

# Light for Dark Times

## *You Must be Born Again!*

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***TULIP – The Fundamentals of the Faith by which we are Saved***

***Sermon #7 – Irresistible Grace***

***February 6, 2022***

**Sermon Text:** Romans 8:28-30

**Scripture Reading:** 1 Cor 15:1-11

Many people who profess to be Christians believe that subjects such as these we have been considering are perhaps interesting to some, but in the end rather unimportant. Let's be reminded then as we come to this next letter in TULIP – "I" – for Irresistible Grace, that nothing is in fact more important for us to be absolutely clear upon.

Listen to some excellent and very helpful comments by J.I. Packer, taken from his introduction to John

Owen's, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* – [Banner of Truth, 1967] -

“[Arminius/Arminianism insists that] Scripture must be interpreted as teaching the following positions:

1. Man is never so completely corrupted by sin that he cannot savingly believe the gospel when it is put before him.
2. Nor is he ever so completely controlled by God that he cannot reject it.
3. God's election of those who shall be saved is prompted by his foreseeing that they will of their own accord believe.
4. Christ's death did not ensure the salvation of anyone, for it did not secure the gift of faith to anyone (there is no such gift); what

it did was rather to create a possibility of salvation for everyone if they believe.

5. It rests with believers to keep themselves in a state of grace by keeping up their faith; those who fail here fall away and are lost.

Thus, Arminianism made man's salvation depend ultimately *on man himself*, saving faith being viewed throughout as man's own work and, because his own, not God's in him.

The Synod of Dort was convened in 1618 to pronounce on this theology, and the "five points of Calvinism" represent its counter-affirmations. They stem from a very different principle—the biblical principle that "*salvation is of the Lord*"; and they may be summarized thus:

1. Fallen man in his natural state lacks all power to believe the gospel, just as he lacks all power to believe the law, despite all external

inducements that may be extended to him.

2. God's election is a free, sovereign, unconditional choice of sinners, as sinners, to be redeemed by Christ, given faith and brought to glory.
3. The redeeming work of Christ had as its end and goal the salvation of the elect.
4. The work of the Holy Spirit in bringing men to faith never fails to achieve its object.
5. Believers are kept in faith and grace by the unconquerable power of God till they come to glory.

These five points are conveniently denoted by the mnemonic TULIP: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Preservation of the saints.

Now, here are two coherent interpretations of the biblical gospel, *which stand in evident*

*opposition to each other.* The difference between them is not primarily one of emphasis, but of content. *One proclaims a God who saves; the other speaks of a God who enables man to save himself.* One view presents the three great acts of the Holy Trinity for the recovering of lost mankind—election by the Father, redemption by the Son, calling by the Spirit—as directed towards the same persons, and as securing their salvation infallibly.

The other view gives each act a different reference (the objects of redemption being all mankind, of calling, those who hear the gospel, and of election, those hearers who respond), and denies that any man's salvation is secured by any of them.

The two theologies thus conceive the plan of salvation in quite different terms. *One makes salvation depend on the work of God, the other on a work of man;* one regards faith as part of God's gift of salvation, the other as

man's own contribution to salvation; one gives all the glory of saving believers to God, the other divides the praise between God, who, so to speak, built the machinery of salvation, and man, who by believing operated it.

Plainly, these differences are important, and the permanent value of the "five points," as a summary of Calvinism, is that they make clear the points at which, and the extent to which, these two conceptions are at variance.

Continuing, Packer writes:

"The question which John Owen, like the Synod of Dort divines (ie, theologians) before him, is really concerned to answer is this: *what is the gospel?*

....So far from magnifying the love and grace of God, this claim [Arminianism] dishonours both it and Him, for it reduces God's love to an impotent wish and turns the whole economy of 'saving' grace, so-called, into a

monumental divine failure....my salvation, on this view, depends not on what Christ did for me, but on what I subsequently do for myself....

Our minds have been conditioned to think of the Cross as a redemption which does less than redeem, and of Christ as a Savior who does less than save, and of God's love as a weak affection which cannot keep anyone from hell without help, and of faith as the human help which God needs for this purpose." [Ibid]

Plainly then, this subject is vitally important and crucial – it deals with whether or not we preach the gospel of God, or another gospel which really is no other. The subject is important to us, because it is important to God!

Let's turn our attention then to this 4<sup>th</sup> point – *Irresistible Grace*. Fundamentally, the question addressed here is this:

*Can the sinner frustrate God's election to salvation? That is to*

*say, is the will of man "free" to reject all efforts of God to save him? Or, is the saving, gracious work of the Holy Spirit in the elect, irresistible?*

To quote Packer again:

"The Spirit's gift of internal grace was defined by the Arminians as 'moral suasion,' the bare bestowal of an understanding of God's truth.

This, they granted—indeed, insisted—does not of itself ensure that anyone will ever make the response of faith. But Calvinists define this gift as not merely an enlightening, but also a regenerating work of God in men, 'taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a 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.'

Grace proves irresistible just because it destroys the disposition to resist. Where the Arminian, therefore, will be content to say: “I decided for Christ,” “I made up my mind to be a Christian,” the Calvinist will wish to speak of his conversion in more theological fashion, to make plain whose work it really was:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and  
nature’s night:  
Thine eye diffused a  
quickenning ray;  
I woke; the dungeon flamed  
with light;  
My chains fell off: my heart  
was free:  
I rose, went forth, and  
followed thee.

Clearly, these two notions of internal grace are sharply opposed to each other.” [Ibid]

Well then, what do the Scriptures say? What is the nature of God’s saving grace as applies to the sinner through the Word by the

Holy Spirit? The answer rests upon the three points we have already considered, especially on the first.

Eph 2:1-5 **And you were dead** in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (4) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive** together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

This irresistible saving grace of God is inseparably linked to what is called *regeneration* or *the new birth*. You see it in scriptures like this:

Eze 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. (27) And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Tit 3:5-6 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, (6) whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

Joh 3:5-7 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”

Irresistible saving grace is also described as or connected with what is often called *effectual calling*. This is the powerful calling of the sinner to Christ by the

hearing of the gospel and the work of the Spirit.

*“Calling is the efficacious summons on the part of God the Father, in accordance with and in pursuance of his eternal purpose in Christ Jesus, addressed to sinners dead in trespasses and sins, a call that ushers them into fellowship with Christ and into the possession of the salvation of which he is the embodiment; a call immutable in its character by reason of the purpose from which it proceeds and the bond it effects.”* [John Murray, *Collected Writings*, vol 2, Banner of Truth Trust, 1977].

Rom 8:28-30 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (29) For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (30) And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he

justified he also glorified.

1Co 1:2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

2Ti 1:9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

*Effectual calling* is this mighty work of the Spirit to the sinner who is one of Christ's sheep (there is also a general, non-effectual call that does not effect salvation) – which is *effective*. That is to say, it *effects* salvation. Always. It is irresistible and cannot be thwarted. All whom the Lord calls He justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies.

Here it is stated in the London Confession of Faith:

1. Those whom God has predestinated unto life, he is pleased in his appointed, and accepted 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 to them a 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. ( [Romans 8:30](#); [Romans 11:7](#); [Ephesians 1:10, 11](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14](#); [Ephesians 2:1-6](#); [Acts 26:18](#); [Ephesians 1:17, 18](#); [Ezekiel 36:26](#); [Deuteronomy 30:6](#); [Ezekiel 36:27](#); [Ephesians 1:19](#); [Psalm 110:3](#); [Song of Solomon 1:4](#) )

2. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, nor from any power or agency in the creature, being wholly passive therein, being dead in sins and trespasses, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit; he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it, and that by no less power than that which raised up Christ from the dead. ( [2 Timothy 1:9](#); [Ephesians 2:8](#); [1 Corinthians 2:14](#); [Ephesians 2:5](#); [John 5:25](#); [Ephesians 1:19](#), [20](#) )

4. Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet not being effectually drawn by the Father, they neither will nor can truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved: much less can men that receive not the Christian religion be saved; be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light

of nature and the law of that religion they do profess. ( [Matthew 22:14](#); [Matthew 13:20](#), [21](#); [Hebrews 6:4](#), [5](#); [John 6:44](#), [45](#), [65](#); [1 John 2:24](#), [25](#); [Acts 4:12](#); [John 4:22](#); [John 17:3](#) )

In all of this language then, you can see that this work of grace – and that is what it is, *grace, unmerited favor of God* – cannot be thwarted, it cannot be resisted so as to be *ineffectual*, but Christ's sheep, His elect, will *always come to His call and be saved*.

Listen to John Murray on this:

The action by which God makes his people the partakers of redemption is that of *summons*. And since it is God's summons it is efficacious summons.

We do not ordinarily associate with the word 'summons' the efficacy that is requisite for compliance with that summons. A summons issued by a court does not of itself empower us to appear in court. It gives us warrant to appear and it

requires us to appear but it does not actually bring us into court. That depends on our strength and will.

Or, perchance, it depends on the force applied by the executive officers if we are apprehended and compelled to appear.

But it is wholly otherwise with God's summons. The summons is invested with the efficacy by which we are delivered to the destination intended – we are effectively ushered into the fellowship of Christ. There is something determinate about God's call; by his sovereign power and grace it cannot fail of accomplishment. God calls the things that be not as though they were (Romans 4:17).” [Redemption Accomplished and Applied, Murray, Eerdmans, 1955].

We close with this: *the calling of God, the effectual calling of His sheep to salvation, is irreversible.*

1Co 1:7-9 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus

Christ, (8) who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (9) God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1Th 5:23-24 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (24) He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

“On a visit to Britain in May, 1862, when he was invited by Queen Victoria to preach in the Royal Chapel of St. James, [the great church historian, Merle d’Aubigne] also visited the Metropolitan Tabernacle. C.H. Spurgeon purposely shortened his own discourse to allow time for d’Aubigne to speak to the vast congregation.

‘There was,’ he said, ‘in the latter part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a man in Italy who was a child of God, taught by the Spirit. His name

was Aonio Paleario. He had written a book called *The Benefit of Christ's Death*. That book was destroyed in Italy and for three centuries it was not possible to find a copy; but two or three years ago an Italian copy was found...and it has been printed again.

It is perhaps singular, but this man did not leave the Romish Church, as he ought to have done, but his whole heart was given to Christ. He was brought before the judge in Rome, by order of the Pope.

The judge said, "We will put to him three questions: we will ask him what is the first cause of salvation, then what is the second cause of salvation, then what is the third cause of salvation." They thought that, in putting these 3 questions, he would at last be made to say something which should be to the glory of the Church of Rome.

So they asked him, "What is the first cause of salvation?" And he

answered, "CHRIST." Then they asked him, "What is the second cause of salvation?" and he answered, "CHRIST." Then they asked him, "What is the third cause of salvation?" and he answered, "CHRIST."

The first cause, Christ; the second, Christ; the third, Christ; and for that confession, which he made in Rome, he was condemned to be put to death as a martyr.

My dear friends, let us think and speak like that man; let every one of us say, "The first cause of my salvation is Christ; the second is Christ; the third is Christ. Christ and His atoning blood, Christ and His regenerating Spirit; Christ and His eternal electing grace. Christ is my only salvation. I know of nothing else."

[The Reformation in England, Merle d'Aubigne, Banner of Truth].