

THE FALSE DOCTRINE OF IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

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BACKGROUND

John Calvin was a French theologian who moved to Geneva, Switzerland in 1536, where he published his "Institutes of Christian Religion."

Calvin's belief system reflected earlier teachings by Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), and later became known as Calvinism. Calvin's theology states that due to man's inherited sinful nature, he cannot come to God; rather, God must come to him. God has already determined (predestined) who He will save and who He will condemn, and therefore, His Son only died for the saved, otherwise known as the "elect." The members of the "elect" cannot resist being saved, and having been chosen by God, they cannot fall away.

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Calvin's concept of predestination and election is summarized in the acrostic **TULIP**:

Total Depravity
Unconditional Election
Limited Atonement
Irresistible Grace
Perseverance of the Saints

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Our focus in this study is on the doctrine of Irresistible Grace (the **I** in the **TULIP** acrostic). This is the belief that God sends the Holy Spirit only to the "elect," or those on the "saved" list, removing their depraved nature inherited from Adam, thus enabling them to answer the call of God by the Word, and altering their will to be drawn to Christ.

The Holy Spirit thereafter guides them directly to understand and correctly interpret the Bible. Man's role in obtaining salvation is completely passive. The "elect" who are called cannot resist the Holy Spirit so as to be lost; those "elect" who are never called will still be saved. Those who are "not elected" may still be called, but can never truly come to Christ and therefore cannot be saved.

This doctrine is NOT found in the Bible.

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Let us examine some Bible verses commonly used by Calvinists to justify this belief.

Supposed proof texts:

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."
 (John 6:37)

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."
 (John 6:44)

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We find in John 6:26-49 a discussion between Jesus and the Jews concerning spiritual matters. He declares that the Father has drawn men, which He has, and that those will come to Him. The question is, "How are men drawn?"

God draws men to Him through the preaching of the Gospel.

"It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." (2 Thessalonians 2:14-15)

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Jesus is not saying that the elect will be forced to come to Him because of the Father's will, but that those who choose to heed the call of the Father will come. The call of God is the gospel.

"... for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?"

(Romans 10:13-14)

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Supposed proof text:

"For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (Romans 8:14)

This verse is not making a declaration concerning HOW men are called; it is a simple statement of fact: if you are led by the Spirit, you are a son of God. We are commanded to walk by the Spirit. We choose to obey or to disobey that command.

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please."
(Galatians 5:16-17)

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The multiple conversions in the book of Acts point clearly to the decision of men and women to obey the Gospel:

- The day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47)
- Those who believed the message after the lame man was healed (Acts 3:1-4:22)
- The Samaritans (Acts 8:4-25)
- The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40)
- Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:34-46; 11:14)
- Lydia and her household (Acts 16:14-15)
- The Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-33)
- The Corinthians (Acts 18:8)

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God certainly calls, but as Paul explains, man may choose not to answer the call. The one who chooses to answer has an obedient faith in Him.

"How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!' However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." (Romans 10:15-17)

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"Irresistible Grace" contradicts the Bible because it denies man's free will, therefore his actions could not be a result of his personal choices.

"Irresistible Grace" blames God for sin ("God made me this way"), or credits God for salvation in spite of sin ("God forced me into becoming a Christian although I was having fun as a sinner").

"Irresistible Grace" accuses God of showing partiality and practicing unrighteous judgment (see Romans 2:11; Acts 10:34).

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Man DOES have free will!

"See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it ..."

... I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants ..."
(Deuteronomy 30:15-16, 19)

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Man DOES have free will!

"Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

(Joshua 24:14-15)

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.'"

(Matthew 16:24)

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Man DOES have free will!

"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (John 15:6-7)

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

(John 3:16)

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Man CAN resist the Holy Spirit!

"But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking." (Acts 6:9-10)

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Man CAN resist the Holy Spirit!

*"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. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."*

(Acts 7:51-53)

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Question for the Calvinist:

If God calls "irresistibly by grace," why is it that Christians are expected to go out and preach the Gospel?

"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"

(Matthew 28:18-20)

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Question for the Calvinist:

What need is there for the "preacher" of Romans 10:13-14 if God will call the elect with or without a preacher? Yet even those who hear the gospel often reject it.

"However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

(Romans 10:16-17)

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Question for the Calvinist:

If God's call is irresistible, why is the word of God full of appeals to respond?

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46)

"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come' and let the one who hears say, 'Come' and let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost." (Revelation 22:17)

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The Bible teaches that God has offered the hope of eternal salvation to all mankind, to everyone who will believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and who will obey His word. God has afforded each soul the ability to either accept or reject the truth of God of his own free will.

*"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, **BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.**"* (Romans 1:16-17)

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All are called by the gospel, revealed once for all time by the Holy Spirit through His apostles and prophets. Some choose to reject God's plan of salvation, resisting the Holy Spirit-inspired word of God.

"Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." (Jude 3)

"... that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles." (2 Peter 3:2)

"But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (2 Peter 1:20-21)

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Some choose to accept and believe the gospel, freely submitting their will to His will by an obedient faith. Those who have believed and obeyed will be saved. Those who reject the gospel through disbelief will be lost.

"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned'." (Mark 16:15-16)

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On Judgment Day, all will be judged according to their deeds.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:10)

"But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation." (Romans 2:5-8)

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The grace of God brings salvation to all men, conditional on how we choose to live; whether we follow His instructions to deny worldliness and to practice godliness.

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." (Titus 2:11-14)

HOW TO OBEY THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

Hear the word (2 Thessalonians 2:14-15; James 1:21)

Believe the gospel (Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24)

Repent of sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30-31)

Confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:10; Matthew 10:32-33)

Be Baptized (Galatians 3:26-27; Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38)

Remain Obedient (Matthew 7:21; Revelation 2:10; Hebrews 3:12)