the Son?
 - Everybody, then man makes the final decision for his salvation?
 - This cannot be the case because you would have Universalism
 - If God has given everyone over to the Son
 - Then everyone must eventually be saved
- **Notice:**
 - The “giving” takes place prior and to the “coming”
 - Those who the Father gives to the Son *come* as a result of being *given*.
 - Not upon foreseen faith
 - The reason a person *comes* to Christ is because that person has been *given* by the Father to the Son
 - God does not draw everyone individually, then wait to see if they respond and believe
 - And as a result of man’s response give them a new heart
 - **Rather:**
 - Who the Father gives - the Father draws = Regenerates though the effectual call
 - God takes out the heart of stone and puts in a heart of flesh
 - As a result of this: the elect believe
- **John 6:44** - ⁴⁴ *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day*
 - **Question:** Who is it that the Son will raise up in the last day?
 - = all who the Father gives to the Son
 - If God gives everyone to the Son
 - Then everyone has to be raised up to eternal life
- **John 6:64-66:** -
- How does the crowd react to Jesus teaching of Irresistible Grace?
 - ⁶⁴ *But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.)*
 - ⁶⁵ *And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”*
 - ⁶⁶ *After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him*
- **Question:** Can God’s grace be resisted?
 - **Matthew 23:37** - *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*
 - **Acts 7:51** - *You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you*
- These verses are talking about the **general call** for all to repent, not God making the attempt in desiring to save all people

- **Acts 17:30** - *but now he (God) commands all people everywhere to repent*
- **Matthew 22:14** - *For many are called, but few are chosen*
 - “Many” - general call to all
 - “Few” – special call to the elect = regeneration / irresistible grace
- **Irresistible Grace Further Demonstrated:**
 - **Deuteronomy 29:4** - *But to this day the Lord **has not** given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear*
 - **Isaiah 6:10** - *Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”*
 - **Matt 11:25** - *At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children;*
 - **2 Tim 2:24-26** - *²⁴ And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will*
 - **Phil 1:29** - *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.*
 - **Acts 13:48** - *And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed*

God can (without a contradiction) will as to **precept** what he does not will as to **decree**.

– Francis Turretin

- **Objections to Irresistible Grace**
 - Where does the confusion come in over this doctrine?
- **Arminian Position:**
 - The Holy Spirit cannot regenerate fallen man until he believes.
 - The Holy Spirit does all He can to bring every fallen man to salvation,
 - but until fallen man responds in faith, of his own free will, the Spirit cannot give life (*synergism*)
 - Faith comes before regeneration.
- **Why do Arminians believe this?**
 - Because man possesses Libertarian Freewill / Prevenient Grace
 - Because of all of the commands in Scripture that state one must believe to be saved
 - Since the requirement for salvation is given to believe:
 - Arminians believe it must be possible for man to do it
 - Otherwise God would not require it of us

- = Same thing Pelagius believed
 - Is it true that God only commands us what we are able by our nature to do?
 - **Matthew 5:48** - *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*
 - Can we do this?
 - Even though we cannot
 - God still requires it of us
 - God does not lower His standards for righteousness
 - Arminians view Saving Faith as something that we must exercise to become saved
 - By means of God neutralizing the effects of sin by Prevenient Grace
 - = Man has the final say in salvation
 - Calvinists view Saving Faith as a result of Christ uniting us to Himself
 - By means of Irresistible Grace
 - = God has the final say in salvation
- **Other Objections:**
 - **1 Timothy 2:1-4** *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for **all people**, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires **all people** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*
 - It is important that we do not downplay God's urgency for the gospel to go out to all people everywhere in all nations = referring to the **general call**
 - The objection often raised by this verse:
 - Doesn't this verse plainly teach that God wants all people to be saved?
 - Doesn't this discredit the Reformed Doctrine of Predestination:
 - That God has chosen only His elect for salvation?
 - How can the Reformed Doctrine of Predestination be true if God wants ALL people to be saved?
 - **What is meant by "all people?"**
 - Without exception = every single person alive
 - Without distinction = in regard to gender, ethnicity, social status.....
 - The correct understanding of "all people" is not every single individual alive on the planet
 - But rather all "kinds" of people
 - Not just the poor and persecuted
 - But also kings and those in high positions who are the ones persecuting the Christians during this time

- Paul is urging prayer for all kinds of people, especially those in authority who are persecuting the Church
 - Paul simply means that there is no people and no rank in the world that is excluded from salvation; because God wishes that the gospel should be proclaimed to all
 - Paul is not denying predestination by God simply wanting all to be saved, and then leaving the choice up to man
- **1 Timothy 2:5-6** - ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom **for all**, which is the testimony given at the proper time.
 - Who is Paul referring to when he says “**for all**?”
 - Everyone without exception?
 - Everyone without distinction?
 - **Mediation** – who does Jesus mediate for?
 - All people everywhere = universalism
 - All people everywhere, but it only applies to those who believe = synergism
 - God’s elect = monergism
 - **Hebrews 9:15** - Therefore he is the **mediator** of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance
 - **Romans 8:34** - ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is **interceding for us**
- **2 Peter 3:9** - ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward **you**, not wishing that **any** should perish, but that **all** should reach repentance.
 - If God “wishes” that not should perish, then why do they?
 - Can God’s will be thwarted?
- **1948 General Assembly Report on the Free Offer of the Gospel (2 Peter 3:9):**
 - *He (God) is longsuffering in that, or because, he does not wish that any men should perish, but rather because he wills or wishes that all should come to repentance.*
 - *Repentance is the condition of life, without repentance men must perish.*
 - *But the will of God that men be saved expressed here is not conditional.*
 - *It is not: I will your salvation if you repent, but: I will that you repent and thus be saved*
 - This verse is talking about the general call for all to repent, not God making the attempt in desiring to save all people.
 - **Acts 17:30** - but now he (God) commands all people everywhere to repent
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- **The Two “Wills” of God**
 - **Deuteronomy 29:29** - ²⁹“*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*”
 - **Decretal Will – (Secret will)**
 - That which God has decreed to bring about from all eternity
 - = everything that exists
 - **Prescriptive Will – (Moral will)**
 - That which God wills that we should (moral law)
 - God desires and commands all men everywhere to repent
 - God desires and commands all men everywhere to follow His commandments
 - Can God’s Prescriptive Will be broken?
 - **Matthew 22:14** - ¹⁴“*For many are called (general call / prescriptive will for all to believe), but few are chosen (special call / decreed will in regard to those God elected).*”
 - **Matthew 23:37** - ³⁷“*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*”
 - Jesus wanted to gather the children of Jerusalem together
 - = moral / revealed will
 - But they would not
 - **Acts 7:51** - *You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit*
 - God’s prescriptive / revealed will can be broken
 - People break God’s moral law all of the time
 - The Ten Commandments?
 - God commands all men everywhere to repent
 - God commands that the gospel go out to all the nations
 - Can men say no to God’s Prescriptive Will? = Yes
 - Even though man can either obey or disobey the revealed will of God:
 - God is still sovereign over every choice we will ever make
 - We cannot make any choice outside of God’s sovereign control over it
 - Man may choose to either obey or disobey Gods law:
 - But only because God first ordained it to so
 - God works through our wills to accomplish all His purposes
- **WCF Chapter 3 Article 1**
 - *God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established*
 - **God’s Decretal (Secret) Will** – that which God has foreordained from all eternity
 - Can man resist God’ s Decretal Will? = No

- **Psalm 135:6** - *Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.*
- **Romans 9:19** - *You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”*
- **Isa 55:11** - *so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it*
 - Since God has already foreordained what will come about
 - It cannot be broken
 - This being the case, men are still held responsible for their actions
 - **Question:** How can God decree that we do something and not be the author of sin?
 - **James 1:13** - ¹³ *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.*
 - **Acts 4:27-28** - *for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place*
 - Is murder a sin?
 - Did the Jews, Pilate, Herod, and Gentiles choose to murder Jesus?
 - Did God decree before the foundation of the world that they would do so?
 - Can anything come to pass unless God decrees it?
 - Does this make God the author (one to blame) of sin = NO
 - How can this be???
 - One of the biggest objections people make against Reformed theology is that it makes God the author of sin
 - The difference lies in the relationship between the creature and the Creator
 - **WCF 7:1** - *The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.*
 - We tend to think of God working in the same manner as we do
 - We think that God does things perfect, while we do things similar but on a far less scale
 - We have a tendency to think of God performing actions as an exalted man, meaning He does things just like we do but on a much greater scale
 - This type of thinking is completely false

- God and man are not the same type of being, God being on the very top of the ladder and man being at the bottom
 - Rather the distance between God & man is infinite
 - The difference between the way God does things and we do things is infinitely different
 - God is able to determine our actions
 - Not as a direct line down from heaven to us
 - But in a completely different manner that is inconceivable to humanity
 - God is able to bring about what He has determined based upon the contingent choice of his creation
 - Yet every choice we make is exactly what God has ordained for us to do
 - We have to be careful not to try and understand the secret will of God
 - The distance between God and man is too great
 - God has not revealed His secret will to us in His word
 - We have to stop where the Bible stops
- The Bible teaches us that the gospel call is to go out to all people
- The Bible teaches that God desires repentance from all people
 - **Acts 17:30** - *but now he commands all people everywhere to repent*
- The Bible also teaches God has only given some people (the elect) to the Son for salvation
 - **John 17:9** - *I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours*
- Some try to make the claim that the two wills of God are contradictory and therefore not biblical
- Why would God command us not to murder but yet decree the very people, time, and method of those who murdered His own Son?
 - The Bible doesn't tell us
- God can (without a contradiction) will as to **precept** (revealed will) what He does not will as to **decree** (secret will)
 - Both are true because the Bible teaches them
 - Just because we cannot figure this out in our own heads does not mean God is a liar or that He contradicts Himself
 - Rather – He has chosen to keep this secret from us
 - It is our duty to remain humble and content with what He has given us