

Irresistible Grace

by Ronald Hanks

Ronald Hanks's sermon on Irresistible Grace emphasizes that God's grace in salvation is sovereign and cannot be resisted by the sinner.

Scripture: Psalm 110:3, John 6:44, Acts 16:14, Romans 8:29, Romans 9:16, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 2:13

Topics: "Sovereign Grace", "Salvation Assurance"

Description

Ronald Hanks delves into the theological debate on whether salvation depends on God's grace or the sinner's free will, emphasizing the doctrine of irresistible grace. Irresistible grace asserts that when God determines to save a person, nothing can hinder that salvation, highlighting the sovereignty of God in the process. The sermon explores key Bible passages supporting salvation by grace alone, the denial of free will, and the practical importance of understanding irresistible grace for assurance of salvation and intercessory prayer.

Transcript

Does salvation depend on God's grace or on the sinner's free will? Can God's will to save man be frustrated? Can it happen that although God's grace has begun to work in a man, that grace is able to be resisted and lost? Does God merely try to save men or does He actually save them?

These are vital questions!

The significance of these questions comes into no clearer focus than in a discussion of the truth of irresistible grace.

The doctrine of irresistible grace, or as it is sometimes referred to, efficacious grace, is the fourth of the Five Points of Calvinism. It is represented by the I in the acronym TULIP.

By irresistible grace we mean that God's grace and salvation cannot be effectively resisted. When God determines to save a man, that man is saved. Neither he himself, nor the devil, nor the wicked world are able to prevent his salvation. Nothing can stand in the way of God's purpose. Not only does God will to save him and work to save him, but He actually does save him, "For who hath resisted his will?" (Rom. 9:19).

Irresistible grace is an important issue. Let no church or individual Christian suppose otherwise.

The importance of this issue is not merely that it concerns the question "Can grace be resisted?" but ultimately the question "Can God be resisted?" The grace of salvation is God's grace. Can God, the sovereign God, the God about Whom the Scriptures declare that "He does according to His will in the army of heaven, and none can stay his hand" (Dan. 4:35) be frustrated in His will to save even one sinner? The issue concerns the very Being of God. As concerns the doctrine of irresistible grace, we are faced with the most fundamental question with which a man can be faced: what do you believe about God?

Because the Reformed faith confesses the truth that God is a sovereign God, the Reformed faith also teaches irresistible grace. This, surely, is rigorous logic, as any clear thinking person can see. More importantly, this is the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. The purpose of this chapter will be to demonstrate the validity of this assertion.

A. The Doctrine

1. The saving of the sinner is due to the power of God's grace alone. That sinner has been unconditionally elected to salvation in eternity by God the Father. In time he has been redeemed by the death of Jesus Christ. But this sinner must also be saved, that is, the benefits of Christ's death must be applied to him and he must be made to possess the salvation that God has willed for him. He must be converted in heart and life from a dead, unbelieving, and disobedient sinner to a living, believing, and obedient child of God. The power of God that works this radical change in the sinner is grace.

Salvation is by grace and by grace alone. That in the history of the church has proved to be the pivotal issue: grace alone! Always there have been those who, although they spoke of salvation by grace also attributed salvation, at least to some extent, to the work and ability of man. Yes, salvation is due to the grace of God, they said. But that grace of God cooperates with the work and will of the sinner. Yes, the power of God accomplishes salvation. But the power of God depends on the willingness of the sinner. What this means is that salvation is due to the grace of God and something else rather than to the grace of God alone.

The Scriptures teach clearly that salvation is by grace. In Ephesians 2:8 the apostle Paul teaches, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." In Acts 20:24 the same apostle speaks of the gospel as "the gospel of the grace of God." Concerning himself he says in I Corinthians 15:10, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

That we are saved by grace means that we are not saved by works. Salvation by grace alone means that our works do not at all contribute to our salvation. That grace rules out works as the cause of salvation is plain from the Scriptures. We read in Romans 11:5, 6: "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace." Galatians 2:16 teaches the same truth: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." In Titus 3:5 Paul declares, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

2. This grace of salvation is an irresistible grace. On the surface of it, it is plain that the power of grace must be a great power. Man is the sinner; God must be the Savior. Man is incapable; God must be able. Man is powerless; God must be omnipotent. Man is weak; God must be sovereign.

We are like the man whom Jesus healed at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-9). Just as he was physically impotent so are we spiritually impotent, absolutely unable to walk (spiritually) at all. And our condition is due to our sin, as was the case with the impotent man. "Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (John 5:14).

The saving of the sinner demands great power. The devil must be defeated; a rebel must be subdued; a heart of stone must be made a heart of flesh; a new creature must be brought forth; the dead must be raised. This work calls for great power, power that is beyond the power of a mere mortal: miraculous power, supernatural power.

On the part of God, great power is required. Mere begging, pleading, or coaxing will not do. But there must be the exercise of almighty power, such power as was exhibited in the creation of the world. Really every child of God is living evidence of the almighty power of God. On the part of anyone who has been the object of the saving grace of God, there can be no question of the sovereignty of God in salvation. Anyone who knows himself knows the sovereignty of God.

Granted that the power of irresistible grace is a great power, the question remains whether or not it is irresistible power. Granted that the sinner is dead, granted that God must work in salvation, granted that His work is powerful; could it not yet be that this work is not so powerful as to be resisted and frustrated by the sinner? Could it not be that God works to give all men the ability to come to Christ, if they chose to do so? Might not grace only enable men to come to Christ, always conditioned on their free will, so that man could very well choose not to come to Christ, refuse to come to Christ, and resist grace? So the crucial question is this: is the grace of God irresistible?

The answer of the Scriptures and the Reformed faith is: yes! Grace, if it is grace, must be irresistible grace. Because God is an irresistible, sovereign God, His grace is an irresistible and sovereign grace. God and God's grace cannot effectively and ultimately be resisted by the most obstinate of sinners. When God's grace operates to save the sinner, that grace shall triumph in the salvation of that sinner. He will be saved. God will have the victory. Not the power of the devil, not the power of the wicked world, not the power of the sinner himself, shall be able to prevent, overthrow, or frustrate the work of God's grace. The God of the Scriptures is the God Whom Isaiah says in Isaiah 46:10 "... declares the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." He is the God before Whom Daniel says in Daniel 4:35, "... all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

The god of resistible grace is not the God of the Scriptures. He is a weak god, an ineffective god, a powerless god. In reality, he is no god at all, but an idol god. So serious is the denial of irresistible grace!

B. Scripture Passages

But what Scripture passages prove this teaching of irresistible grace? Do the Scriptures support this teaching? Without doubt, they do.

1. Salvation by grace alone.

a. Romans 3:24. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

b. Romans 4:16. Therefore it (salvation) is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed.

c. Romans 9:16. So then it (salvation) is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

d. 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 labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

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

2. Salvation not by man's works.

a. Romans 3:28. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the works of the law.

b. 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 grace: otherwise work is no more work.

c. Galatians 5:4. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

d. Ephesians 2:8, 9. For 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.

e. II Timothy 1:9. 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.

f. Titus 3:5. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

3. Repenting and believing by the grace of God.

a. John 3:27. John (the Baptist) answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

b. John 6:65. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given him of my Father.

c. Acts 5:31. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

d. Acts 11:18. When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

e. Acts 16:14. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

f. Acts 18:27. And when he (Apollos) was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace.

g. I Corinthians 4:7. For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

h. Philippians 1:29. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.

i. Philippians 2:13. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

j. II Timothy 2:25. In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.

4. Grace is irresistible.

That the grace of salvation is irresistible is the clear teaching of the multitude of Scripture passages that speak of God efficaciously saving sinners. God does not try to save sinners, depending on their cooperation. He does not attempt to save sinners but stands helplessly by unless they at least exercise their free will. He does not do His best to save sinners, always facing the real possibility that His best is not good enough and that the sinner may effectively resist His efforts to save him. No, God saves sinners, sovereignly, efficaciously, irresistibly. This is the language of the Scriptures from beginning to end.

a. Deuteronomy 30:6. And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

b. Isaiah 55:11. So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it.

c. Ezekiel 36:26, 27. And 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 an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

d. John 6:37. All that the Father giveth me (Christ) shall come to me: and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

e. John 6:39. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

f. John 6:44, 45. No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man

therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.

g. Romans 8:29, 30. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 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.

All who are predestinated and called by God are infallibly brought to salvation. The result of their being predestinated and called is that they are justified and glorified. Nothing can prevent the final glorification of any who are predestinated and called.

5. Salvation as rebirth, re-creation, resurrection.

The Scriptures' description of salvation as rebirth, re-creation, and resurrection from the dead leaves beyond question the truth of irresistible grace.

a. Rebirth.

Over and over again the Bible speaks of salvation as a rebirth. This is Jesus' description of salvation in His well-known discourse with Nicodemus in John 3. In John 3:3 Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Other Scriptures that refer to salvation as a rebirth include John 1:13; 5:21, 24; Ephesians 1:19, 20; 2:1, 5; Colossians 2:13; Titus 3:5; I Peter 1:3; I John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18.

That salvation is a rebirth implies that the grace of salvation is irresistible. As far as physical birth is concerned, the child who is born has no say in the matter of whether or not he will be born. He does not cooperate in being born, not even will to be conceived and brought forth. Neither is he able effectively to resist conception and birth. What is true of physical birth is also true of spiritual rebirth. It is not due to us; we do not cooperate in it; nor are we able effectively to resist it.

b Re-creation.

Often the Scriptures describe our salvation in terms of re-creation. Paul writes, for example, in II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Other places in the Scriptures where this figure is employed include Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 2:10; 4:24; Colossians 3:10.

That salvation is a re-creation also implies that the grace of salvation is irresistible. Just ask yourself: "When God created all things in the beginning, how did He create them? Did He create them in such a way that when He spoke the creative word calling each creature into being, it still remained a question whether or not that creature would actually come into being? Did the creature cooperate with God in its creation? Was there a single creature able to resist God's creative word? To ask these questions is to answer them. What was true of God's original creation of all things in the beginning is also true of His still greater work of re-creation.

c. Resurrection.

Still another common figure in the Scriptures to describe God's work of saving lost sinners is resurrection from the dead. Recall the well-known prophecy of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37. In Ephesians 2:1 Paul

writes, "And you hath he quickened (made alive again), who were dead in trespasses and sins." Other Scripture passages where this same figure occurs include John 5:28, 29; Romans 6:13; 8:10; 11:15; Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13; 3:1.

The saving of the sinner is a resurrection of the sinner, a resurrecting of him from spiritual death, a raising of him from his being dead in trespasses and sins. By describing salvation as a resurrection from death, the Bible emphasizes that the power that saves the sinner is an irresistible power. It is folly to teach that the work of salvation is due to the cooperation of the sinner. It is folly to teach that in the work of salvation the sinner is able to frustrate and resist God's intentions of saving him. Can a dead man cooperate in his being made alive? Could Lazarus have frustrated Christ's intentions of raising him from the dead? In the last day, when Christ comes again and raises the dead, will those dead bodies be in a position to cooperate in being raised or to refuse to be raised, resisting the power of the resurrection and preventing the will of the exalted Christ that they be raised? Of course not. Neither is the sinner able to cooperate in or resist God's salvation of him.

6. The sovereignty of God's will.

Those texts of the Scriptures which teach the sovereignty of God's will also clearly imply the truth of irresistible grace. If that which God wills always comes to pass, God's purpose to save a sinner is a purpose that must be realized.

a. Psalm 115:3. But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.

b. Isaiah 46:9, 10. Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.

c. Daniel 4:35. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

C. Difficult Passages

Against the doctrine of irresistible grace, appeal is often made to certain passages of Scripture which seem to teach that it is indeed possible for the sinner to resist and thus frustrate the grace of God.

Two passages may be cited as representative. In Matthew 23:37 Jesus laments, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not!" Acts 7:51 records Stephen's accusation against the unbelieving Jews, "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."

In explanation of these passages let it be understood that the doctrine of irresistible grace does not mean that the natural man does not stand opposed to God, God's Christ, God's Spirit, and God's Word. He certainly does. He is a rebel against God and a hater of God. There is no love of God in him nor desire to

please God. This is simply what it means that the sinner is totally depraved. In this sense it certainly is true that the sinner resists God and salvation.

But the question is: can the sinner effectively resist God's grace? Can he maintain his resistance against God even when God has determined to save and has begun to save him? Can he frustrate the Holy Spirit when once the Spirit has begun to work in his heart and life? The answer to all these questions is: no! In this sense, God cannot be resisted. His grace is an irresistible grace.

1. Matthew 23:37.

As far as Matthew 23:37 is concerned, yes, the wicked leaders of the Jews did everything they could to prevent Jesus' gathering of Jerusalem's children. They stoned the prophets and opposed Jesus' preaching and teaching. They discredited Jesus before the people and threatened reprisal against any who openly confessed Him. In no way does this imply, however, that these wicked leaders succeeded in preventing Jesus from gathering Jerusalem's children. They were gathered and saved, that is, the elect among them, notwithstanding the resistance of the wicked rulers.

2. Acts 7:51.

Stephen's accusation against the unbelieving Jews in Acts 7:51, that as their fathers had always resisted the Holy Ghost, so did they, does not either imply that grace is resistible. Stephen is not talking about these wicked Jews effectively resisting the grace of the Holy Spirit working within them to save them. Not at all! He is rather talking about their opposition to the Holy Spirit in the sense that they constantly opposed the word of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures and the prophets who were the instruments of the Holy Spirit to bring that word. As their fathers resisted Moses and Aaron, so did the Jews of Stephen's day resist Jesus and His apostles. They did not resist the Holy Spirit within them, for they were devoid of the Holy Spirit. The proof is their rejection and stoning of Stephen. But their resistance was to the external call, commands, reproofs, and teaching of the servants of God sent by the Spirit.

D. Objections

1. Man is saved against his will.

Against Calvinism's teaching of irresistible grace the enemies of this truth raise several objections. One of their objections is that if God's grace is irresistible, then man is actually saved contrary to his will. The caricature of Calvinism is that it teaches that Christ draws sinners kicking and screaming into heaven; that God forces men against their wills to be saved. Those who hold to irresistible grace are charged with teaching that God deals with men as senseless stocks and blocks.

We reject this charge! This is not the teaching of Calvinism, but a gross misrepresentation.

Neither is it the case that one defends the truth of sovereign grace by denying, or downplaying, the activity of faith. One does not show himself to be a staunch advocate of irresistible grace by getting nervous whenever someone speaks of our repenting, our believing, or our coming to Christ, as if this puts the

emphasis on man, man's work, and man's ability, and jeopardizes the truth of sovereign grace.

The reality is that the fruit, the infallible effect of God's grace in the sinner is that although before he did not believe in Jesus Christ, now he believes in Jesus Christ. Although before he did not repent of his sins, now he repents of his sins. Although before he would not come to Christ, now he wills and actually does come to Christ. Irresistible grace does not rule out repentance and faith but rather guarantees that the sinner will repent and will believe in Jesus Christ.

An illustration of this truth we have in Jesus' miraculous healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda in John 5. That impotent man had absolutely no ability in himself to walk, nor was he in any position to cooperate with Jesus in the miracle of his healing. But when Jesus spoke the word that healed him, that impotent man was healed and the effect of his being healed was that he did what he could not do before - he took up his bed and walked.

That our willing and doing are the effect of God's grace at work in our lives is plainly taught in the Holy Scriptures. In Psalm 110:3 David declares, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." In Philippians 2:13 Paul writes, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

2. Preaching and the other means of grace are unnecessary.

Another objection against the truth of irresistible grace is that it effectively rules out the use of means, particularly the means of the preaching of the gospel. If man does not have the ability in himself to believe, to accept Jesus Christ and salvation, why call men to faith in Jesus Christ? If it does not lie in the ability of every man to cooperate in salvation, why preach the gospel to all men? If God's grace is irresistible and if the will of God to save certain men will certainly come to pass, why should the church be concerned to preach the gospel at home or on the mission field? Will not God save his people regardless?

This objection does violence to the truth that although God's grace is irresistible, that irresistible grace of God is worked in men through definite means, chief of which is the preaching of the gospel. The divine rule in this matter is that God works and God maintains His grace in the hearts of His elect people by means of the preaching of the gospel.

The warning of the Canons of Dordt, III, IV, 19 is in order here.

As the almighty operation of God, whereby He supports this our natural life, does not exclude, but requires the use of means, by which God of His infinite mercy and goodness hath chosen to exert His influence, so also the before-mentioned supernatural operation of God, by which we are regenerated, in no wise excludes, or subverts the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the food of the soul. Wherefore, as the apostles, and teachers who succeeded them, piously instructed the people concerning this grace of God, to His glory, and the abasement of all pride, and in the meantime, however, neglected not to keep them in the exercise of the Word, sacraments and discipline; so even to this day, be it far from either instructors or instructed to presume to tempt God in the church by separating what He of His good pleasure hath most intimately joined together.

E. Denials

1. Free will.

The outstanding denial of irresistible grace is the popular teaching concerning the free will of the sinner. Those who hold to free will not only teach that man has the ability within himself to accept Jesus Christ but also teach that it is in the power of every man also to reject Jesus Christ, to resist and frustrate the operations of God's grace, and to prevent Christ's efforts to save him.

This was the teaching concerning the power of free will by Erasmus at the time of the Reformation. In his book *On the Freedom of the Will*, Erasmus states: "I conceive of free-will ... as a power of the human will by which a man may apply himself to those things that lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from the same."

The Arminians at the Synod of Dordt ascribed the same power to free will. To the Synod they stated their position as follows:

That this grace of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of all good, even to this extent, that the regenerate man himself, without prevenient or assisting, awakening, following, and cooperative 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 operation of this grace, it is not irresistible.

Although the statements of Erasmus and of the Arminians at the time of the Synod of Dordt are somewhat guarded, the greatest claims for free will are made today. Almost unlimited power is ascribed to the will of the sinner. Free will is able to accept Jesus Christ offered in the gospel, mighty to open up the heart to a pleading Savior, capable of making a decision for God. Indeed, free will is more powerful than God Himself, for it can resist God and prevent the operations of God's saving grace.

It ought to be clear that to teach free will is to deny irresistible grace. If the power of free will is not only that it can accept Jesus Christ and salvation but also reject the same, man is able effectively to resist God's grace. If God desires the salvation of all men, but salvation depends on the exercise of his free will, it is necessarily implied that although God desires the salvation of a certain man, that man may be able to frustrate God's desire to save him.

In fact, not only is the teaching of free will a denial of the irresistible character of God's grace, it is really a denial of grace altogether. If salvation depends on a power in man, a power that is able either to accept or to reject salvation, salvation becomes a work of man. And if salvation is due to a work of man, however small that work may be, it is not any longer due to the grace of God.

2. Common grace.

The teaching of common grace leads to a denial of irresistible grace. That is not hard to demonstrate. Common grace is a grace of God that is shown to all men but a grace of God that, although it is shown to all men, does not save them. To teach a non-saving grace of God, to teach a grace of God of which all men are the objects, is the first step towards denying irresistible grace. In fact, in those churches in which common grace has become accepted dogma, there has been a weakening and even on occasion open

renunciation of the doctrine of irresistible grace.

3. The free offer of the gospel.

The teaching of the free offer of the gospel, inasmuch as it presupposes the free will of the sinner, is also an implicit denial of the irresistibility of grace. If the gospel is not any longer the power of God unto salvation, as Paul says that it is in Romans 1:16, not the means by which God works grace in the hearts of the elect, but only an offer of salvation, dependent on the sinner's acceptance of that offer; then it is clearly implied that the sinner may very well choose to reject the gospel and the offer of grace and salvation in the gospel. Then, although God wants to save him, although God expresses His love for him in the gospel, the sinner is able to frustrate that desire and love of God. The doctrine of irresistible grace is effectively thrown out the window.

F. Practical Importance

The importance of this doctrine is great. It belongs to the message of the gospel. That makes it an important doctrine. From various points of view it is important for the church and for every Christian personally to hold to the truth of irresistible grace.

1. Salvation by grace.

The maintaining of irresistible grace is important for our confession of the truth that salvation is of grace. To deny irresistible grace, to teach free will, is to teach that salvation depends upon the will and work of man. It is to teach grace plus works rather than grace alone. That is not the gospel, but another gospel, a false gospel, a gospel that is no gospel at all.

2. Assurance of salvation.

The believer's assurance depends on the truth of irresistible grace. If it is possible that God's grace can be resisted, that after God has begun his saving work in me, it is still possible that I can resist it and lose it, how can I ever be sure of my salvation? I cannot be. The doctrine of free will and the teaching of resistible grace are cruel doctrines. They strip the child of God of the assurance of salvation. Then he must live in constant doubt and fear whether he will ever be saved. That is frightening! That is paralyzing! That is depressing!

3. Intercessory prayer.

If God's grace were not irresistible, it would be foolish to pray for the conversion or repentance of anyone. If God stands by powerlessly before the dread majesty of man's free will, what sense would there be to pray for Him to convert anyone. What despair for the Christian married to an unbelieving mate! What despair for those believing parents who have a wayward child! What despair for that church that has straying members! On the other hand, what hope we may have when we understand, as each of us knows

by our own experience, that the grace of God is a sovereign and an irresistible grace.

G. Relation to the Other Points

Certainly the truth of irresistible grace establishes the truth of the sovereignty of God. If God is sovereign, and He is, the grace of God must be an irresistible grace. To deny irresistible grace is to deny really the sovereignty of God. Then God and God's will are dependent on man and man's will. Then Christ is reduced to a beggar. And the Holy Spirit is a weakling. God is put in the position of Darius who earnestly desired to save Daniel from the lion's den, but could not (Dan. 6). Because God is God, the almighty God, His grace is irresistible grace.

Irresistible grace is necessitated by man's total depravity. Exactly because man is the sinner, unworthy of salvation, his salvation must be by grace. And since man is such a sinner that there is no good in him, no ability for good, no desire even for the good, that grace of salvation must be an irresistible grace.

Unconditional election establishes the basis for irresistible grace. As God's salvation of men eternally did not rest on any worth or works in those men, was completely unconditional, so His salvation of them in time does not rest on any of their worth or works. And that is exactly the teaching of irresistible grace.

The teaching of irresistible grace preserves the truth of limited atonement. For if free will and resistible grace are true, then it were very well possible that Christ would have died in vain. Then, although Christ died for a man and wants to save that man, Christ is frustrated because of the unwillingness of the sinner to be saved.

Irresistible grace also guarantees the preservation of the saints. Since God's grace that brings salvation to a man is a sovereign, almighty grace, the grace of God that continues to abide in a man is a sovereign, almighty grace. Just as it cannot be frustrated in its initial operations, neither can it be frustrated ultimately. Those who are brought to salvation by the irresistible grace of God are by the power of that same grace preserved in salvation.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ronald-hanko/irresistible-grace/>

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