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**SESSION 5: Irresistible Grace<sup>1</sup>**

*Definition: "The fourth point of Calvinism is the doctrine of irresistible grace, which says that the Holy Spirit never fails in His objective to bring His own to faith."<sup>2</sup>*

**I. HOW DID YOU COME TO BE A CHRISTIAN?**

"When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths [of the doctrine of election] in my own soul—when they were as John Bunyan said, burnt into my heart as with a hot iron, and I can recollect how I felt that I had grown on a sudden from a babe into a man—that I had made progress in scriptural knowledge, through having found, once for all, the clue to the truth of God.

"One week-night, when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher's sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, How did you come to be a Christian? I sought the Lord. But how did you come to seek the Lord? The truth flashed across my mind in a moment—I should not have sought him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, How came I to pray? I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. How came I to read the Scriptures? I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that he was the Author of my faith, and so the doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession, "I ascribe my change wholly to God."<sup>3</sup>

"God's grace is irresistible and invincible; the Spirit never fails to accomplish his saving purpose in the mind, the heart, and the will of God's chosen people."<sup>4</sup>

**II. TWO KINDS OF CALLS**

A. A general call: external and universal

*"For many are called, but few are chosen."* (Matthew 22:14, ESV)

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<sup>1</sup> This outline is adapted from portions of chapter 6 of *The Doctrines of Grace*, by James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken. For further study, see Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, chapter 33.

<sup>2</sup> Joel Beeke, *Living for God's Glory*, 102.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Spurgeon, quoted by CJ Mahaney, *Sovereign Grace and the Glorious Mystery of Election*, 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 31.

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The elements of the gospel call:<sup>5</sup>

1. Explanation of the facts concerning salvation

*“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”* (Romans 3:23, ESV)

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 6:23, ESV)

*“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:8, ESV)

Basic outline of the gospel: God, Sin, Cross.

2. Invitation to respond to Christ personally in repentance and faith

*“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*  
(Matthew 11:28, ESV)

*“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,”* (John 1:11–12, ESV)

*“and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* (Mark 1:15, ESV)

3. A promise of forgiveness and eternal life

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16, ESV)

*“Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out,”* (Acts 3:19, ESV)

B. The specific call: internal and effectual

Definition:

“Effective calling is an act of God the Father, speaking through the human proclamation of the gospel, in which he summons people to himself in such a way that they respond in saving faith.”<sup>6</sup>

“The second kind of call is internal, specific, and effectual. It not only issues the invitation but also provides the willingness or ability to respond. It is a case of God bringing to spiritual life those who without that call would remain spiritually dead forever.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 694.

<sup>6</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 693.

<sup>7</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 138.

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*"...including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."* (Romans 1:6–7, ESV)

*"For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."* (Romans 11:29, ESV)

*"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."* (1 Corinthians 1:9, ESV)

*"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,"* (Ephesians 4:1, ESV)

*"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,"* (2 Timothy 1:8–9, ESV)

*"Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall."* (2 Peter 1:10, ESV)

### C. Calling is by the Father

*"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him."* (1 John 3:1, ESV)

### D. Calling is to the Son

*"But we must also remember that the call is never apart from Christ."<sup>8</sup>*

*"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."* (1 Corinthians 1:9, ESV)

### E. Calling is tied to regeneration, which is by the Spirit

*"In the Scriptures this change is called a regeneration (Titus 3:5), a spiritual resurrection which is wrought by the same mighty power with which God wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead (Eph. 1:19, 20), a calling out of darkness into God's marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9), a passing out of death into life (John 5:24), a new birth (John 3:3), a making alive (Col. 2:13), a taking away of the heart of stone and giving of a heart of flesh (Ezek. 11:19), and the subject of the change is said to be a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17)."<sup>9</sup>*

#### 1. John 3:1-15

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<sup>8</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 93.

<sup>9</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 164.

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### 2. The connection between calling and regeneration:

“Effective calling is thus God the Father *speaking powerfully to us* and regeneration is God the Father and God the Holy Spirit *working powerfully in us* to make us alive.”<sup>10</sup>

“A good way of expressing this is to say that the Holy Spirit regenerates us, giving us a new nature, as a result of which we naturally do what the new nature does: that is, we believe the gospel, repent of our sin, and trust in Christ unto salvation.”<sup>11</sup>

## III. THREE IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS

### A. Two responses

1. A superficial response to the external call
2. A God-prompted response to the internal call (conversion)

*“and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’ (Mark 1:15, ESV)*

*“...I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:20–21, ESV)*

True saving faith consists of:

- Knowledge of the gospel
- Agreement with the facts of the gospel
- Trust<sup>12</sup> in the promises of the gospel

“Saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God.”<sup>13</sup>

### B. The importance of the general call

1. Romans 10:1-21

### C. REFORMED THEOLOGY FOR REAL LIFE: Am I elect?

1. Have you responded to the gospel call?

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<sup>10</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 700. Cf. 1 Peter 1:23-25; James 1:8; Acts 10:44

<sup>11</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 135.

<sup>12</sup> See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 710-711.

<sup>13</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 710.

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2. Do you trust in Jesus Christ alone for eternal salvation?

“There is only one way to know this, and it is not by trying to peer into the eternal counsels of God, stripping the cover from the book of his divine foreknowledge and predestination. The only way you will ever know if you are among the elect is if you respond to the gospel. The Bible says, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). When you believe in Christ, you can know that God has set his electing love upon you and that, having loved you, he will continue to love you and keep you to the end. It is in Christ that you have been chosen (Eph. 1:4), and it is to Christ that you must look for the assurance of your salvation.”<sup>14</sup>

#### IV. THE ORDER OF SALVATION (ORDO SALUTIS)

- A. Foreknowledge
- B. Predestination
- C. Effectual calling
- D. Regeneration
- E. Conversion: Repentance and faith
- F. Justification
- G. Adoption
- H. Sanctification
- I. Glorification

#### V. ALL THIS IS FROM GOD

“When we are first saved, we think quite naturally that we have had a great deal to do with it, perhaps because of wrong or shallow teaching but more likely because at that stage of our Christian lives we know more about our own thoughts and feelings than we do about God. However, the longer we are Christians the further we move from any feeling that we are responsible for our salvation or even any part of it, and the closer we come to the conviction that it is all of God.”<sup>15</sup>

#### VI. REFORMED THEOLOGY FOR REAL LIFE

- A. What are you called to?
- B. How did you come to be a Christian?
- C. What are the essential elements of the gospel that you need to include in how you tell your testimony? What language do you use?

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<sup>14</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 143-144.

<sup>15</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 153.

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