

# What is Irresistible Grace?

**Summary:** *Scriptures teach that God softens the heart of men and women such that they gladly submit themselves to His commands. None who are not softened will submit, and none who are softened want to rebel.*

*...and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.*

## Acts 16:14

"All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace."<sup>1</sup>

As we know from our understanding of depravity (see "What is Total Depravity), man is hopelessly and undeniably lost. Not only do we dwell in a domain of darkness (Colossians 1:13), but we even hate the light and refuse to come to it (John 3:19-20). Even if we could, the fact is that we do not do so (Romans 3:10-11). We will not, cannot and do not come to Christ on our own. We are as bad off as we can be.

How then can we be saved? How do we come to the light if we are unwilling and unable to do so?

Scriptures teach us that there is a distinct order in salvation. While we may not practically experience and distinguish this order, it is theologically important nonetheless. As the Bible teaches, regeneration precedes faith and not vice versa.<sup>2</sup> This

understanding is not all that popular in our evangelical tradition in which we often hear preached "if you just believe, you will be born again." In reality, the Bible states, "if you are born again, you will believe." The distinction is crucial. As John 3:21 reads, the one who comes to the light does so in order that his deeds (surely including the very coming to the light) may be shown to have been accomplished in or by God Himself.<sup>3</sup>

Some would take this to mean that God drags people into His kingdom kicking and screaming. Maybe that is why a lot of so-called Christians are always frowning. However, this is not at all what the doctrine of irresistible grace teaches.<sup>4</sup> Rather, the Scriptures teach that God softens the heart of men and women such that they gladly submit themselves to His commands. None who are not softened will submit and none who are softened want to rebel.

Passages which teach God's absolute sovereignty in accomplishing salvation in His elect include:

- *All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'*

## Daniel 4:35

- *You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?' On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?*

## Romans 9:19-21

- *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they may not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God...For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

## 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Looking only at the 2 Corinthians passage, we see that our hearts prior to God's calling are comparable to the empty void which existed prior to creation (Genesis 1:2). There was not a spark of light to which God responded. Rather, He spoke into absolute darkness and effectively and absolutely created light. In the

<sup>1</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 5:1 "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God." (ESV). Believing in the present is dependent upon being born again in the past. The tenses in the Greek are crucial and the ESV brings out this distinction well.

<sup>3</sup> This is similar to what John has already written in chapter 1 verse 13 "who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Our rebirth and adoption is owing not to our first birth and all of its privileges, not to the free exercise of our or other's wills, but solely upon God."

<sup>4</sup> Also called "effective grace" so show that it is effective toward those for whom it is intended. To be sure, the word "irresistible" can be confusing is not somewhat derogatory.

same way, God does not respond to some foreseen flicker of faith or hope within us. Rather, He speaks into darkness and shines light into the darkest recesses of our hearts. His calling to His elect is irresistible. It is effective, and it is absolute.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to differentiate here between the general gospel call which goes out to all and the effective call which proceeds to believers. We must not confuse the two.