

## Irresistible Grace

by [Rev. Gordon Girod](#)

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### I Corinthians 15:10

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

### I Corinthians 15:1-10

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

After that, he was seen of about five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

## IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

### Fourth Head of Doctrine: His Conversion to God, And the Manner Thereof.

When Paul said, "By the grace of God I am what I am," he spoke more than a great truth concerning his own life. He was voicing a great principle of the Christian faith, for each of us must say as Paul did, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

To some, who clearly understand the Christian faith and the language of the Word of God, this is a trite statement, easily comprehended. To others, these words from the lips of Paul may be as meaningless as if they were spoken in a foreign tongue.

One day after the evening worship service, one of the young men of the congregation came with the question: "What is grace? Never a service passes," he continued, "but that the grace of God is mentioned either in the sermon, in the prayers, or in the hymns which we sing. But the more that I hear the word used, the less certain I become that I know what it means."

One of the best definitions which I have heard of the word "grace" was uttered, of all places, upon the floor of the United States Senate. For some years immediately subsequent to World War II, the state of New Hampshire was represented in the United States Senate by the Hon. Charles Tobey. Senator Tobey was much more than an able lawmaker; he was a well-known Christian who was thoroughly conversant with the language of Scripture.

On this occasion, according to his biographer, Senator Tobey was speaking to a bill to grant Great Britain further economic aid, ranging in the billions of dollars. Charles Tobey reminded the other senators that the British Empire continued to carry on international trade with Communist China, supplying their needs, at the very time that American boys were being slaughtered by the Communist Chinese in the Korean conflict. He had much more to say, but he concluded his speech with these words: "This is grace, that we have given them so much when they deserve nothing." "This is grace, that we have given them so much when they deserve nothing."

Senator Tobey's words fit the Biblical concept of grace well, for grace is the free, unmerited gift of God.

The young man who came with his question was confused, I think, because the term *grace* is employed to describe so many different situations. Paul said, for instance, "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). What did he mean, and what do we mean when we say that we are "saved by grace"? We mean that our salvation is the gift of God, the free, unmerited gift of God.

But the term *grace* is used in other ways. When Dwight L. Moody saw a drunken man staggering down West Madison Street in Chicago he said, "There but for the grace of God go I." What did he mean? He meant that his ability to withstand liquor and drunkenness was the gift of God, the free, unmerited gift of God.

After the accident in which my automobile was demolished some years ago, I knew that I had escaped injury and death only by the grace of God. What does one mean when he uses the term in circumstances like that? I meant that my safe keeping was the gift of God, the free, unmerited gift of God.

Paul went further than any of these examples when he said, "By the grace of God I am what I am." He was saying that every good thing in his life was the gift of God: his salvation, his conversion on the Damascus road, his willingness to sacrifice all things in the service of God, the missionary spirit in his heart, whatever righteousness and truth and peace were in his life — all these were the free, unmerited gift of God.

It is not enough to say that grace is the gift of God. That would be an incomplete definition. To clearly define the meaning of the term *grace* as it is used in the Scriptures, one must add three descriptive and definitive adjectives. It is free; it is unmerited; it is irresistible.

Consider that grace is the free gift of God. One might ask: But are not all gifts free? By no means. There was, for example, the young woman of wealth who paid for the medical education of a young man whom she planned to marry. After the young man had graduated from medical school, he turned about and married a nurse whom he had met during his internship. The young woman who had paid for his education took her case to court. She demanded that he repay her for his education. In this case the court ruled that she had given him the money "in anticipation of marriage," and since the marriage had not taken place, the money must be repaid. You see, this was not a free gift; there was a condition attached to it. The young man must marry his benefactor or return the gift.

When we say that the grace of God is a free gift, we mean that there are no conditions attached. This truth can be easily discerned in connection with our redemption. We can never repay God for our salvation. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "When ye have done all things, say yet, we are unprofitable servants." We are expected to serve God, of course, but if we do serve God well, the ability to do so is an additional gift. We are expected to act as good stewards, of course, but if we are enabled to act as good stewards of the things which God has given, the ability to do so is an additional gift from God. And though we have the missionary fervor of a Paul, though we possess the fearless consecration of a Peter, though we accept a martyr's death along with Stephen — though we do all of these things, yet we are to know and to say that we are unprofitable servants.

God knows that we can never repay Him for the gift of our salvation. Our salvation is a free gift; all the gifts of God are free gifts. There is no thought of repayment. When we say that we are saved by grace, we mean that our salvation is the free gift of God.

In addition, our salvation and all other blessings which we receive from God are unmerited gifts. By this we mean believe in Christ; but because he who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also." *Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Art. XIV.*

We do not merit our salvation. We do not earn our salvation. We are not saved because of anything which God finds in us. Our salvation is an unmerited gift. Therefore, when we say that we are saved by grace, we mean that our salvation is the free, unmerited gift of God.

The order of things is well laid out in the hymn "Amazing Grace." The second verse reads:

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And, grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear,  
The hour I first believed.*

When God gives us the gift of faith, when He makes it possible for us to believe, then we suddenly realize that the grace of God was upon us long before, that God was working with us and in us from the beginning.

Nor is that all. A third fact in connection with grace must be considered. The grace of God is irresistible. When God has determined to present us with the gift of salvation, we cannot refuse that gift.

When we say that man cannot refuse, nor defeat, nor deny the grace of God, you will recognize that we are saying the exact opposite of what is being preached and taught in many places today. The contrary conception of the manner of salvation proceeds like this. God made salvation available to all men when He sent His only-begotten Son to the cross. From that point on, however, the matter of salvation depends upon man. Man must decide whether he desires to be saved. If a man desires to be saved, if he will repent of his sins, if he will accept the redemptive work of Christ on earth, God will save him.

What is wrong with this view? Just this: It is totally unscriptural. As we pointed out earlier, it makes faith a work of merit. God gives man salvation in exchange for faith according to this view.

But more. This view is based upon the totally fallacious notion that man is able and willing to be saved. Neither is true. Man is not able, in himself, to receive the salvation of God. And man is not willing, in himself, to receive the salvation of God.

Consider the first, that man is not able to receive the salvation of God in himself. Hear the words of Jesus in this regard. He said to His disciples, "Ye did not choose me, but I have chosen you." Hear Jesus again, for He also said, "No man can come unto me, except the Father which sent me, draw him" (John 6:44). Place the emphasis, where it belongs, upon the verb, *can*. "No man *can* come unto me, except the Father which sent me, draw him." It is impossible for a man to come to God, unless God Himself draws the man. A man is not able to come to God in himself. Jesus declared that God must choose the man, and that God must draw the man.

Secondly, Paul points out why this is so, and at the same time, points out that man is not willing in himself to come to God. In his epistle to the Romans (8:7) Paul declares, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

Note what Paul says of the "carnal mind," that is, the unregenerate mind, the mind of the unsaved man. Paul says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." Not merely that the carnal mind is indifferent to God. Not merely that the carnal mind is cold toward God. Nothing so simple as that. The carnal mind is *enmity* against God. The carnal mind hates God. The carnal mind is in rebellion against God. The carnal mind is not willing to be saved; it is, rather, at war with God.

Only when I become aware of these facts, do I begin to realize what God has done for me. In my natural self I was in rebellion against God. My nature being wicked, perverse and corrupt (Belgic Confession Art. XIV), I hated God and the law of God. Had God left me to myself, I would have remained in rebellion against God. Had God given me any choice in the matter, I would have chosen to defy God.

But glory be to God, He gave me no choice. By his sovereign power He broke my rebellious will. He called me when I would not be called. He took me when I would not be taken. He saved me when I would not be saved. He made me to believe when I would not believe. He gave me faith when I had no faith and wanted no faith. I praise God that His grace is irresistible. If His grace were anything but irresistible, I would have resisted it. Oh, yes, the hour arrived when I came willingly, but this I must know was the Spirit of God working in me.

I dare not be deceived about the manner in which my redemption was worked in my life. I must know that the Holy Spirit "opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcizes that which was uncircumcized; 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” (Art. XI).

“ . . . this is in nowise effected merely by . . . 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 . . . ; so that all in whose hearts God works in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe. Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but, in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active. Wherefore, also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received” (Art. XII). *Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine.*

Men dislike this doctrine. Oh, yes, they do. Often those who declaim the most vociferously their love for the Lord, despise this doctrine. Do you know why they hate it? They hate it because it leaves man without a shred of pride.

It means that the believer cannot boast of his faith, because his faith is the gift of God. It means that the believer cannot boast of a decision that he made to serve God, because he knows that God made that decision for him. It means that there is only one thing left for the believer to do, and that is to fall upon his knees and say, “O Lord, miserable, unworthy, worthless wretch that I am, I do not know why Thou hast saved me, but I know that Thou hast. Thank God! Thank God!”

Then I have a second cause for thanking God that His grace is irresistible. The grace of God is irresistible, not only in the sense that man cannot refuse it; it is irresistible in the sense that Satan cannot defeat it.

One good Biblical illustration of this truth may be found in the record of the Old Testament saint, Job. You will recall that Satan asked permission of God to attack this faithful servant of the Lord. Satan’s admitted purpose was to prove that he could take this man away from God. The Lord granted Satan the permission to attack this saint. Then Satan went to work. He took Job’s flocks and herds. He took the lives of Job’s sons and daughters. He took Job’s health, leaving Job a miserably ill man. In the midst of Job’s misery, Satan turned Job’s wife against him. In short, Satan worked every misery and crime upon this man that is known to the pit of hell. Yet Job remained true to God.

Satan failed to reckon with one fact. There was a power in Job that is greater than all the power of darkness. There was a power in Job which is greater than the winds of the desert or the waves of the sea. There was a power in Job which

is greater than the power of sin, death and hell. And that power was the sovereign, irresistible grace of God.

I thank God that His sovereign, irresistible grace cannot be defeated by the king of the underworld, for it is not against flesh and blood that we must fight but against the principalities and powers of darkness. I thank God that His sovereign grace is irresistible, for the cunning of Satan is such that he would deceive even the elect, were that possible. But it is not possible, for within the elect is the sovereign, irresistible power of God.

This is my hope and my faith, born of God. I am not strong enough to wrestle against the arch-criminal of the universe, but that same great God who hurled Satan into the outer darkness before time began has put His sovereign, irresistible grace in me. I am not strong enough to battle against the host of the damned, but that same great God who will one day hurl Satan and his host into the lake that burneth with fire forever, has put His sovereign, irresistible grace in me. This is why Paul was able to exclaim with joy, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

One last thought. The grace of God is irresistible, because temptation cannot undermine it. John puts it this way in his Gospel, "The light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness cannot put it out."

Satan came to a young man one day, the New Testament relates. The purpose of Satan was to tempt Him. To this young man Satan made his most superlative promise. He said, "I will give thee all the kingdoms of the world." But the young man answered, "It is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve.'"

Ah, you say, but that young man was Jesus, and Jesus is God. True enough, gloriously true, He is God. But He is also man. What of this Jesus with His human nature? How did the Man Jesus resist this most dazzling of all temptations? John provides the answer in His Gospel, for he wrote of Christ that He is "full of grace and truth." That is the answer: Full of grace and truth.

This, then, is the grace of God, the free, unmerited, irresistible grace of God. Man cannot refuse it. Satan cannot defeat it. Temptation cannot undermine it. The free, unmerited, irresistible grace of God. My salvation is a free gift from God, for He knows that I can never repay Him. It is an unmerited gift, for surely I did not deserve it in any wise. It is an irresistible gift, for it was necessary for God to break my rebellion before He could save me. And now that He has saved me, I can be certain that all the powers of darkness shall not take the gift of God from me, for all the hosts of sin and hell cannot defeat the power of God.

But now I must warn you, lest you fail to assess the whole truth of God. For Paul writes that once God has broken our rebellion, that once God has created within

us a new nature, that we are to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to work, for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13).

Having been rescued from the darkness and brought into the light; having been freed from the slavery of sin and brought into the liberty of the sons of God, being no longer servants but sons and daughters, we are to become “co-laborers together with God.” God provides the grace; God provides the ability; God provides the strength; and with that grace, with that ability, with that strength, we are to work out the purposes of God in our lives.

Now, there are always those who, understanding the truth of God only partially, use this truth of God as an excuse for unconsecrated living. If there are those who use the doctrine of election and its derivative, the doctrine of irresistible grace, as an excuse for an unholy life, the fault must be found, not in these divine truths but in the perverseness of their own natures. The *First Head of Doctrine*, Art. XIII points out, “The consideration of this doctrine of election is so far from encouraging remissness in the observance of the divine commands or from sinking men into carnal security, that these, in the just judgment of God, are the usual effects of rash presumption or of idle and wanton trifling with the grace of election, in those who refuse to walk in the ways of the elect.” Thus a man must take care lest he be deceived by his own corrupt nature. What shall we say of people like these? There are two possibilities.

If there is no real desire in your heart to serve God, get down on your knees; plead with God, plead with Him that He may implant that desire in your heart, for if that desire never comes, you are a castaway, and in the judgment the crime will be yours, for God hath promised, “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”

But there is another possibility. It may be that God will have you for His own, but that you have not yet learned to submit to the will of God. God left Jacob a cripple before Jacob learned to submit to the will of God. God hurled Jonah into the sea and caused him to be swallowed by a whale, before Jonah learned to submit to the will of God. God hurled Saul of Tarsus to his knees and left him in blindness, before Saul learned to submit to the will of God.

The question is: What must God do to you, before you will learn to submit to His will? Must God bring illness into your life? Must God bring tragedy into your home?

Must God take away a loved one in death before you will learn? Pray God, beseech God that you may learn to submit to His will, before He crushes you with a rod of iron. As for you who have submitted to the sovereign will of God, as for you who have turned to God with whole-souled devotion, I have this to say to you: Rejoice in the sovereign, irresistible grace of God, for this is the promise,

that nothing, nothing in all this world, nor in the world to come can separate you from the love of God.

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