



## **Reformed Theology**

### **Irresistible Grace**

This is sometimes call Effectual Grace.

By nature, all sinners resist God's grace, but God overcomes the resistance of his elect – and so we call it irresistible grace. God's call always produces the desired effect in the sinner, and so we say it is an effectual call. (Orrick)

Calvinism – The new birth (grace) is God's work of renewal in our hearts which necessarily brings about the act of saving faith. (Piper)

Arminianism – The new birth is God's work of renewal in our hearts in response to our act of saving faith. (Piper)

The doctrine of irresistible grace means that God is sovereign and can conquer all resistance when he wills. (Piper)

Reformed Theology → regeneration precedes faith  
(before a person can exercise faith, something must take place by the power of God in them)

## Nine Points

1. Our depravity is so severe that we need this.

John 3:3–8 [3] Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” [4] Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” [5] Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. [6] That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [7] Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ [8] The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Ephesians 2:1–8 [1] And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—[3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. [4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—[6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

2. Faith and repentance are a gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8-9 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Romans 12:3 3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

3. We cannot come to Christ unless God draws us.

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

4. God's effectual calling overcomes resistance to the Gospel.

I Corinthians 1:22-24 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

This is grace that brings about what God wants it to bring about. (Sproul)

5. The new birth enables us to receive Christ.

I John 5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

6. The new covenant promises grace that will triumph over our resistance.

Deuteronomy 29:2-4 2 And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: “You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, 3 the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. 4 But to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.

Deuteronomy 30:6 And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Jeremiah 32:40 I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

Ezekiel 11:19-20 19 And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

## 7. Who then can resist His will?

Monergistic regeneration is exclusively a divine act. Man does not have the creative power God has. To quicken a person who is spiritually dead is something only God can do. A corpse cannot revive itself. It cannot even assist in the effort. It can only respond after receiving new life. Not only *can* it respond then, it most certainly *will* respond. In regeneration the soul of man is utterly passive until it has been made alive. It offers no help in reviving itself, though once revived it is empowered to act and respond. (Sproul)

To be sure, Lazarus acted. He responded. He came forth from the tomb. But the crucial point is that he did none of these things while he was still dead. He did not respond to the call of Christ until after he had been made alive. His resurrection preceded his coming forth from the tomb. His restoration to life preceded his response. (Sproul)

Effectual calling is effectual because in it and by it God effects exactly what he intends in the operation: the quickening of spiritually dead souls to spiritual life. (Sproul)

Reformed theology does not teach that God brings the elect “kicking and screaming, against their wills,” into his kingdom. It teaches that God so works in the hearts of the elect as to make them willing and pleased to come to Christ. They come to Christ because they want to. They want to because God has created in their hearts a desire for Christ. Likewise the reprobate do not want to embrace Christ earnestly. They have no desire for Christ whatever and are fleeing from him. (Sproul)

Romans 9:14-24 14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. 19 You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? 22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— 24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

8. Regeneration changes the disposition of the heart.

God, by His grace changes my heart, so that I desire to come to Christ.

9. Regeneration is the work of the Spirit and the Word.

Romans 10:14–15 [14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

God’s call is made effectual by the Word and the Spirit. It is important to see that Word and Spirit are here conjoined as two vital factors in regeneration. The Holy Spirit is not working apart from the Word or against the Word, but with the Word. Nor is the Word working alone without the presence and power of the Spirit. (Sproul)

## Three Quotes from John Piper

The doctrine of irresistible grace does not mean that every influence of the Holy Spirit cannot be resisted. It means that the Holy Spirit, whenever he chooses, can overcome all resistance and make his influence irresistible.

More specifically, irresistible grace refers to the sovereign work of God to overcome the rebellion of our heart and bring us to faith in Christ so that we can be saved. If the doctrine of total depravity, as we have unfolded it in the previous section, is true, there can be no salvation without the reality of irresistible grace. If we are dead in our sins, and unable to submit to God because of our rebellious nature, then we will never believe in Christ unless God overcomes our rebellion.

In other words, running straight through the Gospel of John is the truth that God the Father and God the Son decisively draw people out of darkness into light. And Christ died for this. He was lifted up for this – that all of them might be drawn to him – all the children, all the sheep, all who are of the truth, all those whom the Father gives to the Son. What John 12:32 adds is that this happens today in history by pointing the whole world to the crucified Christ and preaching the good news that whoever believes on him will be saved. In the preaching of the lifted up Christ, God opens the ears of the deaf. The sheep hear his voice and follow Jesus (John 10:16, 27).

## Summary Statements

Again we are forced back to the question of the extent of original sin. If original sin involves moral inability, as Augustine and the magisterial Reformers insisted, then faith can occur only as the result of regeneration, and regeneration can occur only as a result of effectual or irresistible grace.

To say that the grace of regeneration is irresistible is simply to say that this grace, which is so vital to our salvation, is sovereign. This grace is dispensed sovereignly and freely by God. It is truly grace, with no mixture of human merit of any kind. By this grace the captives are set free and the dead in sin are raised to a new life. This is the manifest work of the tender mercy of God, who stoops to rescue his children from sin and death and who, as he did in the initial work of creation, takes pieces of clay that are spiritually lifeless and breathes into them the breath that quickens them. (Sproul)

This means that the resistance that all human beings exert against God every day (Romans 3:10-12 Acts 7:51) is wonderfully overcome at the proper time by God's saving grace for undeserving rebels whom he chooses freely to save. (John Piper)

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