

Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10



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Is Grace Irresistible?

The “I” of the Calvinist scheme TULIP refers to “Irresistible Grace.”

You’ll remember from previous bulletins in this series that Calvinism teaches that all human beings are born Totally Depraved and unable to have faith or become saved, not even to desire salvation. Instead, God predestined certain individuals to Unconditional Election, and provided the blood of Jesus to provide Limited Atonement for those individuals only.

Irresistible Grace teaches that at some point in an elect person’s life, God will come upon him through the Holy Spirit and provide salvation.

The Westminster Confession of Faith says,

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds, spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone

and giving unto them a heart of flesh... This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man; who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call..." (The Westminster Confession of Faith).

David Steele, the apologist of Calvinism, says in his *Five Points of Calvinism*, pp. 39–40,

The Father ... marked out those who were to be saved [and] the Son came into the world and secured their redemption. But these two great acts—election and redemption—do not complete the work of salvation, because included in God's plan ... is the renewing work by the Holy Spirit by which the benefits of Christ's death are applied to the elect. It is with this phase of salvation that the doctrine of Irresistible Grace is concerned. Simply stated ... the Holy Spirit never fails to bring to salvation those sinners whom He personally calls to Christ. He inevitably applied salvation to every sinner He intends to save, and it is His intention to save all the elect.

But I must protest that against the presumptions and assertions of Calvinism, the Bible declares that grace is not irresistible! Contrary to Calvin's views, the Bible says that the Holy Spirit can be resisted.

In Acts 7:51, Stephen declares to the Jews who had heard him preach and yet who were about to stone him, "you men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did." And in 2 Cor. 6:1–2. Paul urges his audience "not to receive the grace of God in vain." These are just two plain examples among many that show people resisting God's attempts to save them. As Jesus said in Matt. 23:37,

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

But, we should back up anyway. Because the Bible does not teach that God zaps anyone with salvation. It's important not just to refute the Calvinist doctrine of Irresistible Grace, but also to endeavor to understand the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation.

First of all, the Holy Spirit is that part of God responsible for the communication of God's message. This He chose to do by inspiring the minds and pens of certain individuals. Jesus promised the twelve, "the Holy Spirit ... will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:26, *cf.* 15:26–27, 16:13). And Jesus prayed for those who "would believe in Me thorough their word" (John 17:20). Thus, when the apostles wrote of the words and works of Christ, they were guided by the Holy Spirit, so that all generations would have a perfect and inspired record of the life of Jesus. This extends to Paul and the other prophets of God's word. Paul declared that the gospel was "the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16). Paul also talked about how "by revelation there was made known to me the mystery ... and by referring to this, when you read, you can understand" (Eph. 3:1–5). It is "the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (Eph. 1:14).

Faith does not come by private zap from the Holy Spirit. Faith comes by hearing the gospel message communicated in the word of God (Rom. 10:17). John said, "these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30–31). The saving words of the Holy Spirit are provided to us when we read the Bible!

The Holy Spirit convicts our heart the same way, when we read His inspired words. Peter says that we are "born again" through "the living and abiding word of God ... the word which was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:23–25). James invites us to "receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls" (1:21). The word of God is "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword ... able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The Holy Spirit works powerfully to convert mankind through His inspired gospel message! Obviously, this requires the willingness to read and listen to the word of God.

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