

# The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

## **SPECIAL ISSUE**

### The Doctrine of Irresistible Grace

...this preserving grace of God is not a power that remains external to us, so that we are passively, unconsciously perhaps, carried into glory: it is a power within us, that causes us to hold on to the God of our salvation. . . .

Grace preserves, and we persevere!

Herman Hoeksema

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## MEDITATION

## By Grace

*(The meditation for this special issue is from the pen  
of the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema, and is reprinted from Volume 18.)*

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.  
Ephesians 2:8*

For! . . . .

Let us not overlook this little but significant word!

For by grace are ye saved! The conjunction presents the truth here expressed as a reason for something else, an explanation of something that has been mentioned in the context.

It informs us of the fact that this statement does

not stand alone, that it is not an isolated truth, which one can accept or not accept without much effect for the rest of the contents of his faith; which one can either deny or confess as of little or no practical significance and importance.

*For by grace are ye saved! . . . .*

It means that salvation by grace, and by grace only, is an indispensable condition for something



else, a ground, a foundation, without which that something else cannot stand. Denying it is like destroying the foundation of an edifice: you pull down the whole structure. It is like cutting away at the root of a tree: you kill the tree.

And that for which this statement is the reason may be read in the immediately preceding verse: "That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus"!

God is rich in mercy!

And He saved us! Even when we were dead in sins, He quickened us together with Christ; and raised us up together with Him, and made us sit together in heavenly places. . . .

All this in order that He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace!

Through our salvation the riches of His grace must be displayed.

But how is this possible unless salvation be by grace?

By grace only!

---

In grace your salvation has its source.

For the eternal fountain-head whence the whole blessed stream of your salvation gushes forth is sovereign election.

Chosen you are unto salvation before the foundation of the world. And the motive of God's election of His people is grace, sovereign, absolutely free grace.

Pure grace!

Nothing else determined God in predestinating you unto conformity unto the image of His Son. There are, indeed, those who find the reason and the determining factor of God's election in man. They, too, would emphasize that salvation is all of grace, not of works. It is grace that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, and grace that you may become partaker of the blessings of salvation in Him. Nay more, they, too, speak of election unto faith, and election unto glory. It is only the elect that actually become heirs of eternal salvation. But election itself? Is it, too, according to them, of mere and pure and sovereign grace? Ah, no! It is not of grace, say they, but of works! Yes, indeed, of *works*, though they themselves would use other terms to describe their view of election. Or is it not an election of works, which teaches that God found or foresaw in the elect a willingness to accept Christ and the terms of His salvation, in distinction from others, whom He foreknew as stubborn and unwilling to come to Christ?

And then it is not of grace!

For then it was man, his goodness, the foreseen choice of his will to receive Christ, that determined God's choice. Then it is not grace that makes the elect acceptable to, and beloved by God in His eternal counsel; but it is some element of goodness in man that induced the Most High to prefer him above others. And when God shews forth the riches of His grace in the salvation of the elect, they will always be mixed with this excellency of man. . . .

But God forbid!

For you are saved by grace!

And this implies that your salvation is of God from beginning to end, from its eternal source in the counsel of God to its final manifestation in glory in the day of Christ.

It was grace that ordained you unto salvation. And this signifies, not that God's election is arbitrary, but that it has its reason and motive in God alone. Of Him are all things! God is gracious! Full of grace is He in Himself, apart from any relation or attitude He may sustain to the creature. For He is good, the sole Good, the implication of all infinite perfections. And as the supreme and only and infinitely Good, He is the perfection of all beauty. He is pleasant and altogether lovely, and there are pleasures at His right hand forevermore. And eternally He is attracted by His own beauty. For He is God Triune, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. And of the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, God knows Himself, beholds Himself, His grace and beauty, and inclines unto Himself in eternal and infinite divine favor! . . .

This infinite loveliness and divine pleasure in His own beauty is God's grace.

By grace you are chosen!

By the knowledge of and attraction to the loveliness of His own perfection God was divinely urged to ordain His people!

A people that would be perfect even as He is perfect, lovely as He is lovely. For whom He has foreknown them He also did predestinate to be conformed according to the image of His Son. . . .

A people upon whom He might look with eternal good pleasure, and that might taste that the Lord is good!

A people in whom He might shew forth the infinite riches of His grace!

For by grace are ye saved!

---

Blessed grace!

For by grace are you reconciled unto God!



That same grace that motivated the Most High to ordain you unto salvation, according to which it was His purpose to make you altogether lovely, even as He is lovely, explains that and why He reconciled you unto Himself through the death of His Son!

For, mark you well, *saved* you are by grace!

And that means that you were lifted from the deepest depth of sin and shame, of guilt and condemnation, of corruption and death, to the highest possible bliss of an eternal righteousness and life and glory.

Saved you are. . . .

Created you were with all the elect, in the first man Adam who was made a living soul; who, indeed, had life, but not in himself; who lived without being the lord of life; whose glory was corruptible, whose righteousness was amissable, whose life was mortal; and who was of the earth earthy. And in him we violated God's covenant, became guilty, liable to death and damnation, subject to corruption, children of wrath. And our condition was, as far as we were concerned, hopeless. For in Adam we could sin, but we could never pay a ransom for our sin; we could die in him, but had no power to regain life in God's favor; we could turn away from the Fount of life, but never could we return to Him. We could only increase the guilt of our sin every day, through every word we spoke, by every deed we performed, with every breath we took. Enemies of God we had become, hating Him and hating one another!....

Saved we are!

Saved by grace, by free and sovereign grace!

For even then, when we were dead in sin, objects of God's righteous wrath, that could never be restored to the favor of God unless we would willingly take our way through the depth of hell, He loved us, and reconciled us unto Himself!

Us He reconciled. Do not express this differently. Do not say that He reconciled Himself to us. For to reconcile is to restore a relation of love and faith and friendship that has been violated and broken, the relation of the covenant. And on His part that relation was never violated. He is the eternal I AM, that changeth not. With an eternal, immutable, sovereign love He loved His own, even when they were rebels in themselves. But us He reconciled. Us He restored to that state in which we were once more the proper objects of His favor and blessing, the state of eternal righteousness!

For such is reconciliation: restoration to favor in the way of perfect justice!

And justice required satisfaction!

And satisfaction of the justice of God with respect to our sin could be accomplished only by a voluntary act of perfect obedience even unto death. No, not merely to suffer the punishment for sin is satisfaction. Even the damned in hell suffer the agonies of death, yet they do not atone for their sin. God demands that we shall love Him. And for the sinner that violated His law and trampled under foot His covenant, this means that he must love Him in His righteous wrath, love Him in death and hell, if ever He is to atone!

And this act of perfect obedience we could never perform.

Reconciled we are by grace!

For when in sovereign grace He chose us, and ordained us to be conformed according to the image of His Son, He chose us in Him. By grace He ordained His Son to be the Head of the church, to become flesh, to assume the burden of our sin and guilt, to enter into our deepest woe, to become sin for us, that we might become righteousness of God in Him! . . .

And by grace He chose the way of suffering and death, the way through the depth of hell, there to lay upon God's altar the sacrifice that would be sufficient to satisfy the justice of God.

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself!

That He might shew forth the riches of His grace!

For by grace you are saved!

By grace only!

---

Mighty grace!

For by grace is also the power of God by which you are delivered from the dominion of sin and death!

Reconciliation alone is no salvation, nor could it possibly lead to salvation if the operation of grace ceased at the cross. It must be applied, so that from darkness we are translated into life, from sin into righteousness, and with cords of love we are united once more with the heart of God!

And how could this be accomplished?

Shall we say that from the cross onward salvation becomes the work of man: God has done His part, now man must realize what God has accomplished? Or, at least, shall we allow the grace of God and the will of man to mix at this point, harmoniously and sweetly to work together in order that the salvation manifested on the cross of Christ may be perfected? Shall we say that on God's part He is willing now to save all men, that the recon-



ciliation accomplished on the cross is offered with the intention to save by God to all, and that, for the rest, it depends upon the choice of man's will? . . .

God forbid!

The riches of His grace must be revealed!

By grace are ye saved!

Through faith. Mark you well: *through* faith it is that we are saved. It is not on condition of faith, a condition which we must fulfill if God is to bestow the blessings of salvation on us: there are no conditions unto salvation at all! It is not because of faith, as if faith is the new work which God requires of us by which salvation may be obtained: there is no work unto salvation, not even faith, nor the work of faith. For by grace are we saved, *through* faith.

Faith is the *means* unto salvation.

For it is the spiritual tie that unites us with Christ, the spiritual faculty whereby we may know Him, taste Him, long for Him, trust in Him, rely on Him, appropriate Him, live out of Him as the young tree draws its life-sap out of the ground through its roots. . . .

Through faith!

It is God's means, a means of grace, a power that is wrought in your inmost heart by the mighty grace of God: by grace ye are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God!

For by grace He unites us with Christ!

By the power of grace He quickens us together with Him, making us new creatures.

By grace He calls us, powerfully, irresistibly, sweetly, out of darkness into the light of the gospel.

By grace He implants the faith in us, whereby we embrace the Christ of God and all His benefits!

It is not of yourselves; it is God's gift.

Salvation is of the Lord!

Wonderful grace!

Abiding grace!

For ye *are* saved!

And because it is by pure and sovereign grace that you are saved, you will surely be saved even unto the end of eternal glory.

Always salvation is of the Lord, never does it become of us; always it is by grace, never does it become of works. Even as it is in free, divine, absolutely sovereign grace that He chose us, and ordained us to become conformed according to the image of His Son; and even as it was by that same grace that He reconciled us unto Himself through the death of His Son; and even as it was by pure grace that wrought the faith within us whereby we do lay hold on the Christ of God; even so, it is by grace that we are preserved unto the final salvation that shall be revealed in the last time!

By grace ye are preserved!

And through the power of that gracious preservation ye *persevere*!

For, on the one hand, even our perseverance is not by works, nor on account of works, nor by virtue of our cooperation with the grace of God: it is of pure grace. Yet, on the other hand, this preserving grace of God is not a power that remains external to us, so that we are passively, unconsciously perhaps, carried into glory: it is a power within us, that causes us to hold on to the God of our salvation. . . .

Grace preserves, and we persevere!

And who shall separate us? . . .

Unchangeable grace!

## EDITORIALS

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

# About This Special Issue

This is the third, and final, special issue of our current volume-year. It is the fourth special issue devoted to the so-called Five Points of Calvinism, and it is devoted in its entirety to the subject of Irresistible Grace.

In this instance the popular order of the Five Points of Calvinism—designated by the mnemonic T-U-L-I-P—and the order which we are following, that of the Canons of Dordrecht, coincide: in both

the doctrine of Irresistible Grace is fourth. However, in our Canons it is not designated as "Irresistible Grace" but as the doctrine of Man's Conversion to God and the Manner Thereof. This doctrine is treated in Articles 6 to 17 of Canons III, IV. And, as might be expected, it is treated in a very restricted fashion, that is, from the viewpoint of Reformed opposition to the errors of Arminianism.

In this special issue we will not limit ourselves to



the scope of the Canons. Actually, of course, the subject of Irresistible Grace includes all those doctrines which in Dogmatics are treated under "Soteriology" or the Order of Salvation." Even the doctrine of Perseverance, though it is treated separately as the last of the Five Points of Calvinism and though we shall also treat it separately, belongs in this category. And our treatment of this Fourth Point shall be more inclusive than our Canons. Besides, there are related subjects which are significant. Among these are that of the so-called "Free Offer," the subject of the relation of Ir-

resistible Grace and Preaching, and the old question, "Does this doctrine make men careless and profane?" These subjects will also have a place in this issue.

For the meditation this time we have chosen an appropriate reprint from the pen of the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema.

In behalf of the Staff's committee, I hereby express sincere thanks to all who contributed to this special issue.

May our readers profit.

## Irresistible Grace

What is meant by it?

To understand the meaning of irresistible grace we must go back in history to the time of the Arminian controversy. The very term *irresistible* cannot be understood, except in that light.

The Arminians taught *resistible* grace. In their third article they seemed to maintain an orthodox doctrine of man's depravity, although more than appearance this was not. And in their fourth article they made it very plain that the grace of God in their system of doctrine is dependent on the will of man. Man, after all, is able to resist the operation of God's grace; and if he is able to resist, he is also able not to resist. The choice rests with him, and the efficacy of God's grace depends on the willingness or unwillingness of the sinner.

This is very plain when one reads Articles 3 and 4 of the Arminians together:

3. That man has not saving faith of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, in as much as he, in the state of apostasy and sin, can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do any thing that is truly good (such as saving faith eminently is); but that it is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through His Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, or will, and all his powers, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good, according to the Word of Christ, John xv. 5: 'Without Me ye can do nothing.'

4. That this grace of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of all good, even to this extent, that the regenerate man himself, without preventient or assisting, awakening, following and co-operative grace, can neither think, will nor do good, nor withstand any temptations to evil; so that all good deeds or movements, that can be conceived, must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ. But as respects the mode of the operation of this grace, it is not irresistible, in as much as it is written concerning many, that they have resisted the Holy Ghost, Acts vii., and elsewhere in many places.

Bear in mind that when the Arminian speaks of "resistible" and "irresistible" he does not have in mind merely the idea that the natural man *attempts* and *strives* to oppose and counteract and overcome the power of God's grace, but that he *successfully* opposes the grace of God, so that he is not converted to God. This is plain from the articles quoted above, but even more clear from the written opinions of the Remonstrants which were submitted to the Synod of Dordrecht, especially from Paragraphs 5 and 6:

5. The efficacious grace by which anyone is converted is not irresistible, and although God through the Word and the inner operation of His Spirit so influences the will that he both bestows the power to believe, or supernatural powers, and indeed causes man to believe; *nevertheless man is able of himself to despise this grace, not to believe, and thus to perish through his own fault.* (italics added)

6. Although according to the altogether free will of God the disparity of divine grace may be very great, nevertheless the Holy Spirit bestows, or is ready to bestow, *as much grace upon all men and every man to whom God's Word is preached as is sufficient for the furtherance of the conversion of men* in its steps; and therefore not only do they obtain sufficient grace unto faith and conversion whom God is said to be willing to save according to the decree of absolute election, *but also they who are not actually converted.* (italics added)

It is over against this doctrine that the Fourth Point of Calvinism maintains the truth of what has come to be known as "Irresistible Grace."

And yet that expression does not occur in our Canons. Neither in the title of the Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine nor in the articles themselves does the term occur.

Moreover, the expression is not above criticism. In the first place, of course, it is negative: it expresses the idea that the grace of God whereby the elect are converted cannot be successfully resisted. But the truth is positive; and it is always better, if possi-



ble, to express that truth positively. In the second place, the expression itself is not above reproach. To speak of the power and operation of God's grace as "irresistible" might leave the impression that the grace of salvation is such that the elect sinner is dragged kicking and screaming to heaven in spite of the fact that he resists and fights and pulls back all the way and does not want to be saved and does not want to believe and walk in godliness and sanctification of life. But this is exactly not the case. The Reformed doctrine of "irresistible grace" is actually a doctrine of *effectual*, or *efficacious* grace. This the Canons emphasize again and again. Article 10 of Canons III, IV speaks of the truth that God "confers upon them (the elect) faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of His own Son...." Article 11 speaks of the fact that God "powerfully illuminates their minds by His Holy Spirit" but also "by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, pervades the inmost recesses of the man; He opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions."

And Article 16 goes to the heart of the matter:

But indeed, even as through the fall man did not cease to be man, endowed with intellect and will, and neither did sin, which pervaded the whole human race, deprive him of the nature of mankind, but depraved and spiritually slew him, so also this divine grace of regeneration does not operate in men as in stocks and blocks, neither does it take away the will and its properties, or forcibly compel it against its will, but spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, powerfully and at the same time pleasantly turns it: so that where before the rebellion and opposition of the flesh had full dominion, now a ready and sincere obedience of the Spirit begins to reign—in which the true and spiritual renewal and liberty of our will consists. And unless that admirable Artificer of ever good deals in this wise with us, there is no hope that man should arise out of the fall through a free will, through which, when he stood, he plunged himself into ruin.

The relation between this Fourth Point and all the others is plain: it is one of perfect harmony. Irresistible grace is rooted in eternal and sovereign election. It has its ground in definite atonement: for all the blessings of salvation were merited and surely obtained by Christ for the elect, and for them alone. It has its spiritual necessity in a depravity which is indeed total, a depravity to which the only exception is the exception of efficacious grace. And it has its continuance and sure result in the preservation and perseverance of the saints.

Break that perfect harmony, and the inevitable result will be the loss of *all* of the Five Points of Calvinism.

## Careless and Profane Christians

*Prof. Robert D. Decker*

The Reformed Faith (the truth of Scripture as set forth in the Reformed Creeds, especially the Heidelberg Catechism, The Belgic Confession, The Canons of Dordrecht) proclaims the truth of the absolute sovereignty of God. God is the sovereign Creator of heaven and earth and all that they contain. In six days, by His almighty and efficacious word God created all things (Gen. 1, 2). The Christian confesses with the Psalmist: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: He layeth up the depth in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:6-9). All things belong to the Sovereign God Who says, "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is Mine, and the fulness thereof" (Ps. 50:12). God is

God, the Lord of lords, the King of kings (cf. I Tim. 6:15, 16).

As the sovereign Creator, God is the sovereign Redeemer of His people in Jesus Christ. For this very reason God created all things. God's eternal purpose is to reveal His glory in Christ and in His body, the church. Of this the inspired apostle Paul wrote: "For by Him (Christ) were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church: Who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him I say,



whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col. 1:16-20).

The sovereign God, "To the praise of the glory of His grace," elected His people in Christ, "before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-12). These elect God gave to Christ, and for these sheep Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down His life. These sheep hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow Him. To them the Good Shepherd gives eternal life and no one is able to pluck them out of His hand because "My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:25-30). By His irresistible grace the sovereign God draws these sheep to Jesus, and all whom God gives to Christ come unto Him and Christ promises: "...Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out...and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:37-44).

There is only one conclusion to all of this: It is God "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Timothy 1:9). Salvation is all of grace from beginning to end. Salvation is not founded upon our works (Eph. 2:8-10). Nor does salvation depend on the will of man. It is true the Christian is called to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. He can do that, however, only because it is God Who works in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12, 13). God Himself says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy....therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth" (Rom. 9:15-18). God is God!

This truth, the truth of irresistible grace of the Sovereign God, has been courageously proclaimed and zealously defended by the church of Jesus Christ all through the ages. This "faith of our fathers" is living still in the Reformed tradition. It is a truth which has been and still is fiercely opposed and much maligned. The Heidelberg Catechism deals with this opposition. Having established the truth that our good works cannot be the whole or even the part of our righteousness before God, the Catechism asks: "But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?" The Catechism answers: "By no means: for it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness" (Question and Answer 64). The argument of those who oppose this truth runs something like this. If one is justified by faith alone and not of works, if one is saved by irresistible grace and his works

have nothing to do with his salvation, they neither merit God's favor nor detract from it. If that be true, it does not matter how one lives. The doctrine of irresistible grace is an immoral doctrine which allows people to sin as much as they wish. A person is either saved or he's not. It is all by grace so it makes no difference how he lives. Whether he walks in sin or holiness he is certain of eternal life. This doctrine of irresistible grace makes people careless and profane. It makes people careless about their walk of life. No matter how much sin a person commits he is saved. Preach this doctrine, the opponent says, and the church will lose its sensitivity toward sin. People will become profane.

It ought to be noted that this objection invariably comes from those who hate the truth of sovereign grace. The objection does not come from those who are sincerely searching the Scriptures for the truth, but from those who hate the truth but cannot oppose the truth on biblical grounds. That this truth makes men careless and profane the Catechism correctly calls an impossibility. Those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith will surely bring forth fruits of thankfulness. Those implanted into Christ reveal Christ. They are one with Christ by faith so that Christ lives in them and they live out of Christ. The fruit is always there!

But this objection is much older than the Catechism. When Jesus proclaimed the truth of sovereign, irresistible grace He was bitterly opposed by the Pharisees with their false doctrine of work-righteousness. When our Lord made plain that salvation is by grace alone, "Many therefore of His disciples when they heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" and they "went back, and walked no more with Him" (John 6:60, 66). The Apostles faced the same opposition. In the first five chapters of his Letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul develops the truth of justification by faith and not by works. In chapter six he asks: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (verses 1-4). To speak of a careless and profane Christian is a contradiction in terms. There are no careless and profane Christians! He who is justified before God, righteous in Christ, has no joy in sin. He who is careless and profane has never tasted the wonderful grace of God.

The Christian, the forgiven sinner, is according to Scripture DEAD to sin. This simply is not true of the ungodly. The ungodly is not dead to sin but



alive to sin. Sin is his lord and master; its power is enthroned in his heart. He is dead *in* sin. His mind is darkened, his will is perverse, his heart is corrupt and full of deceit. The ungodly agrees with his sin. He does not long to be delivered from sin. Willingly he yields his members the servants of unrighteousness. He finds his pleasure in the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life. He goes from sin to sin until finally he is ripe for judgment. Romans 1:18-32 describes the entire terrible process. Outside of Jesus Christ and apart from the mercy of God's grace "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10ff.). The ungodly is careless and profane!

But not the Christian! He is bound to Christ by faith. He is righteous in Christ and Christ lives in him. The Christian is dead to sin. His heart is reborn, his mind is renewed, his will is turned. The fruit is that he no longer agrees with sin. He no longer has his conversation in the sinful world. Saved by grace, through faith, God's gift, he is the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained that he should walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10). The Christian hates his sin and opposes evil at every turn. He is

not careless and profane; the Christian cares very much!

This does not mean that sin is dead in him. Sin remains very much alive in him. The Christian is always tempted. He still retains what Scripture calls the old man of sin or the flesh. And he sins. But his attitude toward sin is changed. On account of his sin and sinful flesh he repents daily in godly sorrow. He confesses with the Apostle: I am wretched, lost, prone by nature to hate God and the neighbor. The good that I would I do not, the evil which I would not, that I do. I thank God, I am righteous in Christ by grace alone (Cf. Rom. 7:14-25). Daily the Christian prays, Father forgive my sins, grant me strength to fight and oppose my sin and to walk in those good works which Thou hast ordained that I should walk in them. His life is characterized by that constant tension, that fight against sin. That is the experience of every child of God. Where the irresistible grace of God in Jesus Christ is at work in the heart of the Christian there is that fruit of thankfulness to the praise of the glory of God's grace. Once more let it be said: there are no careless and profane Christians.

## The Wonder-Work of Regeneration

*Rev. Ronald Hanko*

"Most powerful . . . most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable." With these words the Canons of Dordt celebrate the wonderful work of God's grace in regeneration (Canons III, IV, 12). In Canons III, IV the truth of Irresistible Grace is taught in close connection with the truth of Total Depravity. Regeneration is not the only work of grace mentioned there, but it receives the emphasis because it holds first place among all the other works of God's grace in the heart of the sinner.

In connection with Unconditional Election and Limited Atonement we learn of the work that God does *for* us, when from eternity, according to His good pleasure, He sets apart for us in Christ all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3, 4); and when at the cross He purchases for us poor unworthy sinners those same blessings of life and salvation. In connection with Irresistible Grace we learn of the work that God does *in* us, when with everlasting kindness He applies and gives to us all that has been chosen and purchased for us. The very first work in that application of salvation to the elect, redeemed sinner is the wonder-work of regeneration.

Scripture speaks of regeneration in many different ways. The word itself means "rebirth," and in such passages as John 3:3ff and I Peter 1:3 we read of being "born again." This rebirth is not a second physical birth, as Jesus so patiently pointed out to Nicodemus, but a spiritual birth. By our first birth we are born of earthly parents, and thus "of the flesh" (Jn. 3:6); by our second birth we are born from above of God, by water and the Spirit (Jn. 1:3, 3:3, I Jn. 3:9). By our first birth we are born into this world, but by our second into an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading (I Pet. 1:3, 4). The very principle of our first birth is a "corruptible seed," but the seed of our spiritual rebirth is the living and abiding word of God (I Pet. 1:23). Thus it is that by our natural birth we are spiritually still-born, dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1, Ps. 51:5), while through regeneration we are born again into the fellowship of life everlasting.

That regeneration is a work of grace is evident. It is a work wrought through the power of the resurrection of Christ (I Pet. 1:3) and is the beginning of our resurrection with Christ (Eph. 2:5, 6). It is brought to pass through the Spirit of Christ (Jn. 3:5-



8) and is the gracious cause of all our obedience to the truth and love for one another in the body of Christ (I Pet. 1:22). But what is more, regeneration is actually "Christ in us, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). In regeneration Christ Himself, in Whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily and in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3, 9), comes to dwell in our hearts by His Spirit. In regeneration the life of Christ which cannot die, the life of God Himself, is imparted to us in all its glory and sweetness. This is proved by the Word of God in I Peter 1:23. That living and abiding Word of God by which we are born again is none other than Christ Himself. It is not the Scripture, for that is neither living nor abiding, but the written revelation of the living and abiding Word. Christ as the Word made flesh, living and abiding forever, dwelling in our hearts by the operations of the Spirit, is the seed of the new life. Regeneration is of grace in Christ.

We also find regeneration described in Scripture as a "new creation" (II Cor. 5:17), a resurrection from the dead (Eph. 5:14, Jn. 5:25), a circumcision of the heart (Deut. 10:16), a washing and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Tit. 3:5), an awakening (Eph. 5:14), and in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel as the giving of a new heart of flesh in the place of our old stubborn and rebellious heart of stone (Jer. 24:7, Ez. 11:19, 36:26). We understand, of course, that regeneration is all of these things because it is first of all "Christ in us." But what we must see is that in all these different ways Scripture teaches us that regeneration is indeed a work "most powerful." It is a work of grace which reveals the infinite strength of the Almighty, a sovereign operation of God by which we are infallibly and certainly saved. That is also what we mean when we speak of "irresistible" grace.

To say that the power of this grace is irresistible is to say first of all that regeneration is the only exception to our depravity. Without regeneration "all the imaginations of the thoughts of our hearts are only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Without the grace of regeneration we are neither able nor willing to come to God, or even to desire that which is good. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And Jesus meant that apart from regeneration we cannot even believe that there is such a kingdom, as the unbelieving Jews so often proved. The irresistible grace of God in regeneration is the only hope for a totally depraved sinner.

But irresistible grace means also, that though by nature we resist the things of God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, our resistance is always broken by the supreme power of sovereign grace. The dead flesh and stone heart of the sinner

cannot stand against the mighty working of the power of God. This is not to be understood in a fatalistic sense as though the sinner is dragged to heaven against his will, kicking and screaming at every step of the way. Rather, we understand that though the very first work of grace which is performed in the heart of the sinner is performed contrary to his own will, that it is also a work which is performed *upon* his will and heart, so that that which was hard is made soft, what was dead is made alive, what was evil, disobedient and stubborn is made good, obedient and pliable (cf. Canons III, IV, 11).

A beautiful example of the work of regeneration is found in Lydia of Thyatira "whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things that were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14). God did not knock at the door of Lydia's heart waiting for her to open her heart and accept Jesus as her personal Saviour. If that had been the case, Lydia would have continued to serve her idols in the temples of Diana and Jupiter. Rather, the Lord opened her heart and from the heart she received the "Good News" which delivered her from the service of "vanities" and taught her to serve the living God in spirit and in truth.

This work of regeneration is therefore, described in the Canons as a work which is both sweet and powerful. It is sweet in that by the power of grace God heals and corrects our heart and will, but it is also powerful in that it is done irresistibly and effectually (Canons III, IV, 16).

It is the irresistible power of that work that needs emphasis. Most preaching today assumes that regeneration is a co-operative effort between God and man. God knocks and man opens. God offers and man decides. God seeks, man finds. Apart from the fact that such teaching is horrible blasphemy and a denial of the Almighty it is the worst kind of foolishness. A popular example of this foolishness is Billy Graham's book, *How to be Born Again*. Besides being a denial of irresistible grace, it is as foolish to write a book of that nature as to write a birthing manual for the child who is yet unborn. The only book that can be written about being born again is the book which God Himself has written, telling us how He conceived us from all eternity in His good pleasure, how He carried us and travailed over us in His Son, and how He brought us to the birth through the irresistible operations of His Spirit. And until we are born again we will not understand one word of what that Book teaches, for it is written in God's Book that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14).



Seeing the irresistible power of the work of God in regeneration, we see also that His work is "mysterious and ineffable (inexpressible)." Regeneration is part of the miracle of salvation and the wonder of grace which God has ordained for the praise of His glory, and therefore is one of His ways which are "past finding out." As little as we understand of the power of God in the creation of the worlds when He called the things that be not as though they were, so little do we understand of this new creation when once again in us God calls the things that be not as though they were.

But though we do not and cannot completely comprehend this work of God "we rest satisfied with knowing and experiencing, that by this grace of God we are able to believe with the heart, and love our Saviour" (Canons III, IV, 13): mysterious indeed, but also "most delightful." In fact, that is the great purpose of God in regeneration, that

through faith and love, delighting in the wonders of God we might show forth the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.

Nevertheless, the delight that we find in this work transcends this present life, for through regeneration we are not restored to the earthly paradise and the life of our father Adam, but by this work we are lifted up to the heavenly Paradise where we see God face to face in the face of Jesus Christ, and where with eternal astonishment and delight we cast our crowns before the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever.

That eternal delight and wonder we taste even now, for "the life which we now live in the flesh we live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved us, and gave Himself for us" (Gal. 2:20), and we know that "He which hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Christ Jesus" by the power of irresistible grace (Phil. 1:6).

## The Sovereign, Efficacious Call

*Rev. G. Van Baren*

God calls from the darkness of sin and death to the glorious light of covenant fellowship with Himself. That call is efficacious (powerfully effective); those called do come and assuredly enjoy the communion God promised in Christ.

In speaking of the call according to which God brings His elect people to the consciousness of salvation, we understand that this is the powerful effect of what is called the "irresistible grace" of God. When God calls, His chosen people come; *must* come.

We must understand of course, what is meant by the "call." It is used in two ways in connection with the wonder of salvation. There is the general call which involved the promiscuous proclamation of the gospel. Wherever the gospel goes, there is also the call to repent from sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Many hear that call of the gospel. It was concerning that call that Jesus said, "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). Obviously, Christ here meant that the preaching goes forth; many hear, but will not obey. Yet, God has His people who come—the chosen.

It is clear from Scripture that there is another call, a sovereign, efficacious call, which comes to the elect of God. It is a call so powerful that those called do assuredly come. It is a call in harmony with the very nature of God: His Sovereignty. It is of this that the Canons of Dordt speak in Head III-IV, 12: "And this is the regeneration so highly cele-

brated in Scripture, and denominated a new creation: a resurrection from the dead, making alive, which God works in us without our aid. But this is in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation, that after God has performed His part, it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted, or to continue unconverted; but it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation, or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture inspired by the author of this work declares; so that all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner, are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe...."

The same is the clear teaching of Scripture, as, for instance, in Romans 8:29, 30, "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate.... Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified." Note particularly in this "golden chain of salvation," those called ARE glorified. The calling here refers to that powerful call of God which brings to pass what He determined.

The powerful call of God is seen already when He created the heavens and the earth. God brought into being that which He called. So we read in



Psalm 33:9, "For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." The creation was formed at His very Word.

So also is His call unto final salvation. It is God's call which brings regeneration. But that same call goes forth when the Word is proclaimed. God calls dead sinners to new birth—and then to conscious and godly life. Those whom God regenerates, He causes also to hear the preached Word. Such hear not only with their ears nor merely with their minds, but they hear within the inner recesses of their very being. Their very heart is affected. The Word preached falls as rain and sunshine upon the seed of life in the heart—and causes that seed to sprout and flourish. God thus awakens the new life within one and will make that life to develop and grow.

Thus sovereignly the almighty God calls His elect to repentance and confession of sin—and they repent. These obey, and must obey, the powerful call of God. Therefore the Word states in Romans 8:30 that those called shall also be glorified.

This call which brings to repentance and glory is part of what is termed the "irresistible grace" of God. This issue of the *Standard Bearer* points out how that the irresistible grace of God is involved in every aspect of the salvation of the elect sinner. Here too, we recognize that grace, or the favor of God toward His elect people, is not to be resisted. His favor, directed toward His own people, will assuredly accomplish what he has determined. This is true obviously also with respect to the call as that term is used in Romans 8:30. God calls to repentance and new life, and His irresistible grace will see to it that the elect sinner hears and is converted. He cannot resist that call. He will want to obey even as God requires.

Some claim a contradiction here. A "call" which is obeyed because of "irresistible grace," apparently denies the human element, man's responsibility. If there is no chance for refusal, man is made to appear as a stock or block. Therefore has arisen also that terrible doctrine of the "free-will" of the sinner. The grace of God is said to be resistible; man is able to reject the call. The work of God is reduced to a "gentle advising." So also the Canons of Dordt state in the rejection of errors, Head III-IV, 7: "We reject the errors of those who teach: that the grace whereby we are converted to God is only a gentle advising, or (as others explain it), that this is the noblest manner of working in the conversion of man, and that this manner of working, which consists in advising, is most in harmony with man's nature.... But this is altogether Pelagian and contrary to the whole Scripture which, besides this, teaches yet another and far more powerful and divine manner of the Holy Spirit's working in the conversion of

man, as in Ezekiel: 'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh,' Ezek. 36:26."

There is not any contradiction between the irresistible grace of God whereby He calls unto salvation—and man's responsibility. It is true that our minds cannot fully grasp the wonder of the work of God—and how could they, since we are but creatures, and He is God? Yet we confess that the Sovereign God so controls all things that He draws those whom He calls. Is not this the teaching too of Philippians 12, 13: "...Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure"? There is clearly the conscious, willing activity of the child of God in working out his salvation. He applies himself to that cause. He is interested in and concerned with his salvation. Still he knows that God is the One working in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Not man is "willing," but God works a willingness in the elect sinner. Not man "does," but God works the doing within the elect sinner. That is the irresistible grace of God whereby one is called—and comes.

Therefore Jesus could say in John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth Me *shall come* to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." And again in verse 44, "No man can come to Me except the Father which hath sent Me draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day."

It is this truth which has constantly comforted saints through the ages. God draws—therefore they have come.

Would some yet complain about this glorious truth? Would some still insist upon the free will of the sinner to choose or not? Would some willingly like to maintain that God could give up of His Sovereignty in order to allow for "free will" in the sinner?

The fact is that unless God is entirely Sovereign, unless He calls with almighty power, there should no flesh be saved. It is not a question of "free will" or not "free will." If salvation depended upon the willingness of any sinner, he would in fact never be saved. Man's situation after Adam's fall into sin is such that he cannot hear spiritually. He cannot "will" to be saved. He cannot "see" the kingdom of heaven. To insist on the "responsibility" of man, to insist on man's ability to choose Christ or not, in fact would destroy every possibility of deliverance.

Nor does the irresistible grace of God in His sovereign call render any man without excuse before God. None may ever claim before God that since He did not powerfully call and draw him, that therefore his rebellion is not his own fault. None



may ever blame God for his sin. Fact is, God made man, in Adam his representative head, capable of obedience. When Adam sinned, and all we in him, then man became guilty not only, but also incapable of obedience. But the sin of disobedience remains man's.

But every saved child of God can only give God everlasting praise that He calls, draws, and preserves His people to the end. These understand that only because of that irresistible grace of God did they come. There is no other way but the drawing by the Father that accounts for their willing and doing.

This is not to say that any are compelled to come into heaven against their will. None who are drawn by the Father remain rebels. Nor can any, insisting on walking in ways of disobedience and sin, expect that nevertheless the Father will draw him into glory.

But rather, Father in heaven draws in such a way that He works the desire and longing for salvation within the hearts of elect sinners. These hear the sweet sounds of the gospel. These understand the

wonderful glory of deliverance from sin and death. These see the wonder of fellowship and communion with God in Christ. In them there is worked such a longing for those things heavenly, that their whole being is filled with desire for that. These would use their time, talents, possessions to God's glory and as those who would dwell in His house. Willingly, these are found at the foot of Christ's cross.

And all these shall be saved. None shall be ashamed at the return of our Lord Jesus Christ who have placed their trust and confidence in Him. He shall deliver from this earth with its present corruptions, to bring to the blessed glory in the new heavens and the new earth. Every child of God is assured that he shall enjoy such blessings—because the Sovereign God called by irresistible grace—and he comes to enjoy what is his for Jesus' sake. So never, never mock with that wonder of irresistible grace and its evidence seen in the call of God's elect from sin to glory. That remains the only sure basis for hope and comfort in a world of uncertainty and doubt. And all the glory be then to God's Name!

## Faith and Irresistible Grace

*Rev. C. Hanko*

The word 'faith' in Scripture is derived from a Hebrew word that means 'that which is firm,' thus, that which is steadfast, trustworthy, infallibly true. From this is derived the subjective idea, the firm unchangeable conviction that God's Word is true. Scripture speaks of this in II Peter 1:19: "We have also a more sure (absolutely sure) word of prophecy; whereunto we do well that we take heed." In the New Testament the Greek word for faith corresponds with that, since it is derived from a word that means 'to persuade,' and thus 'to be persuaded,' to believe, to trust with a sure confidence.

Adam in paradise had that sure confidence in God. As he came forth from the hands of the Creator he intuitively knew God. His first consciousness was the deep awareness of the power and glory of God as revealed to him in the broad expanse of the sunny heavens, in the rushing torrent of the streams, in the singing of the birds, in the beautiful variety of trees; plants, and flowers, and in the peaceful grazing of all sorts of animals. We can well imagine that his first cry of wonder must have been, O my God, how glorious art Thou in all the works of Thy hands! For Adam was created in the image of God in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, so that he intuitively knew God,

devoted himself to God and was prepared to serve Him as King of the earthly creation. With his whole being he sought God as his highest good, expected all things from His hands, and rejoiced in the intimate fellowship of walking with God and communing with Him at the tree of life.

Therefore his sin of eating of the forbidden tree was characterized by willful disobedience, rebellion, and breach of covenant. Willfully, even deliberately, he turned himself against God, listened to the lie of Satan as transmitted to him by his wife, and allied himself with Satan in the wicked attempt to be like God. Since Adam was the head of the human race Adam's guilt became our guilt, and since he was our first father we are all conceived and born in sin, our understanding is darkened into foolishness, our heart is turned against God in wicked rebellion, our will is perverse, so that we put forth every effort to gain our selfish ends, dishonoring God's Name, misusing and destroying God's creation, and filling the measure of our iniquity every day.

Only grace can change that. In fact, grace does not merely restore us to our former state in paradise, but exalts us to a higher and richer life in an even closer intimacy and communion with God as the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ. God sent



His Son into the world to seek and to save His lost sheep and to lead them into the sheepfold of heaven, nevermore imputing our sins unto us. Only the atoning death of the cross could redeem us from sin and death and make us sons and daughters of our God, heirs of the salvation that He prepares for us in the Father's House with its many mansions.

Therefore Scripture teaches that there is salvation in no one but in Jesus Christ. He not only opens the way to our salvation, He not only brings salvation, but He *is all our salvation*. He assures us, "I am the Bread of Life." "I am the Water of life," "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life," "I am the true Vine." It is especially this last statement, the figure of the vine, that is important to us here. In John 15:1, 2 Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. ...Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. ...For without Me ye can do nothing."

At the moment of regeneration we are ingrafted into Christ like a branch in the vine, to draw our life from Christ. Or, to change the figure, at regeneration the life of Christ is implanted in our hearts. We become new creatures, born from above. To us is given the spiritual faculty, the ability to believe. Just as an infant has all the potentialities that he will ever have, whatever he may become later in life, so also the reborn child of God has the full potentiality to believe, even though that faith becomes evident only later. "I live," says Paul, "yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live *by the faith of the Son of God*, Who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Therefore faith is the living bond that unites us to Christ, whereby we become partakers of Christ and of all His benefits.

Salvation is by faith and by faith alone. In answer to the plea of the Philippian jailer, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?", Paul answers, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house (Acts. 16:30, 31). Jesus says in John 3:14, 15, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Again in verse 36 of the same chapter it is confirmed that salvation is by faith, and by faith alone: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

This faith, according to our Heidelberg Catechism, consists of a certain knowledge and an assured confidence (Lord's Day 7). This knowledge

is not merely intellectual, but involves the heart. It is a knowledge of an enlightened understanding, arising out of the life of Christ that is implanted in the heart. Paul speaks of knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection (Phil. 3:10). There are many professed theologians who are thoroughly acquainted with the Scriptures, but who in their spiritual blindness do all in their power to undermine the truth revealed there, while there are unlearned believers who are given spiritual eyes to see, spiritual ears to hear and hearts to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. "This is eternal life, that they might know Thee the only true and living God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou has sent" (John 17:3). Those who know God, also know themselves, in all their sin and misery. They flee to the cross to seek pardon in the atoning blood of the Savior and know Him as their only and complete Savior.

This faith is also an assured confidence. The believer not only confesses that God is the only true and living God, but also adds, This God is my God forever and ever. He is assured of the forgiveness of sins through the atoning death of the Savior. He has the adoption to sons and cherishes the hope of eternal life in everlasting fellowship with God. In the midst of all the trials and sufferings of this present time He rests assured that God is for Him and that nothing can be against him. He is confident that God Who has begun a good work in him will surely finish it. Even in times of doubt and temptation when God seems far from him he still seeks his refuge in God in prayer. He cherishes the beginning of eternal joy in his heart.

The all important question is, Who works this faith?

The common conception is that God offers His salvation, but man must believe and accept it. Christ is presented as standing knocking at the door of the heart. The knob is on the inside so that He cannot enter unless the sinner opens the door to let Him in. Or the figure is used of one holding out a slice of bread, which the hungry person can accept or reject. It is maintained that when God created Adam in His own image the will was not a part of that image. At the fall the will was impaired, but did not become perverse. The sinner can realize his sin and misery, can still will the good, even though he does the evil. Paul's complaint in Romans 7, that when he wills the good evil is present with him, is ascribed to the natural man apart from grace. He can hunger for the Bread of life, can reach out as a drowning man for the lifeline that is thrown to him in the preaching of the Word. This is a shameful denial of the sovereignty of God, making a helpless Jesus dependent upon mere man; no, worse, upon a dead sinner. If this were the case, not one of us



would ever be saved.

There are also those who speak of faith as a condition unto salvation. They defend this view in a pretence of maintaining man's responsibility, as if God's sovereign grace ever bypasses man's responsibility. In our own history as Protestant Reformed Churches the statement was made from one of our pulpits, and ultimately condemned, that "God promises to every one of you that, if you believe you shall be saved." No matter how one may attempt to give this a Reformed interpretation, the fact remains that it militates against the plain teachings of the Scriptures. The general promise that is declared to "everyone" is made dependent upon the condition "if you believe." This can never be taken to mean that God says to the lost sinner, "I promise to save you on the condition that I fulfill in you My own promise, that is, that I give you faith to believe." The only possible interpretation is, that faith is a condition unto salvation, and that man must believe before he can be saved. Scripture always confirms the truth, "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). Nothing, not the grace, not the salvation, not the faith is in any sense of man, but it is God's work of sovereign mercy in us.

Similar to the view mentioned above is the view that God's promise to the baptized child at baptism (Gen. 17:7, Acts 2:39) is a conditional promise that is contingent on the child's acceptance. It is said

that God promises to each baptized child that he is an heir to eternal life, but if this child, when he comes to maturity, does not accept that promise, he thereby rejects it and becomes a covenant breaker and is cast out. Apart from the fact that this teaches a salvation that is dependent upon a dead sinner, this also teaches a grace that is resistible and a falling away of saints. Salvation is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God Who shows mercy (Rom. 9:16). There can be no real faith nor assurance of faith except from God.

Faith is God's gift, which He works in our hearts through the preaching of the Word and by His Holy Spirit. Not by an outside source, such as science, secular history, or anything else that must prove the Bible to be true, but by the testimony of Scripture itself. Faith is through hearing, and hearing is by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Our Reformed Confessions maintain that faith is "conferred, breathed and infused into man," for God "works in man both the will to believe, and the act of believing also" (Canons III, IV, Head of Doctrine, article 14).

Thus we can triumphantly declare, "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be the glory for ever. Amen." This assurance of faith depends not on us, but on God alone, and is attained only in God's sovereign mercy.

## Righteous by an Irresistible Grace

*Rev. Thomas C. Miersma*

For the believing child of God who clings to Christ by faith, the truth that he is accounted righteous before God is of the greatest significance. The principle that he whom God declares to be righteous is righteous, is a matter of pure grace to him. The believer knows himself to be a guilty sinner as he is in himself. The truth that God justifies the ungodly in Christ affords him a rich comfort and an unshakeable confidence. It is a confidence which he has, not of himself, but of grace.

What does it mean to be righteous? It means that one stands according to the judgment of God, in perfect conformity with God's own righteousness and perfection. Of that righteousness and righteous will of God, the law of God is the revelation and the standard. To be righteous means that according to God's own verdict and judgment, one measures up to that standard and stands in perfect conformity with it. God renders a verdict. He justifies or con-

demns, declaring innocence or guilt. He whom God justifies, whom God declares righteous, stands before the Lord in a state of perfect innocence. He stands without condemnation before the law of God. To be righteous, then, is principally the fruit of a legal act of justification on the part of God as Judge.

In such a state of innocence and righteousness Adam stood in Paradise. His was a created righteousness by nature, for he was created in God's image, in righteousness and true holiness. He stood before the bar of God's judgment as perfect, free from guilt. He did so, moreover, as the representative head of mankind. But Adam fell into sin by eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He thereby entered the state of guilt and came under the sentence of death. In him, we died, for by Adam's offence "judgment came upon all men to condemnation" (Romans 5:18).



This was according to the purpose of God. God purposed to magnify His own grace by justifying His people in Christ, that our righteousness might not be by creation, or through our own works, but by His grace alone. Thus God ordained Christ to be the head and fountain of all righteousness and chose unto Himself a people in Christ. Them He justified in His counsel, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 8:30, "Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified:..." that thus He might establish in Christ, a righteousness which is of God, out of pure grace.

Moreover, God in His love and grace sent His only begotten Son into the world in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin that He might condemn sin in the flesh. Christ was born, made of a woman, made under the law. He took upon Himself our state of guilt in Adam, and though being Himself perfectly innocent and righteous, He suffered in our place the condemnation and punishment due unto us. That righteousness of grace which God purposed for us in Christ, He established on Calvary's cross in the way of strictest justice. There Christ bore the penalty of our sin and guilt, taking our condemnation upon Himself, suffering the deepest reproach and pains of hell, as a penal sacrifice. In this way, in perfect obedience unto the Father, He has, by His death, fulfilled all righteousness. The result is that God imputes, puts to the account of His people, the perfect righteousness and satisfaction of Christ. He justifies them, accounts them righteous before Him. The Lord our God, in the cross of Calvary, established a righteousness which is of free and unmerited grace, in the perfect satisfaction and merits of Christ. In the resurrection of Christ, He declared His verdict, pronouncing His people righteous, for Christ's sake. Objectively and historically, then, the elect of God were justified when God raised Christ from the dead, Christ, Who "...was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

That which God purposed in Christ and accomplished in the cross, He also sovereignly bestows upon His people, by the power of an irresistible grace. God justifies the believer through faith, by the power of His grace. By nature, sinful man does not want the righteousness of God in Christ. He goes about, instead, seeking to establish his own righteousness. Sinful and fallen man seeks of himself to expiate his own guilt and to propitiate God by his own works. The natural man seeks a righteousness, not of grace, but of his own making—by good works, by obedience to law, by prayers and fastings, by animal sacrifices and self-torturing. Over the whole world, natural man is busy seeking his own way of righteousness by his own works.

Man is by nature a Pharisee, a self-righteous hypocrite, who out of the principle of enmity against God in his heart, seeks not the righteousness of God in Christ, but a man-made righteousness of outward obedience. A righteousness that is of free grace, he does not want. Rather he accounts it an unholy thing, a thing to make men careless and profane, for a doctrine of free grace destroys all man's sinful pride.

But God, Who justifies the ungodly, not only declares His people righteous in the cross of Christ, but by the power of His grace He sovereignly bestows upon them a justifying faith. When God kindles in the heart of a dead sinner a living faith, uniting him to Christ, He strips away all that sinner's pride, shows him to be what he truly is in himself, a guilty and totally depraved sinner. By the power of His grace, He reveals to the child of God that all his own righteousnesses are as so many filthy rags. He works in him a heartfelt sorrow for sin, and repentance, and He takes him to the cross of Christ, there revealing to him the righteousness which He has wrought for Him in Christ. By the power of that same grace He justifies that sinner in his own conscience. That faith by which the believer clings to Christ and which is wrought in him by the irresistible power of grace is the means by which God justifies the sinner before the bar of God's own justice in the believer's conscience.

That work of grace is a powerful work of God in which the Lord speaks His Word into the consciousness of the believing sinner and declares unto him that, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 8:1), that the perfect righteousness of Christ is freely given unto him, imputed unto him, put to his account, so that he stands before God as if he had never sinned. God declares that He accounts faith unto righteousness, without works, and that, "the just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17). By that work of grace God assures the believer that he is righteous before Him in Christ. That is the confession which the child of God makes in our Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 59, when after considering all that is contained in the Apostles' Creed, the questioner asks, "But what doth it profit thee now that thou believest all this?" And the child of God, by the grace of God given unto him, responds, "That I am righteous in Christ, before God, and an heir of eternal life." That confession he makes through the power of a true faith which God kindles in his heart by the power of an irresistible grace through the working of the Spirit. God works that confession in him, assures him of it by His grace, and seals it upon his consciousness by His Word.

That gracious work of God is powerful and



efficacious. For it is not possible that he for whom Christ died, who has been justified in the death and resurrection of Christ, should not also receive this blessing of the cross. But even as Christ died only for His people, so also God bestows upon them and them alone the blessing of a justifying faith. It is a particular work of grace. Nor may we regard faith as a new kind of work, a work of man, as a basis of our righteousness. This the Arminian tries to do in His denial of sovereign and particular grace. Christ's righteousness alone is our righteousness before God, and faith is the instrument of an irresistible grace of God to apply that righteousness to the consciousness of the elect.

The fruit of that grace of God is that it breaks down all pride, all self-righteousness of the natural heart, and writes upon the believer's consciousness the reality of his free justification in Christ. He sees before him the accounting sheet of his debt of sin upon which God has written, "paid in full in the blood of Christ."

By the power of grace, the Lord also assures the believer of his righteousness in Christ day by day. Though he sins daily, though it is borne in upon him that he has kept none of God's commandments aright, but daily transgresses them all, nevertheless God, by the power of His grace, works repentance and faith, causing him daily to flee to the cross of Christ, there assuring him of his righteousness in Christ. This affords the child of God great consolation and comfort. It gives him peace in his soul. As the apostle Paul also says in Romans 5:1, "Therefore

being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Through the sovereign power of grace, God daily gives unto His people this unshakeable confidence. For though our conscience condemn us and accuse us of guilt and sin, yet the word of God's grace testifies to us that we are righteous in Christ. "It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" (Romans 8:33-34). He whom God declares righteous is righteous. This was the confidence of Job, for God testified of him that he was righteous. In that confidence he also walked in uprightness before the Lord, a walk of thankfulness, in sanctification by grace. For the Lord testified to him in his heart that he was righteous. All the power of Satan could not shake that confidence, nor could the accusations of Job's friends. For the Lord upheld him in His grace, and though his faith was tried by many afflictions, though he struggled in his heart with God's way with him, yet in all these things he had the testimony of God that he was righteous, and that these things had not come upon him in judgment for his guilt.

That confidence and blessed assurance is the gift of God's grace unto His people in Christ, wrought in them by His Spirit. In the way of repentance and faith, God renews that assurance day by day, speaking His Word of peace to our hearts, so that we say with the psalmist David, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity..." (Psalm 32:1, 2a).

## Transformed by Sovereign Grace

*Rev. J. Kortering*

To think upon grace is to think upon God. In its deepest meaning, grace is beauty. In Proverbs 1:9, instruction in the law of God is called "an ornament of grace." According to James 1:11, when the sun burns a flower, the "grace of the fashion of it perisheth." Spiritually speaking, God is Himself gracious, beautiful. The Scriptures speak frequently of the grace of God as beauty that flows from God Who is the source of beauty. Hence in I Peter 5:10 He is called the "God of all grace." This beauty He conveys to us through His Son Jesus Christ: "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). In view of all this it is said of Noah, "he found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8).

How amazing it is that this beauty of God is evident in this world. Indeed, we look about us and see the ravages of sin and death. The sentence of

God upon the sin of Adam and Eve has worked through all of history. Wars continue to rock the nations. By greed, man rapes the earth of its precious substances and upsets the delicate balances God placed in nature. The laboring man rises up against the corporate world, while big business represses the need of the workers. Week after week man flocks to the stadium to satisfy his drive for conquest while steel meets steel. If that escape is not sufficient, he enhances it with liquor or drugs all in the name of "fun." Meanwhile, the poor of the cities waste away, deprived of the necessity of life, and the unwanted unborn are ripped from the womb in untimely birth. Oh, the evil of our generation rises unto God as a testimony of His judgment. Yet in the midst of all this, the people of God, who by nature are no different,



offer unto God their hearts, their hands, their very lives in service unto the one true God. This is the evidence that God transforms the sinner by sovereign grace!

## GOD IS GLORIFIED THROUGH SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification glorifies God!

By this we do not mean that God lacks glory in Himself. The glory of God is the sum total of all the beauty that He is as God. The Revelation of God indicates to us that He is the eternal, infinite, unchangeable, one only true God. His beauty includes His wisdom, love, holiness, and righteousness, and much more. Surely, nothing that man has can add something to that glory of God.

God sanctifies us nevertheless, in order that we may glorify Him. We are made spiritually alive so that we may acknowledge before God that He is beautiful. This is the high purpose that God has in salvation. As the angels do this now before His presence so we from the earth must return to God the glory due unto His most holy name. We do this with our lips when we praise Him, we do this with our hands when we obey Him, we do this with our will when we submit unto Him, we do this with our minds when we acknowledge that the truth is in Him.

It dazzles our minds to imagine what heaven will be like. What a day that will be when all creatures will bow before Christ, the Perfect Revelation of God, and praise God for all His goodness. At that time we will be made perfect, sin will be no more, and our whole being will be brought into subjection unto Him. Holiness will be expressed in perfect consecration unto God, we will be separated from all sin in order that we may offer unto God the sacrifices of thankfulness.

Already now, our life of sanctification glorifies God. Out of this sin-cursed world there arises unto God good works performed by His people who acknowledge that He is God and gratefully serve Him.

## SANCTIFICATION AND SOVEREIGN GRACE

Only sovereign grace is able to accomplish such a transformation. The more we do justice to the Scriptural truth of our natural total depravity, the more we will rejoice in sovereign grace as the only way unto sanctification. In the measure that many in the church tamper with the doctrine of total depravity and claim that man still has some good, even the ability to choose the good, in that measure they deny the need for sovereign grace. We believe that the Bible teaches that man is *dead* in trespasses and sins. Only a spiritual *resurrection* will bring him out of his spiritual grave. "Awake thou that

sleepiest and arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph. 5:14). This is accomplished by grace. In our Reformed tradition we speak of irresistible grace. This is true from the point of view of the sinner's inability to interfere with its operation. Man, the natural man, cannot resist God's grace when God wills to work that grace in Him. No one can shake his fist in God's face and say no. When God wills to work grace, the power to make the ugly sinner beautiful in His sight, the sinner cannot stop God in His intent and purpose. The reason is that grace is not only irresistible, it is efficacious, all powerful. Grace flows forth from God Himself. The Holy Spirit uses this grace as the powerful means whereby He applies the salvation which Christ merited on the cross for all the elect. It is divine power, power that sanctifies.

Thus we read in Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Our Netherland's Confession states that faith is active and produces good works which, "works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God forasmuch as they are all sanctified by His grace" (Art. 24). How can that be? Listen to the Canons of Dordt explain: "by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, He pervades the inmost recesses of man, he opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions" (Canons III and IV, Art. 11).

You see, God guarantees His glory by working in our hearts and lives by means of this sovereign grace.

## THE BLESSING OF SANCTIFICATION

When the Holy Spirit works grace in us the result of this is that we walk in sanctification, that is, we do good works. Our Heidelberg Catechism properly warns us that we must have a correct understanding of what good works really are. "Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations or the institutions of men" (Lord's Day 33, Q. 91). How tempted we are to determine "good" on the basis of human morality. A church corrupted by situation ethics instructs the members that fornication is not sin if sexual intercourse serves to prepare a young couple for marriage. The supreme court of our land has sanctified abortion; yet that does not make it right in God's sight. Good is determined by God alone, for He has set forth the stan-



dard of good in His Holy Word. When the grace of God is in us, we look at the Word and believe in God and give Him the honor to determine what is good for us and what He wills us to do for His sake. Then we are motivated by God's glory and not our own ambitions. That is indeed sanctification, a making holy, a separating from sin and drawing near unto God.

That work of grace in us is not of such a nature that we resist it and deplore it, but we receive it graciously. God's irresistible and efficacious grace does not drag us by the nape of our neck into the kingdom of heaven. Rather, the Holy Spirit works within our nature in such a way that we consciously enjoy the benefits of grace and are thankful to God for them. This is accomplished in two ways.

First, we become spiritually conscious of the blessing of the new life in Christ Jesus. This takes place when we are able to contrast the life of sanctification and depravity. Our spiritual judgment enables us to see the deplorable consequence of sin and to hate and flee from it. An example of this is Moses, referred to in Hebrews 11:24, 25: "By faith Moses when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward." The advantages of being "son of Pharaoh's daughter", which included being Pharaoh, the treasures in Egypt, the pleasures of sin weighed but little compared to being numbered among the people of God, though it meant the reproach of Christ. He considered the duration and the reward: Egypt was for a season and ended in the judgment of God; the people of God had the riches of God's friendship which was for eternity. The world may eat, drink, dance, and have their pleasure, but it brings untold misery, broken marriages, broken homes, and ruined bodies. Obedience to God and service of God may afford a small place in the world, but it produces covenant homes, peace with God and with one another, joyful service of God and meaningful

lives.

Secondly, we are thankful to God for these blessings and we show this to Him by walking in sanctification and good works. Thankfulness is not forced upon us, it arises from within us. We count our blessings for God's goodness in saving us. We are thankful to God that this is our own, not only personally, but also for our families, our loved ones, and the church of the living God. How thankful we are to God, for from Him alone come all these blessings of salvation. We do not feel sorry for being saved by sovereign grace, we rejoice and are glad in that salvation.

Hence, our doing good works are not to merit with God. That is not only impossible, but also spiritually forbidden. Paul by the Holy Spirit warns us in Romans 11:6, "And if by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more of grace: otherwise work is no more work." Our Heidelberg Catechism correctly teaches, "But why cannot our good works be the whole, or part of our righteousness before God? Because, that the righteousness which can be approved of before the tribunal of God must be absolutely perfect and in all respects conformable to the divine law and also that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin."

The motivation for doing good and living a holy life is to glorify God. We are thankful to Him for His wonderful work and we desire that the praise and glory be God's alone.

#### GRACE FOR GRACE

In conclusion we can see that the glorious grace of God that transforms the sin-enslaved-sinner returns unto God. It begins in God, it fills us to overflowing, and returns to God in the form of thankful obedience and service.

The beauty that God has in Himself is reflected in us by the working of grace and radiates unto Him eternally. "For all things are for your sakes that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God" (II Cor. 4:15).

## Irresistible Grace and Preaching

*Pastor Van Overloop*

The link in the golden chain of Calvinism which is called irresistible grace is as indispensable as the other four links. This link answers the question, "How are the benefits of Christ's cross applied to the elect?"

The answer of all those who deny or compromise the sovereignty of God is that the benefits of Christ's cross are not applied UNTIL the recipient exercises the so-called prerogative of a free moral agent and actually wills to be converted. The pre-



suppositions of this answer of the Arminians are many. We list two major ones. The first is that man is not truly totally depraved, for, they say, man's will in itself has never been totally corrupted but only hindered, and man can use its powers to choose good. The second incorrect presupposition is that grace is nothing else than a gentle moral suasion which consists in advising the willing heart of unconverted man to be converted. Thus grace is made to be only a helping hand. Salvation in this conception of things is said to be all of grace, BUT all receive this grace. The only possible conclusion to this theory is that the one who remains unsaved is able to resist the grace given to him.

Upholding God's sovereignty we defend the truth that His grace is irresistible.

Elsewhere in this issue it is shown that *total* depravity implies a grace which is irresistible. Also it is shown that grace is the favor of God which is a power to fashion us according to His holy design. God "hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 1:9). Jesus says, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him" and "no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father" (John 6:44, 65).

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In the Canons of Dordt (III, IV, 11, 12) we are taught of the relationship between efficacious grace and preaching. Efficacious calling, by which God works true conversion, consists of the external preaching of the gospel and of the regenerating Spirit pervading the inmost recesses of man. This calling unto salvation God works in us without our aid. This is effected not only by the external preaching of the gospel, but also by an internal, supernatural work of the Spirit. In no wise is this effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel or by moral suasion so that after God performs His part it remains in the power of man to be converted or not. By the work of the Spirit AND by the preaching of the gospel God calls His own. Preaching is the divinely chosen vehicle for the deliverance of irresistible grace. These two elements of efficacious calling may not be separated. If it is held that conversion takes place without the preaching, one hits the rock of the errors of hyper-Calvinism. If it is only by the preaching of the gospel and without the internal work of the Spirit, one hits the hard place of all the errors of Arminianism, for then the preaching is merely moral suasion on God's part with its success depending on the power of man as to whether he will be regenerated and converted or not.

The rightful place of the preaching of the gospel

is alongside the work of the Spirit. Hand in glove these are the divinely chosen means to work conversion. The Spirit effects the radical change in man's heart and will and actions through the means of the preaching of the gospel.

The Canons of Dordt explain what is the proper place of the preaching in the bestowal of grace (cf. III, IV, 17). It draws a comparison between the natural and the spiritual. Natural life is produced and sustained by an almighty operation of God. In His perfect wisdom and goodness God has willed to exert this power upon natural life through the use of means. So it is with spiritual life. Such is produced and sustained within men only by supernatural operations of God. Also this life, through the use of means, is produced and sustained by God. That means is the preaching of the gospel. The golden mean must be maintained between the extremes of hyper-Calvinism (and its denial of the use of gospel preaching) on the one side, and of Arminianism (and its use of preaching as moral suasion) on the other side.

Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit whereby He softens the hard heart, infuses new qualities into the spiritually dead will, and actuates and strengthens the believer to bring forth good works. To this end the perfect wisdom and goodness of God uses the sacred admonitions of gospel preaching. We may not separate what God in His good pleasure has most intimately joined together.

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For this article to provide a more complete treatment of the relationship between irresistible grace and preaching we must consider the practical workings of this beautiful union. We have two thoughts we want to present.

The first thought is about the content of the preaching. What is to be the content of that preaching which is built on the foundation of the absolute sovereignty of God and His irresistible grace? At the Synod of Dordt the Arminians charged that in such preaching there was no room for admonitions.

Again the Canons of Dordt (III, IV, 17) provide us with the proper starting blocks. All true preaching not only must instruct concerning this efficacious grace of God to His glory and the abasement of all human pride, but also must present the admonitions of the gospel in the exercise of the Word, sacraments, and discipline. The theme of all true preaching is the exaltation of God and the consequent humiliation of man. The preaching must show the absolute necessity of the blood of Christ to the exclusion of all the works of men. Central in all preaching must be that the heart of faith is Jesus Christ and His righteousness as efficaciously imputed. The unconverted must not be flattered,



nor the converted given carnal ease.

All who hear the message of the Gospel are to be told plainly that their salvation was and is in the hands of God to give or to withhold. This plain proclamation is no obstacle to coming to faith and salvation, only to human pride. The true preacher of the gospel knows that his entreaties can never make men able or willing, but that conversion is the work of the power of God alone.

Why then cry, "Repent and believe!"? Because the Spirit effectually works in men (to bring about initial conversion in the unconverted and continued conversion in those already converted) in connection with that preaching, illuminating men's minds so they may discern the things of the Spirit of God. Through the means of admonitions to repent from sin and to believe the work of God in Christ, the Spirit makes man discern his inability, sinfulness, and guilt. By means of the gospel admonitions the Spirit enlightens man's understanding as to the propriety and necessity of a salvation by God alone. Thus man is fully persuaded of his utter inability to obey apart from the grace of God, which grace must be irresistible. Thus men's obstinate wills are sweetly and powerfully bent so that where resistance formerly ruled, now there begins to reign a sincere spiritual obedience to the will of God. Therefore the truths of the spiritual inability of man to save himself and of the sovereignty of God in salvation must be proclaimed and the persuasive commands issued in order for the Spirit to work conversion. Only then does the preaching of a salvation of sinners by a sovereign God have hope that God will use His words to bear upon men's hearts with a power no man can resist. Then I, as a preacher of the gospel of irresistible grace, beseech sinners to be reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5:20).

Because the truth of this relationship between irresistible grace and preaching is often misunderstood, let us look at it again answering these questions: "Why exhort and admonish to believe when faith is a gift of God and we cannot believe of ourselves?" "Why would a sinner try to do what is impossible for him to do of himself, namely, believe?"

It does not have to be true that faith is in any way a work of man's corrupt nature. Nor is it necessary that Christ be dead for all, in order for man to have

a warrant to obey Scripture's admonitions. Rather it is while man is exhorted and persuaded to believe in and on Jesus Christ that it pleases God the Spirit to quicken spiritually, enabling the sinner to acknowledge his inability and to desire God's forgiveness. We cannot produce faith in ourselves, not even by placing ourselves under the means of grace (the preaching). Nevertheless it is only through these means that we can expect God's irresistible grace to work in us. So has God joined together the preaching and His efficacious grace as wrought by the Holy Spirit.

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The second practical thought we might bring is that there is a place for prayer in this connection. Accompanying the preaching of irresistible grace, the true minister of the gospel prays. This is also the responsibility of the elect who have already been brought to the consciousness of salvation. They who are the recipients of this irresistible or efficacious grace owe and give eternal gratitude to God, knowing that he has not made himself to differ from the one who does not believe. Therefore, for that one who has not yet been called, it is our duty to pray to God Who calls the things that are not as if they were (Cf. Canons of Dordt, III, IV, 15).

Believing God's Word that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, the true minister of the gospel and all who presently believe pray. We pray that the Spirit will use the means of the Word that morning, afternoon, or evening efficaciously to work initial conversion or to further sanctification in those already believing. Fervently this prayer must be uttered before every worship service. Only the Divine Wind (John 3:8) can make the words of the preaching of the gospel to be a power of salvation which no hard heart can withstand. So we must pray for that Spirit of Christ to be present in every worship service. Otherwise all preaching is in vain.

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So we must preach and so we must pray. A beautiful harmony wrought by Divine wisdom and goodness exists between irresistible grace and that preaching of the gospel which is accompanied by fervent prayers.

Take time to read  
*The Standard Bearer*



# The Free Offer and Irresistible Grace

Prof. H. Hanko

The free offer of the gospel is a heresy which teaches that in the preaching of the gospel God expresses His desire, intention, and purpose to save all those who hear the gospel. The gospel tells every man that God on His part wants each to be saved, earnestly desires that he take Christ as his own, eagerly seeks that every one come to Christ, receive Him as his Savior, and enter into the joy of salvation. It is true that sometimes within Reformed circles the term "offer" has been used in a different sense: as the presentation or proclamation of Christ in the preaching which is heard by all. This is the sense in which Calvin used the term, in which it is used in the Canons of Dordt, III & IV, 9 and in the writings of many theologians of both the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition. But this is not its use in the generally accepted sense of that word. Today (and in the past) most have used the term to express God's own personal desire and intention to save every one who hears the gospel.

It is not difficult to understand that this view of the free offer has a great deal to say concerning *grace*. Historically, one of the "five points of Calvinism" has been the truth of irresistible grace, i.e., that the work of salvation in the hearts of those who are saved is a work which God performs *irresistibly*. Those whom God saves are saved; and they are saved by a work of grace which the sinner cannot resist. God overcomes all the natural resistance of the totally depraved sinner, conquers mightily and powerfully the force of sin in him, and brings him to salvation. Nothing can resist that work. Neither Satan and his hosts of devils nor the hatred and opposition of the sinner can bring that work of God to a standstill. "All that the Father giveth to Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

This grace is worked through the preaching of the gospel, for the Holy Spirit so works in the hearts of God's elect that that preaching is *grace*, a grace that saves. So the preaching stands inseparably connected with grace. What then is the relation between *grace* and the free offer of the gospel? Or, to put the question a bit differently, how can those who teach that the preaching expresses God's desire and willingness to save all men still maintain at the same time that grace is absolutely irresistible?

There have been different answers to this question.

The Arminians deny irresistible grace altogether.

They too maintain a free offer of the gospel and emphatically assert that God desires to save all men. But they simply take the position that the grace which is offered to all men in the gospel is not actually given until man accepts that grace and actually believes in Christ. This was the position of the Arminians against whom the Canons of Dordt were written in 1618-'19. In their "Remonstrance," formulated in 1610, they write: "But as respects the mode of the operation of this grace, it is *not irresistible*, inasmuch as it is written concerning many, that they have resisted the Holy Ghost." (Italics mine.) And this has been consistently the position of all Arminianism until the present.

But others who have attempted to claim allegiance to the five points of Calvinism (and the truth of irresistible grace) while still maintaining the free offer of the gospel have had recourse to "common grace." This has been done, e.g., by the Baptist Erroll Hulse in his book, *The Free Offer: an exposition of common grace and the free invitation of the Gospel*. In this book he writes: "The subject of common grace is inescapably connected with the free offer. It is not possible to deal adequately with the question of the offer without getting to grips with the subject of common grace."

The same is true of the "Three Points of Common Grace" adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924. In the first point the Synod adopted the view that God is gracious to all His creatures, and that this gracious attitude towards all was especially revealed in the offer of the gospel.

Now common grace, according to the Christian Reformed Church, is different from saving grace. Common grace is for all men; saving grace is only for the elect. Common grace is especially revealed in temporal blessings; saving grace is revealed in salvation itself. Common grace is only given in time; saving grace is everlasting. Nevertheless, grace, even common, belongs to and is a part of the preaching of the gospel. And it must not be forgotten that the preaching of the gospel deals with Christ and salvation, and, therefore, with saving grace.

Current Presbyterian thought does the same. John Murray, in the book, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. I, writes: "The universality of the demand for repentance implies an universal overture of grace," and, "This is the full and unrestricted offer of the gospel to all men" (p. 60). In the pam-



phlet of Murray and Stonehouse on "The Free Offer of the Gospel", (a pamphlet which contains the official decisions on this question by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church made in 1948) the same idea is taught. In teaching that "God desires the salvation of the impenitent and reprobate" (p. 3), they claim that this involves God's general attitude of mercy, benevolence, and grace to all.

Now it is not always easy to sort all these things out, and one sometimes wonders how otherwise clear-thinking men can write so obscurely about important points of doctrine. But, whatever the case may be, questions naturally arise. Does the gospel offer saving grace or common grace? or both? Does the gospel itself *work* grace in the hearts of all? And if so, is this grace worked through preaching a saving grace or a common grace? or both?

Generally speaking, it seems as if the defenders of the free offer take the position, first of all, that with respect to *common* grace, the fact that God desires and wills the salvation of all men is an *objective* manifestation of God's grace to all. He shows His favor to all by expressing His desire to save all. But there is more. It is clear from the decisions on common grace made by the Christian Reformed Church that the preaching of the gospel also *works* subjectively grace in the hearts of all—although this grace worked in the hearts of all is common, not saving. The late Prof. Berkhof, e.g., in his defense of the three points and in his interpretation of Genesis 6:3 writes: "The Holy Spirit resisted the ungodliness and perversity of those generations who lived before the flood. He sought to check their ungodliness and to lead them to repentance.... But the Spirit strove in vain; sin increased rapidly" (Quoted from *The Triple Breach*, p. 33).

But saving grace is given only to the elect. They and they alone receive the benefits of salvation through grace.

If one asks how it is possible for God to *desire* the salvation of all men on the one hand, while He, in fact, saves (and determines to save) only some, the answer is usually given that God desires the salvation of all men according to His preceptive decree, while He actually saves all men according to His determinative decree. And if one asks how it is possible that two such conflicting wills can be in God, the answer is blithely given: This is a mystery.

Now there are a couple of conclusions which seem to be obvious in all this. The first is that, strangely enough, it is common grace which takes on an irresistible character. Common grace is given to all, and it is given without man wanting it, asking for it, seeking it, or in any way working to obtain it. It is simply there, given graciously, coming from

God's own heart, directed to every sinner, and given in an irresistible manner. Common grace becomes irresistible grace. Common grace is worked irresistibly in the hearts of men. And while it does not save in itself, it is nevertheless God's gracious and free gift which comes whether men want it or not.

Secondly, this irresistible common grace is inseparably connected with saving grace in this way. It is by common grace that a man possesses the power to accept or reject the saving grace in Christ offered in the gospel. After all, we face the inescapable question: If God desires the salvation of all, why is it that not all men are saved? And the answer is that man rejects the grace which is offered. Thus Berkhof writes in his interpretation of Romans 2:4: "The explanation of (the riches of God's goodness) must be found in the purpose God had in view with this revelation of His love. And what was this purpose? Was it to cast the ungodly Jews more deeply into perdition? No, but to lead them to repentance. . . . But in the case of the Jews *the result does not correspond to the intention. They hardened themselves against this revelation of God's goodness.*" (Quoted from *The Triple Breach*; the underscoring is ours.)

So the relation between common grace and saving grace is this: common grace puts a man into a position to accept the overtures of saving grace in Christ, or to reject them, thus frustrating the intention of God. So common grace is irresistible, saving grace is not. Saving grace can be resisted so that God's intention can be frustrated.

Those who defend the doctrine of the free offer of the gospel insist that saving grace is irresistibly given. They do this in the interests of trying to salvage a semblance of Calvinism and in an effort to demonstrate that they still maintain the "five points." But this will not do. But it simply remains a fact, and that fact cannot be denied, that if God desires the salvation of all and expresses this desire in the preaching, then, when all are not saved, it is because man has resisted these overtures of grace. Grace is resistible. Salvation is no longer sovereignly accomplished. Salvation depends upon the work of man. The Arminians were at least consistent; Berkhof states as much — although the meanwhile professing some sort of strange allegiance to Calvinism.

But all this is emphatically repudiated by Scripture and the Confessions.

There is an important point here which ought never to escape our attention. When we talk of the irresistibility of grace, we are not talking about some abstract concept of grace, as if grace were a power in itself. Grace is *God's* grace. It is His



attitude of favor and goodness, of love and mercy. Because it is God's attitude, it is an attitude which is rooted in His own sovereign will. And that will is always efficacious. The question is not finally whether *grace* is, in itself, resistible or irresistible, but whether *God's will* is resistible or irresistible. And all Scripture and the Confessions teach the truth that God is sovereign.

This is the emphasis of Canons III & IV, 11: "But when God accomplishes His good pleasure (note this emphatic statement concerning God's good pleasure, H.H.) in the elect, or works in them true conversion, he not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their minds by His Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, pervades the inmost recesses of the man; he opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, he quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, he renders it good, obedient, and pliable, actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions."

The same is true of the Westminster Confession of Faith in Chapter X, Arts. 1 and 2. And the same is the teaching of all Scripture. (Cf., e.g., Mt. 11:25, 26; John 12:39, 40; Rom. 9:18; Rom. 11:7-10; II Cor. 2:14-16; Rom. 8:29, 30; John 6:65, 10:26-30; etc.)

What is the conclusion of the matter? In the first place, it ought to be clear that it is impossible to maintain the doctrine of the free offer without at the same time denying the irresistible character of grace. If there are those who persist in wanting the free offer, let them openly admit that they do not want the historic position of Calvinism and the Reformed creeds. This would, at least, be honest. In the second place, it ought not to escape us that the comfort of the believer is finally in the sovereignty of God's grace. If his salvation depended upon himself, he would be forever cast about on the stormy seas of doubt, for he can do nothing for his salvation since all his works are corrupted by sin. But his comfort is in resting only upon Christ. And resting only upon Christ, he rests upon the particular and sovereign grace of his God Who has delivered him from sin and will surely preserve

him to the end to the praise of the glory of God's grace.

### NOTICE!!!

Adams Street Christian School is looking for a custodian who can do both janitorial and minor maintenance work for the coming school year. If interested in part time morning, or morning and after school combination, please contact Cornie Brummel at 452-0799 or Don Doezema at 243-3712.

### NOTICE!!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Edgerton, Minnesota on September 7, 1983, at 8:30 AM, the Lord willing. Delegates in need of lodging are to inform the Clerk of the Edgerton Consistory.

Rev. David Engelsma  
Stated Clerk

### NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 14, 1983 at the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids. Material to be treated in this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk at least three weeks prior to the convening of this session.

Jon Huisken, Stated Clerk

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We are thankful that our parents, DEWEY AND DENA ENGELSMA, were able to celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary on July 30. "He will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord" (Gen. 18:19).

David and Ruth Engelsma  
Lammert and Mary Beth Lubbers  
Donald and Lenore Cook  
Michael and Brenda Engelsma  
Timothy and Lois Pipe  
John and Ruthanne Flikkema  
Jonathan and Floretta Engelsma  
Mark and Debra Engelsma  
Edward and Elizabeth Ophoff  
Kenneth Engelsma  
Sara Engelsma  
Jordan Engelsma  
and 39 grand children  
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