Irresistible Grace / Efficacious Call of the Spirit

Irresistible grace, also known as the efficacious call of the Spirit, is the fourth of the five points of Calvinism. The five points are described using the acrostic TULIP: T- Total inability/ depravity; U- Unconditional election; L- Limited atonement/particular redemption; I- Irresistible grace/efficacious call of the Spirit; and P- Perseverance of the saints. Below is a definition of irresistible grace and, beside it, a description of the Arminian counterpoint we will call resistible grace:*

Calvinism

Irresistible Grace / Efficacious Call of the Spirit

In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion. By means of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ. He is not limited in His work of applying salvation by man's will, nor is He dependent upon man's cooperation for success. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. God's grace, therefore, is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended.

Arminianism

Resistible Grace

The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation; He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) proceeds and makes possible the new birth. Thus, man's free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work. The Holy Spirit can only draw to Christ those who allow Him to have His way with them. Until the sinner responds, the Spirit cannot give life. God's grace, therefore, is not invincible; it can be, and often is, resisted and thwarted by man.

Key similarities:

- There is a general call to salvation to all who hear the gospel (Acts 17:30).
- All unbelievers can resist the Holy Spirit; the non-elect successfully resist Him their entire lives (Acts 7:51).
- The elect freely and willingly receive Christ as Savior, while the non-elect freely and willingly die in their sins (John 1:12, 3:16, 8:24; Rom. 10:13).

* From *The Five Points of CALVINISM - Defined, Defended, Documented* by David N. Steele and Curtis Thomas.

Key differences:

- Calvinism teaches that the Holy Spirit extends a special inward call to the elect that inevitably brings them to salvation. Arminianism counters that the Spirit's call to the elect is no different than His call to the non-elect and may be resisted by both.
- Calvinism says God is not dependent upon sinners' cooperation for salvation. Arminianism says God cannot save sinners without their cooperation through belief and repentance.
- Calvinism teaches that the Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to freely and willingly believe, repent, and receive Christ. Arminianism teaches that the Holy Spirit can only "effectually" draw to Christ those who allow Him to do so.

What is grace?

In the New Testament, the word "grace" is the translation of the Greek *charis* and appears about 170 times. While grace is used in several ways – for example, to denote gracefulness or loveliness (Luke 4:22), or a generous gift (2 Cor. 8:19, 9:8) – its primary meaning for our purposes is unmerited favor, a good deed done for someone with no thought of personal gain. It especially describes the attitude of God in providing salvation for sinners. In classic Greek, grace was something one bestowed only on a friend. But the New Testament use of grace turns the entire concept on its head. God loved us and sent His Son to pay our sin debt while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8), enemies of God (Rom. 5:10), and excluded from the life of God (Eph. 4:18; Col. 1:21).

The New Testament clearly teaches that we are saved by God's grace, apart from any human merit or effort (Acts 15:11; Rom. 3:24, 11:6, Eph. 2:5, 8; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:7). But does God apply saving grace irresistibly to the elect, changing their minds and making them spiritually alive so they freely and willingly believe and repent? Or is His grace applied equally to all people so that those who are willing are drawn to Him and those who are not may successfully resist Him? And if the non-elect are incapable of responding to the gospel message (total inability/depravity), is God just in sending them to hell? These are questions we will explore in future lessons.

Next Week: T-U-L-I-P – Perseverance of the Saints

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