

## Newsletter August 2014

In this newsletter we shall complete our study of soteriology (the study of salvation as an effect of divine agency), comparing the doctrines of Arminianism with that of biblical reformed Calvinism, by completing the chart that was first introduced in our June 2014 newsletter. In the June newsletter, we began by discussing man's state of total depravity, which prevents him from coming to God of his own volition, and the fact that God's election of the saved is not in any way conditioned upon any innate goodness or special attribute that is to be found within individual men or women that are chosen. In the next newsletter of July 2014, we discussed the extent of God's saving grace through an absolute atonement that is specifically and unconditionally applied only to those whom God has chosen to receive it (i.e. limited atonement) as opposed to the Arminian view of a potentially universal atonement, which only becomes effective through man's supposed free-will acceptance of it. In this newsletter we shall conclude the comparison of Arminianism with biblical reformed Calvinism by discussing two final points, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints. Again, we shall utilize excerpts taken from *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity*, Book I, Chapter 3.5. In this final study, we shall discover the astounding power of God's grace to reach hopelessly lost sinners and to tenaciously hold on to them in a state of righteousness regardless of all satanic or earthly powers that may seek to prevail against them. The completed chart below corrects the order of points 3 and 4 which were erroneously reversed in Book I, page 188 (as was previously noted in last month's Newsletter).

ARMINIANISM	CALVINISM
1. <b>Mans depravity is not total</b> — man has free will — there is some good in man which he can exercise to turn to God and accept Christ	1. <b>Total depravity</b> — man is morally powerless to make any effort to save himself and does not even have the desire to seek God
2. <b>Election conditional upon faith</b> — faith as an effort of man comes before election	2. <b>Unconditional election</b> — God supplies the faith to believe to whomever He will
3. <b>Universal atonement</b> — salvation is intended for all persons	3. <b>Limited Atonement</b> — salvation is limited to the elect of God — those whom God has chosen
4. <b>Grace can be rejected</b> — God's efforts to save can be thwarted by man's will	4. <b>Irresistible Grace</b> — God's efforts on man's behalf cannot be thwarted by man
5. <b>Believer can fall from grace</b> — it is possible to lose ones salvation.	5. <b>Perseverance of the Saints</b> — the Holy Spirit seals the believer to eternal salvation

Irresistible Grace, as it is stated in point 4, merely means that when God chooses to save a person, He will absolutely accomplish the task. It is as simple and yet as profound as that; since God is omnipotent, nothing can withstand his sovereign will in any activity He chooses to undertake. We have already discovered in this three-month study that God's working does not depend in any way upon the efforts of man or of some inborn or latent value that men have residing in them. All of the effort in the actual act of redemption comes from God's side of the transaction. As Paul said of the Philippians, "being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Ph.1:6). Paul anchored his confidence in God's continuous working within them, not upon their outward works for God. The good deeds of the Philippians were but an evident outpouring of God's grace working within and through them (cf. Ep.2:10). God saves men by means of divine grace alone, which constitutes the bestowing of his unmerited and undeserved favor on those who by nature reject Him. Therefore, God's grace must be invincible in the act of salvation. If that were not so, the elect while yet in their lost state would reject the gift because they, being but natural men before the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, are just as blind and corrupt as are the reprobate (those whom God has abandoned as unredeemable through sovereign choice).

In saying that God's grace is irresistible, we do not mean to imply that a depraved man or woman will not attempt to fight against the initial efforts of the Holy Spirit to reach them. Even the Apostle Paul "kicked against the pricks [goads]" for a time (cf. Ac.9:5; 26:14). That is, he reacted against the working of the Holy Spirit within him as, in his mistaken zeal for God, he continued to persecute Christians and reject Christ. As we

have seen, it is totally against man's depraved nature to give up on his own works and accept the fact that he is a hopeless sinner desperately in need of God's redeeming grace only made available in the atonement of Christ. Paul's zeal for works and his opposition to free grace had turned him into a mad man as he went about persecuting God's people while in his state of rejection. Nevertheless, as one of God's chosen vessels he was not allowed to fight against God's grace indefinitely (cf. Ac.9:1-6). Although the elect of God may seek to run from God's imploring offer of grace, ignore it, or even curse it at the outset, the Holy Spirit has turned on a bright light within his soul that cannot be long ignored. The dawning of Truth as the Holy Spirit convicts him of his sins and then makes the atonement of Christ real and available to him is eventually more than any man can resist. Therefore, although a man may make every effort to reject the Truth, God's grace must win out over his stubborn and corrupted will because of the bright hope of unconditional redemption it offers.

The Arminian and various others who oppose the doctrine of Irresistible Grace often portray sinners being dragged off in opposition to their "free will" to receive a salvation they fully reject. To them, this would seem to be a violation of the free will of a man or woman to choose his or her own destiny. They apparently think that God should expectantly wait until the sinner comes to Him seeking salvation. This will never happen due to man's inherent depravity as we have previously shown in our June 2014 Newsletter. There seems a way of life that is right to the fallen nature of man, but that way ultimately ends only in eternal death such that any so-called "self-rights" of destiny are self-destructive (cf. Pr.14:12). We may as well argue that a man that is insanely bent on committing suicide by jumping over a cliff should not be restrained from doing so, but allowed to make his leap to death – saying that it would be unfair of us to stop him inasmuch as that would obviously violate the exercise of his free will. Nevertheless, once this man's sanity is fully restored, he will quite joyfully turn away from the precipice of death and embrace life. When God restrains us from continuing on to the eternal abyss, and leads us away from the path of sin thus restoring our spiritual sanity, we inevitably respond to that act of redemption with great joy. Furthermore, what needs to be understood about God's redemptive action is that He does not force anyone to accept Christ as his savior but only places the light of Truth within the darkness of his soul such that his spirit becomes alive and awakens his soul to the Truth. Once Truth is clearly seen and fully acknowledged in his mind, the lost sinner will quite eagerly respond positively to that Truth and thirstily come to Christ to drink of the great salvation that has been so graciously offered him.

Rather than question the fact that God's grace is irresistible, as some foolishly do, we as Christians should not only embrace this wondrous truth but praise God that it is so! We would not ever have come to Christ if that were not true. We would still be spiritually naked and blind – dead in our trespasses and sin – if it were not for God's irresistible grace working in us in opposition to our old depraved Adamic nature. Moreover, since we have made no effort of our own to receive that grace which overpowered our depraved souls and evil minds – pulling us from spiritual darkness upward into plains of light and Truth – we cannot claim any credit for having accepted it. We cannot praise this great faith that God has given us as our own – as if we had received it as an inherent right, nor can we boast of the fact that we came to believe in Christ as a matter of personal achievement (cf. 1Co. 4:7). Redemption was all directed and openly given to us by the hand of God through the application of a wondrous grace that was completely irresistible even to our corrupt minds. Our praise must therefore be directed toward God in Christ and to Him alone for what He has done on our behalf.

Moving on to the final point in the chart, it logically follows that since God's grace is irresistible, and since God has predestined his redeemed to receive it through unconditional election, no power in heaven or on earth can extract the believer from the hand of God once He has openly claimed and declared him. This doctrine differs from the Arminian Baptist doctrine of "once saved always saved" inasmuch as that assumption rests upon a man's oral profession of faith as an act of his supposed free-will. (We should take note here that not all baptists are Arminian; some are quite reformed in their doctrine). Any hope of eternal security perceived by the Arminian in this way is based directly upon the fickle ability of a "saved man" to continually live up to his confession through self-determined human effort, whereas the reformed doctrine rests firmly upon the constraining power of God alone to unconditionally hold his elect in an eternal state of security regardless of any human neglectfulness. Jesus said of those that the Father gave Him, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (Jn.10:28,29). As the Apostle Paul

later said regarding the security of the believer, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ro. 8:38,39). Thus once having received eternal salvation, a child of God cannot ever “lose” that salvation and rejoin the ranks of the reprobate who are continuing on the path to eternal death. He may, as we put it today, “backslide” and lose close fellowship with the Lord for a time due to the weakness of his flesh. Nevertheless, having been gifted with salvation on an unconditional basis, he is unable to do anything that will cause him to lose his place in eternal life because God has predestined them to remain with Him through every trial of faith.

That obviously does not mean that once saved through a spiritual rebirth, a child of God will go about living a life of intentional and habitual sin (cf. Ro.6:1,2). To say that would be to deny the power of the Holy Spirit working within him to direct him in the path of righteousness. We must carefully work out our salvation here on earth with reverential fear and trembling lest we in any way offend our Savior to whom we owe everything (cf. Ph.2:12). There is something dreadfully wrong when a professed believer does not live in conformity with the hope that he says is within him. “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1Jn.1:6). The elect cannot praise God in their heart, soul, and mind and intentionally sin against Him through thought and outward action; one does not allow the other. We must realize however that not all who profess to know Christ are truthful witnesses. Many today profess a form of pseudo-salvation and even lead many others astray to accept a fleshly temporal salving of conscience through rigorous religious exercise even as they continue living in sins that they presume to have been forgiven. This is the false profession and lifestyle of the pseudo-believer about whom we will have much more to say in a future newsletter wherein we shall also discuss secular institutionalized churchianity.

Having said this, we also must not think that perseverance of the saints means that the redeemed believer is faultless and unable to unwittingly stumble into sin at times. As the Apostle John said, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1Jn.1:8). Left to their own inclination and desires, the elect could fall into sin and disbelief continually because of the residue of their old dead depraved nature that remains as a thorn in their mortal flesh. Therefore, it is not so much the “perseverance of the saints” as we find it stated in the chart above that prevents the elect from habitual sinning, as it is the persistent power of the indwelling Holy Spirit ensuring that the child of God will continue his predestined course until the very end. The believer perseveres in the faith because Christ perseveres in his life. He who is indwelt by the Spirit of God is both saved and immediately regenerated into a new creature with an awakened spiritual nature (cf. 2Co.5:17). Moreover, the work of the Holy Spirit continues working to regenerate the mind of the elect over time as well (cf. Ro.12:2; Ep.4:22–24). God cannot fail in the task that He Himself has chosen to do in that vessel which He has also chosen to receive it. He who is called, justified, and glorified in Christ Jesus through the indwelling Holy Spirit ultimately cannot fail to accomplish God’s will set forth for him in his lifetime inasmuch as it is God who persistently works in and through him (cf. Ro. 8:26-30).

As we conclude this study of reformed soteriology, we have discovered how difficult it is for the human mind to fully grasp the absolute sovereignty of God exercised in the election of his own – those who are predestined to be found in Christ from the foundation of the world. While Truth is sweet to the taste, it is often hard for us to fully digest all of its ramifications. So it is with sovereign divine election – especially as we sorrow for those loved ones who continually reject Christ in this life and grieve for those who may have already died without knowing Christ. This is why so many chose to reject it in spite of the fact that the Bible clearly teaches it. In next month’s newsletter, we shall consider the consequences that soteriology sets forth for present-day evangelicalism, which is largely based upon the Arminian free-will doctrine that overstresses man’s role in bringing about eternal salvation in others. Conversely, we shall discuss the unbiblical and irrational error of hyper-Calvinism, which would deny the necessity for man to take the Gospel message to the entire world as a universal Christian mandate. Ultimately, we find that divine election is not a matter of accepting the personal opinions set forth by a mere man named John Calvin over another man named Jacobus Arminius; it is a matter of the acceptance of God’s very Word clearly written down in Holy Scripture – no matter how hard it is for us to fully comprehend it. God must always have the final word in everything. As the Apostle Paul said, “Let God be true, but every man a liar” (Ro.3:4). © Arthur J. Smith, August 2014