

## CHAPTER 9, GRACE

1. I affirm that the grace of God can be and is at times resisted, and this includes but is not limited to the genuine offer of salvation and resisting the Holy Spirit. The Bible says in 2 Thessalonians 2:10 that reprobates "perish because they *refused* to love the truth and so be saved." (italics added) Of course, I am rejecting the Calvinist and compatibilist answer that a person refuses because, as a sinner, that is all that he can do. It seems crystal clear in reading the passage without Calvinist spectacles on that the context and language clearly imply that they "should not have refused" and therefore could have believed which entails the idea of otherwise choice, exactly what Calvinism denies.

Further, I affirm that the ability of man to accept or to resist God's genuine offer of salvation is a part of God's plan and redounds to His glory; moreover, this genuine offer of the gospel is more than "a good faith offer" as taught by the Calvinist. It is an actual offer from God through His chosen medium, which can be accepted by faith or rejected unto damnation. Finally, this includes the reality that God has given the gift of repentance, and that the clear call of Scripture is for everyone everywhere (Acts 17:30) to repent and be saved, which implies that those called upon to repent can, by the grace of God, repent (Matthew 3:2, 4:17, 11:20; Mark 6:12; Luke 5:32, 13:3, 13:5, 24:47; Acts 2:38, 3:19, 5:31, 11:18, 20:21, 26:20; Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

Jesus pronounced woe upon all the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida because they did not repent, obviously indicating He believed they had the capacity to repent (see Matthew 11:21). The book of Revelation leaves believers stunned that unregenerate people refuse to repent even when they are suffering from the wrath of God (see Revelation 9:20-21, 16:9, 11). Acts 17:30 reminds us that the call of God to repent is for everyone. Paul said, "and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:10). The implication obviously means that they could have received the love of the truth and been saved.

In like manner, Stephen preached, "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did"(Acts 7:51). The writer of Hebrews said of those who draw back unto destruction, "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has *trampled underfoot the Son of God*, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has *insulted the Spirit of grace*"? (Hebrews 10:29, italics added). In Noah's day, God said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever" (Genesis 6:3), clearly implying that He was then. Also why did God bring judgment upon leaders and Jews so they *could* not hear and see and return if that in fact was their state already? (Isaiah 6:9-10 and Matthew 13:10-17).

Lastly, I affirm the biblical doctrines of grace. Calvinists refer to their beliefs as "The Doctrines of Grace," which is fine, but it actually does not tell us much. That is to say, the doctrines of any Biblicist are all "doctrines of Grace." There simply are no other kinds. It is similar to the Calvinist's continual reference to the sovereignty of God. It tells us nothing since all believers with any biblical fidelity and understanding of God believe in His sovereignty. Further, disavowal of the Calvinist's definition of the doctrines of grace and sovereignty is not a denial or undermining of the doctrines of grace or the sovereignty of God, but it is what it is, a denial of Calvinism's definition.

2. I disaffirm that the Bible teaches that God carries out His salvation plan through selective "irresistible grace." John Piper describes irresistible grace thusly, "When a person hears a preacher call for repentance he can resist that call. But if God gives him repentance he cannot resist because the gift is the removal of the resistance. Not being willing to repent is the same as resisting the Holy Spirit. So if God gives repentance it is the same as taking away the resistance. This is why we call this work of God "irresistible grace."<sup>63</sup> Note that those who receive this act of grace against their will can only believe and those who don't receive this cannot be saved; therefore, any talk from a Calvinist that God loves people, the lost, hurting, etc., is double-talk because He, according to Calvinism, actually only loves *some* lost and hurting people enough to offer help. This is a disquieting reality.

Piper says also, "The doctrine of irresistible grace means that God is sovereign and can overcome all resistance when he wills." I would note that the Calvinist, as well as Piper's position, is actually stronger than this in that, not only does the doctrine of irresistible grace mean that God *can* overcome, but it actually means He *will or must*. Further, I disaffirm that all verses that say, teach, or imply that man can resist are merely reiterating the position of compatibilism—sure they resist salvation because that is all, according to their nature, that they can do. Moreover, I disaffirm that an offer of salvation through proclamation of the gospel by anyone who views salvation through the grid of Calvinism constitutes a *real offer of salvation from God* if it can be resisted; because according to Calvinism and compatibilism the *real offer of salvation*, in any meaningful sense to the person, cannot be resisted because the *real offer of salvation from God* always results in regeneration. This is a disquieting reality. An example of my point is, in what sense can a person be said to be offered a job if it is impossible for him to accept it, and not only is there no intent to actually give it to him, but in reality there was a predetermined unalterable decision by the CEO not to give it to him; this is in spite of the personnel manager's sincerity in offering the job. The answer seems obvious, NONE!

Let me elucidate this further. Calvinists seek to emphasize the positive of irresistible grace, e.g., God saves some unworthy sinners who otherwise would perish in hell. But the dark side of irresistible grace is that although the "good faith offer" of a Calvinist seems to exonerate him from

being guilty of making an artificial offer of salvation (as long as he is careful not to say specifically to someone things like "God loves you or God cares about you or God wants you to go to heaven") to sinners who cannot, according to Calvinism, really repent, believe, and be saved, because the Calvinist can never be sure who God has selected to regenerate. However, even if the Calvinist is vindicated, it does not exonerate God from using language, commands, parables, etc., which clearly picture God as wanting all to be saved even though, according to Calvinism, He is the *sole* determiner and *only* reason they cannot be saved. Therefore, Calvinism's irresistible grace makes God the sole determiner of who goes to heaven and who goes to hell because He could have saved everyone. This truth is dramatically contrary to the picture of God and His offer of salvation as drawn in Scripture, a disquieting reality.

We all seek to emphasize what we deem to be *the positives* of our message or position. However, it is morally incumbent upon every messenger to quest for full disclosure and to shun any appearance of obscuring the *negative or harsher* teachings of our position. The Calvinist emphasis that irresistible grace assures salvation for some, while minimizing the truth that irresistible grace just as assuredly and irrevocably destines some to eternal torment in hell, reminds me of the Darwinist obsession with the beauty of natural selection's determination that the strong and healthy survive, while they seldom with the same clarity and enthusiasm speak of the dark side of natural selection that requires the brutal and merciless elimination of the weak.

Consequently, the insurmountable obstacle to irresistible grace determining who receives eternal salvation—besides the fact that it is not taught in Scripture—is that it puts God the Father, the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit in the position of appearing to offer deliverance from the wrath to come to all who cry for mercy while, actually, God has no intention of doing so. For, according to Calvinism, He predetermined, contrary to what the gospel and the Scriptures say, to offer salvation to only a few. In other words, it makes God the CEO who allows, yea commands, and says He wants all to be hired, but He has in reality predetermined long ago that they cannot ever be hired even though his personnel managers continue to offer jobs to them. This is a disquieting reality. In order to sustain the idea of irresistible grace, it appears that we must turn common language upon its head, take the obvious and simple meaning of language as seen in Scripture and used in everyday life, and subject it to biblically unnecessary restrictions and meanings, which is one of the pervasive problems in Calvinism. This is a disquieting reality.

For example, Christ felt love for the rich young ruler and out of that love told him how to receive salvation, but the young man refused; after which Jesus noted how difficult it was for a rich person to "enter the kingdom of heaven." The passage clearly indicates that the young man could have been saved if he had chosen to follow Christ, and part of the reason that he chose not to follow Christ was that he was rich (Mark 10:21-23). From the standpoint of Calvinism, whether he was rich or poor had no bearing on whether he would come or not because the draw is irresistible.

Christ's encounter with this young man also demonstrates that Christ loves the lost and loves them enough to tell them how to have eternal life. By every normal meaning, those words meant he could have received salvation at that time had he chosen to believe. The idea of a "good faith offer" may relieve the human Calvinist of malicious deception, but it cannot be so of Jesus or the Trinity. The statement that "all things are possible with God" is exactly my point and in no way proves Calvinism true, but is actually contrary to their system. This is a disquieting reality. Therefore, I absolutely disaffirm that the Scripture teaches or logic demands that God's sovereignty is undermined or minimized when He grants the opportunity to resist His genuine offer of salvation because He sovereignly chose to grant that choice.

Finally, I disaffirm that the doctrine of irresistible grace applied to some in salvation is what the Scriptures teach, or that it is consistent with what God reveals about Himself. The truth is that God revealed Himself in Scripture as actually loving the world—human race—so much that He sent His own Son to die for them (John 3:16), thereby providing for their salvation. And any human can receive this salvation if he will obey God's command and repent and believe, which he can do by God's grace. I do not believe that God offers what cannot be accepted or what He has no intention of providing. Nor do I believe that God condemns people for rejecting what He predetermined that they could not accept.

## ***NOTES***

63. John Piper, "Irresistible Grace" in [What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism](#), copyright Desiring God.org, revised March 1998.

64. J. Piper and the Bethlehem Baptist Church staff, "What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism," [#Grace](#)