

Irresistible Grace?

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The doctrine of Irresistible Grace is the fourth cardinal point in the Calvinistic theology. It is the "I" in the T-U-L-I-P acrostic. Irresistible Grace is also referred to as Special Grace or Efficacious Grace.

How the Calvinists Understand Irresistible Grace

Calvinists deny that Irresistible Grace is God forcing someone to come against his own will. Rather, say the Calvinists, Irresistible Grace makes the individual willing to come. Berkhof defined it thus: "By changing the heart it makes man perfectly willing to accept Jesus Christ unto salvation and to yield obedience to the will of God."

The Canons of Dort state that when God chooses an individual to be saved, He "powerfully illuminates their minds by His Holy Spirit; ... He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart; ... He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it ... this is regeneration ... which God works in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe."

John Calvin wrote about "the secret energy of the Spirit" and "the pure prompting of the Spirit." Calvin meant that the Holy Spirit would have to be sent to an individual to call him to salvation and once called he could not refuse. Calvin wrote, "As I have already said, it is certain that the mind of man is not changed for the better except by God's prevenient grace." Prevenient Grace is defined as "Divine grace that is said to

operate on the human will antecedent to its turning to God.” In other words man’s will is totally subservient to the irresistible call from God.

David Steele and Curtis Thomas state:

This special call is not made to all sinners but is issued to the elect only! The Spirit is in no way dependent upon their help or cooperation for success in His work of bringing them to Christ. It is for this reason that Calvinists speak of the Spirit’s call and God’s grace in saving sinners as being ‘efficacious’, ‘invincible’, or ‘irresistible’. For the grace which the Holy Spirit extends to the elect cannot be thwarted or refused, it never fails to bring them to true faith in Christ!

Paul Enns states:

In the logic of Calvinism, God, through His Spirit, draws precisely those whom God unconditionally elected from eternity past and Christ died for. Thus the purpose of God is accomplished. He elected certain ones, Christ died for those very ones, and now through the Holy Spirit, God dispenses His irresistible grace to them to make them willing to come. They do not want to resist.

Billy Graham wrote:

Being born again is altogether a work of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing you can do to obtain this new birth ... In other words, there is nothing you can do about it ... The new birth is wholly foreign to our will. – No man can ever be saved unless the Holy Spirit in supernatural, penetrating power comes and works upon your heart. You can’t come to Christ any time you want to, you can only come when the Spirit of God is drawing and pulling and wooing.

James Boyce believes that for man it is “impossible for him to be delivered by his own acts, even if he had the will to perform them.” Boyce believes that God did not choose the “elect” because He foresaw that these individuals would be good and pious people; he believes that it was because of God’s unconditional selective choosing of the elect that the elect or chosen ones are led to believe. Boyce takes the position that salvation is not dependent upon “the choice of the elect” but solely upon God’s choice.

Thomas Nettles denies that an individual can contribute to his own salvation. He believes that man’s faith does not come from man’s willingness to receive the word but “only from God’s sovereign bestowal.” He says, “The Holy Spirit moves in such a way as to create willingness in the form of repentance and faith.” He denies that the New Testament commandments of repentance and belief imply that man has it within his own power to repent and have faith.

W. J. Seaton wrote:

What is meant by irresistible grace? We know that when the gospel call goes out in a church, or in the open air, or through reading God’s Word, not everyone heeds that call. Not everyone becomes convinced of sin and his need of Christ. This explains the fact that there are two calls. There is not only an outward call; there is also an inward call. The outward call may be described as “words of the preacher”, and this call, when it goes forth, may work a score of different ways in a score of different hearts producing a score of different results. One thing it will not do, however; it will not work a work of salvation in a sinner’s soul. For a work of salvation to be wrought the outward call must be accompanied by the inward call of God’s Holy Spirit, for He it is who ‘convinces of sin, and righteousness, and judgment. And when the Holy Spirit calls a man, or a woman, or a young person by His grace, that call is irresistible: it cannot be frustrated; it is the manifestation of God’s irresistible

grace.

Lorraine Boettner defines Irresistible Grace as:

God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed by it.

Man's Responsibility in the Salvation Process

Calvinism assumes that God has predetermined and foreordained certain ones to be saved, and that they cannot come to salvation until the Holy Spirit in a supernatural way works on the hearts of the elect. When the Holy Spirit calls the elect individual, he cannot resist. He has to respond, but he has to wait until the Holy Spirit calls him in some mysterious way. Also, if one is not one of the "elect," it will be impossible for him to be saved. Therefore, it is all the Holy Spirit's working. Man is a totally passive respondent in the salvation process, according to Calvinism, which denies that an individual can contribute to his own salvation.

In 1976, Robert Hudnut wrote the book *Church Growth Is Not the Point*. Hudnut is Calvinistic to the core. He writes,

We have been saved. It is not our doing. – No you don't even have to repent. Paul didn't. He was on his way to jail when it happened. He didn't do anything. – It is then we are driven to the passive action of repentance. You do not repent your way to God.

Notice that Hudnut says repentance is passive. His theology is

corrupt. Man is told to repent in Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; and Revelation 2:16. In every verse cited, the Greek verb is in the active not the passive voice. Repentance is something man must do (Greek active voice); it is not what is done to him (Greek passive voice). There is not one case in the Bible of a person being passive while being saved. Even Paul was told what he "must do" (Acts 9:6). In Acts 2:38 repentance is tied to the remission of sins. If a man wants to be saved, then there is something he must do. Man does have a choice to make in his own salvation (Acts 2:40; Deut. 30:11-19; Joshua 24:15; Matt. 23:37; John 5:40). He must be involved. Without man's active role in the conversion process, he is lost.

The responsibility for man having an "honest and good heart" (Luke 8: 15), in order for the seed of the Kingdom to produce, lies with the person, not God. Man is told to "take heed how" he hears (Luke 8:18). The command in Luke 8:18 would be meaningless if man did not have a part in his own salvation. Why should one "take heed how" he hears if his salvation is a product of irresistible grace? Why "take heed" if the Holy Spirit is going to operate on the heart without a man's cooperation?

The Bible teaches man has a part to play in the salvation process. Notice these verses:

John 7:17, "If any man willeth to do his will"

John 7:37, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

John 12:26, "If any man serve me, let him follow me."

John 12:47, If any man hear my sayings, and keep them not."

Revelation 22:17, "He that is athirst, let him say, Come."

Revelation 22:17, "He that will, let him take the water of life freely."

The point of all these verses is that an individual must

“will” and “thirst” and “want to” come to the Lord. It is the responsibility of the individual to “will” – it is not God’s responsibility!

God creates “will” in any person with “an honest and good heart” through the preached word of the cross (John 12:32-33; 1 Cor. 1:18, 21; 2:2). The word is to be preached to everyone (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). To hold God responsible for creating the right “will” in a person arbitrarily and unconditionally makes God a “respector of persons.” This is something he is not (Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17).

Is Faith Totally a Gift From God?

John Calvin wrote:

Faith is a singular gift of God, both in that the mind of man is purged so as to be able to taste the truth of God and in that his heart is established therein. – This is why Paul in another place commends faith to the elect (Titus 1:1) that no one may think that he acquires faith by his own effort but that his glory rests with God, freely to illumine whom he previously had chosen. – Faith – the illumination of God – Faith which he (i.e. God) put into our hearts – Our faith which arises not from the acumen of the human intellect but from the illumination of the Spirit alone – Faith flows from regeneration.

Thomas Nettles wrote:

Faith is a gift of God and is bestowed gratuitously by him. – Neither justification nor faith comes from man’s willingness to receive but only from God’s sovereign bestowal. – Belief is still the result of the effectual call and regenerating power of God.

Millard Erickson wrote: "Faith is God's gift," which refutes this Calvinistic mistake.

He wrote:

Is this Calvinistic view that faith is totally the gift of God correct? No! Does an individual have to wait for the Holy Spirit to come in some secret way to infuse faith? No! There are several reasons:

For God to give certain people faith arbitrarily makes God a respecter of persons. The Bible is emphatic that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 2:11, 10:12; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17). Salvation depends upon man exercising his freedom of will. If salvation depends totally upon the Holy Spirit and a man is lost, that man can blame God. But, that will not happen because the Lord has done his part; man must do his.

Faith comes through the hearing of the word of God not through some secret mysterious sending by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 10:17; Luke 8:11-12; John 6:44-45; 20:30-31; Acts 4:4; 8:12; 15:7; 18:8; 20:32; Eph. 1:13). None of these verses indicate faith coming through a supernatural calling. Faith comes as we hear and study the evidence and then we ourselves decide to believe.

Faith is our part in the salvation process (1 John 5:4; Rev. 2:10). We have a responsibility to save ourselves (Acts 2:40) and to build our faith (Jude 20; Acts 20:32). This is something we must do. Passages like Hebrews 11:6 are meaningless if the Holy Spirit is going to miraculously infuse faith. Jesus said, "Ye must be born anew" (John 3:7). The word "must" is in the active voice indicating we have a part to play in our salvation. We are not totally passive in the salvation process. Our active obedient faith is necessary for us to be saved (Heb. 5:9; 2 Thess. 1:8; John 3:36; Rom. 6:17-18; James 2:24-26).

God purifies the heart by faith (Acts 15:9). Calvinists have the heart purified before faith. Alexander Campbell said, "Why do we preach the gospel to convert men, if, before they believe the gospel, and without the gospel, men are renewed and regenerated by the direct and immediate influence of God's Spirit?" Good question!

Calvinists teach that "spiritual darkness" refers to man's depraved condition and that God has to perform supernatural secret surgery by the Holy Spirit in order to bring men into "spiritual light." But, in Acts 26:16-18, Paul was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles to "open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God." A careful study of the book of Acts reveals that the early Christians depended upon the word of God to change the hearts of sinners and produce faith. Nowhere in the book of Acts do we find someone being converted by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit.

One is never so "spiritually dead" that he cannot hear and understand and believe the word of God in order to have faith (Eph. 5:14; John 5:25; 12:42-43). The rulers of the Jews "believed on" Jesus but would not confess him. Did they believe? Yes! Their problem was a "want to" problem not that they were so spiritually dead they could not understand. Calvinists misunderstand 1 Corinthians 2:14. The "natural man" of 1 Cor. 2:14 is the man who does not care about spiritual things – not the man who cannot understand them. Calvinists say the unsaved man cannot understand spiritual truth. Wrong! The rulers of the Jews, who were unsaved, in John 12:42-43 understood the truth exactly. They just "did not want to" obey the Lord. Wayne Grudem, and Ralph Gore, and Millard Erickson, who are Calvinists, do not even discuss John 12:42-43.

Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, a professor at Trinity Theological Seminary in Newburgh, Indiana – a Calvinistic school – believes that Ephesians 2:8 teaches that faith is a

direct gift from God and that man cannot do anything himself to get faith. The apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." After quoting this verse Montgomery said,

Don't get the idea that you did it. You didn't do it. Faith is the gift of God. The word 'that' in Ephesians 2:8 refers to 'faith' because 'faith' is the closest antecedent to the word 'that.' Once a person is saved, he cannot properly accredit that to anything but the Holy Spirit.

Faith is, in one sense, a gift of God because God has given us the Word which produces faith. Without the Word, we could not have faith. But, the entire Bible and especially Ephesians 2:8 do not teach that faith is a direct gift of God in which we have no part. The word "that" in Ephesians 2:8 refers to the salvation process. The salvation process is "the gift of God." We are saved "by grace through faith" which is the salvation process. But, this does not mean we have earned our salvation. We cannot boast of our salvation as if we have worked for it and earned it (Eph. 2:9). Jesus said even after we have done all that we are commanded to do we are to say, "We are unprofitable servants we have done that which is our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). James said, "Faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26).

Verses Misused by Calvinists to Support Irresistible Grace

John 6:37: "All that which the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

WJ. Seaton said: "Note that it is those whom the Father has given to Christ -the elect- that shall come to Him; and when

they come to Him they will not be cast out."

Response: (1) All those with a submissive spirit will come to Christ. These are the ones whom the Father gives to Jesus and not one of these will he refuse (cf. John 10:26-29 where the verbs "hear" and "follow" are continuous action). One must come with a willing heart John 5:40; 7:17; Matt. 13:9; Rev. 22:17). (2) There is nothing here or in God's word that teaches that God arbitrarily chooses those who come to Christ. Jesus uses truth and love to persuade men to accept him John 12:32-33, 48; 2 Cor. 5:14-15). Calvinists are reading into the text an arbitrary decree that is not there! (3) The gospel is for all (Mark 16:15-16), but not all men will accept it (2 Thess. 1:7-10). Those who refuse to accept Christ do so because of their own willful rejection (Matt. 13:14-15; 23:37)- not because of some arbitrary decree. Paul Butler says, "Man's rejection by God is caused by man's rejection of God." (4) Jesus said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 11:15). Jesus did not say, "The Holy Spirit will supernaturally open your hearts so you can believe." In Matthew 11:15 Jesus was teaching that man has a responsibility to have an "honest and good heart." That is not the work of the Holy Spirit. If a man does not have an "honest and good heart," he cannot and will not come to Jesus. (5) In context John 6:40 explains John 6:37 and 39. It explains who the Father has given unto Jesus: Those who "beholdeth" and "believeth" on the Son! Both of these verbs are present tense verbs indicating continuous action. Those who continue to behold and believe on the Son are the ones whom the Father has given unto Jesus. It is our own individual free-will responsibility to continue to believe. We are not forced or coerced against our will.

John 6:44: "No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day."

John Calvin said: "But nothing is accomplished by preaching him if the Spirit, as our inner teacher, does not show our

minds the way. Only those men, therefore, who have heard and have been taught by the Father come to him. What kind of learning and hearing is this? Surely, where the Spirit by a wonderful and singular power forms our ears to hear and our minds to understand.”

W.J. Seaton said: “Here our Lord is simply saying that it is impossible for men to come to Him of themselves; the Father must draw them.”

Response: (1) Calvin assumes the drawing is a miraculous operation. We base truth on clear biblical teaching – not assumptions. (2) The next verse explains how God does the drawing and it is not miraculous. It is written that one must be taught (Jer. 31:31-34; Isa. 54:13). One must hear and one must learn! This is not miraculous! God draws men through teaching. “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The book of Acts is proof positive that Christianity is a taught religion – not a caught religion in the sense that the Holy Spirit must convert a man separate and apart from the word of God. The means and the method the Father uses to draw men is the preached word (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 4:4; 8:4, 12; 11:26; 15:7; 18:8; 20:20; 1 Cor. 1:18-21; 2:1-4; Col. 2:7; 2 Thess. 2:15; 2 Tim. 2:2; etc.). (3) Why did our Lord invite all men to come to him if he knew that it was impossible for some of them to come (Matt. 11:28)? That does not make sense. (4) Guy N. Woods said: “Some are not drawn, because they do not will to do so; it has been well said. that a magnet draws iron, but not all objects are drawn by magnets, because all are not iron! Similarly, one must be of the right disposition and have the proper response to the drawing power of the Father which he exercises through the gospel.” (5) John 12:32-33 also teaches we are drawn to the Lord through Christ’s death on the cross. Some appreciate his death, and sadly, some do not.

Acts 16:14: “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God,

heard us: whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul.”

John Calvin said:

Indeed, it does not so stand in man's own impulse, and consequently even the pious and those who fear God still have need of the especial prompting of the Spirit. Lydia, the seller of purple, feared God, yet her heart had to be opened to receive Paul's teaching (Acts 16:14) and to profit by it. This was said not of one woman only but to teach us that the advancement of every man in godliness is the secret work of the Spirit.

Charles Hodge said:

The truth is compared to light, which is absolutely necessary to vision; but if the eye be closed or blind it must be opened or restored before the light can produce its proper impression.” Hodge tries to use the case of Lydia as proof of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion.

W. 1. Seaton said:

One outstanding illustration of this teaching of irresistible grace, or effectual calling, is certainly the incident that we read in Acts 16. The apostle Paul preaches the gospel to a group of women by the riverside at Philippi; and as he does so, ‘a certain woman named Lydia heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things that were spoken of Paul.’ Paul, the preacher, spoke to Lydia's ear – the outward call; but the Lord spoke to Lydia's heart – the inward call of irresistible grace.

Response: (1) Calvin's admission that Lydia “feared” God before God “opened” her heart destroys his teaching of Total

Depravity. (2) It is a complete assumption that God opened her heart by a direct secret operation of the Holy Spirit. The text does not tell us what Calvin believes. Calvin gives us a classic case of eisegesis – i.e. reading into the text what is not there. (3) The word “heart” is used figuratively. Consider: John 12:40; Matthew 9:4; 13:15; Mark 2:6; and Romans 10:10. The word “opened” is evidently used figuratively – i.e. to expand or broaden the mind. Luke 24:45 states, “Then opened he their mind.” Jesus “opened” the mind of the apostles by explaining the Scriptures to them not by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. The word “opened” was simply a way of saying that the person came to an understanding of, and a belief in, the message under consideration. It is analogous to Paul’s statement in Ephesians 1:18, “having the eyes of your heart enlightened.” (4) Acts 16:14 indicates that the Lord opened her heart through the things which were spoken by Paul. The Spirit’s work in conversion is not something done directly upon the heart apart from the preached Word. (5) J.W. McGarvey said, “The assumption, therefore, that her heart was opened by an abstract influence of the Spirit, is entirely gratuitous and illogical, while the real cause is patent upon the face of the narrative in the preaching done by Paul.” (6) Dr. Richard Oster said, “It is significant that this opening of the heart came only after she had heard what was said by Paul. Perhaps the method of opening her heart was the preached word (cf. Luke 24:45).” (7) The word “heard” is an imperfect tense verb which means continuous action in the past. Lydia kept on hearing Paul. The hearing occurred before the opening of the heart. Wayne Jackson states, “The implication here is the exact opposite of that demanded by Calvinism. That doctrine alleges that one cannot give honest attention to the Word of God until the Lord first opens the heart, but this passage actually demonstrates otherwise. She kept on listening and thereby her heart (understanding) was opened by God!” (8) The words “give heed” implies that Lydia had a choice in her obedience. Study: Acts 8:6-12; 20:28; Luke 8:18 and Hebrews 2:1-2. (9) There are many passages which demonstrate that God,

as a general rule, works through means and not directly (2 Kings 5:1-14; Matt. 6:11; 2 Cor. 9:10).

Romans 10:16-17: "But they did not all hearken to the glad tidings. For Isaiah with, Lord, who hath believed our report? So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God." John Calvin said, "To whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed. – By this, he means that only when God shines in us by the light of His Spirit is there any profit from the word. Thus the inward calling, which alone is effectual and peculiar to the elect is distinguished from the outward voice of men."

Calvin believed that the Word of God could only produce faith in a heart of one already illumined by the Spirit of God. In commenting on Romans 10:17, Calvin admits that when Paul makes "hearing the beginning of faith he is describing only the ordinary arrangement and dispensation of the Lord which he commonly uses in calling his people – not, indeed, prescribing for him an unvarying rule so that he may use no other way."

Response: (1) Calvin assumes his doctrine of total depravity is true. He insists they did not believe because they could not believe. The text does not say what Calvin believed. (2) If one must be regenerated before he can hear, then he is regenerated before he has faith. This contradicts many Bible passages (John 8:24; Acts 11:14; 16:14; Rom. 1:17; 5:1; Gal. 3:11). (3) Personal responsibility is definitely set forth in this verse. If anyone does not believe, it is because he does not "hearken" to the message preached – not because of inherited total depravity. Notice the parallel between "hearken" and "believed" with "glad tidings" – i.e. the gospel and "report." To have a saving faith is to hearken – i.e. hear and obey. (4) Every case of conversion in the Bible involved a teaching situation. Christianity is a taught religion (John 6:45; Acts 4:4; 8:4; 11:26; 18:8; 20:20; Col. 2:7; 2 Thess. 2:15; 2 Tim. 2:2). There is no example in the Bible where the Holy Spirit supernaturally infused faith into an individual. A saving faith comes when an honest and good heart is taught

truth found in the word of God and then that truth is accepted and appreciated and appropriated.

Conclusion

There is not one passage in the entire Bible which directly or indirectly teaches Calvinism's doctrine of Irresistible Grace. In fact, it contradicts God's word. Calvinism would make God a "respector of persons." But, the Bible says He is not! It is God's will for all men to be saved; therefore, salvation is conditioned only on man's will. God is always willing for all men to be saved. Calvinism is false doctrine. Let us follow the truth in God's word and reject the false doctrine of Calvinism!

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REVIVE US AGAIN

Leslie G. Thomas
January 3, 1950

One of the greatest needs of our day is a religious revival: not in the sense of a barn-storming, emotion-arousing type of evangelism, but a revival that will affect the whole man, and will result in nothing short of a religious revolution.

Any one who stops to think is aware of the fact that religious people everywhere are rapidly approaching a state of complacency; and unless something is done to stimulate their thinking, there is little reason to hope for much more progress toward perfection. (Cf Heb. 6:1-3).

When people become satisfied with themselves their intellects become dull, and they are content to have some one else do their thinking for them. Such people do not hesitate to accept practically anything that is placed before them, if they have confidence in the one who suggests it to them.

However, if we are to have an effectual revival – one that will lead us closer to God and to a greater and more perfect knowledge of his will – it must be characterized by certain basic principles, some of which we shall consider in this lesson.

The first one is:

A New Sense of Dependence Upon God

No one can read the New Testament without being impressed with the idea that God is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, and that every good and perfect gift comes from him. • “I charge thee in the sight of God, who giveth life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the good confession; that thou keep the commandment, without spot, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: which in its own times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality; dwelling in light unapproachable whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power eternal. Amen” (1 Tim. 6:13-16). “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning” (James 1:17).

Time and time again we are taught that our wills must be lost in his; and that if we would be free from those distracting influences which undermine the soul, we must make every effort to seek first his kingdom, and his righteousness. “Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth” (Matt. 6:10b). “But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things

shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

But, in the face of these plain statements of truth, how often do we find ourselves depending upon our own ideas and efforts, as if God did not exist, or had not said anything about these matters. "They profess that they know God; but by their works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (Tit. 1:16). (Read also Rom. 12:17-21; Psa. 37:1ff; Phil. 4:6,7).

A Re-examination of Our Religious Convictions

If one is not careful his religious thinking is liable to crystallize into a form which, for all practical purposes, will become his creed. And when this happens he will likely find himself using this creed, written or unwritten, rather than the word of God itself, as a standard for measuring any new ideas which may be brought to his attention. "For we are not bold to number or compare ourselves with certain of them that commend themselves: but they themselves, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves with themselves, are without understanding" (2 Cor. 10:12).

Of course no one should hold any religious ideas which he does not believe to be scriptural; but at the same time he should always be willing to subject that which he believes to be the teaching of the Bible to a rigid examination. In short, like Martin Luther, he should nail the things which he believes to the "church door," and offer to debate them with all comers. Compare 2 Tim. 2:15; 4:1-5.

Any one who is acquainted with the history of Christianity knows that the greatest progress toward the knowledge of the truth was made during those times when religious debate was the order of the day. Alexander Campbell said, "A week's debating is worth a year's preaching"; and M. C. Kurfees

averred that "truth has always flourished in the soil of controversy."

A Growing Interest in the Welfare Of Others

All Christians are members of the family of God, and, as such, they should be interested in the welfare of each other. "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (Acts 4:32). "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1,2). (Read also 1 Cor. 12-27).

People who are in religious confusion, or in a lost condition, deserve the help of those who are enjoying salvation and the light of eternal truth. "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16: 15). "And if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that perish: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:3-6). "And on some have mercy, who are in doubt; and some save, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 1:22, 23).

Finally, the Lord's people should manifest a benevolent attitude toward all men. "So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially

toward them that are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

If we will allow the principles which have been set forth in this study to become a motivating force in our lives, there will be no doubt about the nature and the results of the revival which will follow.

Bruceton, Tennessee.

Seek and Ye Shall Find

By Burl Curtis

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The beginner might think this is an unrestricted promise but a search of the scriptures will show seeking and finding are regulated. Jesus qualifies asking and receiving by showing an earthly father would not give his son a stone for bread nor a serpent for a fish. He concludes, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him" (Matt. 7:11)? Asking, seeking and knocking will *not* get you everything you want anytime you want it because God only gives "good and perfect gifts" (James 1:17). Often people ask for things not good for them and do not come close to knowing what is perfect for them.

Those who think this is an unqualified promise need to follow the example of David Lipscomb who said, "We do not have enough on a question until we study everything that God has said on that subject." He impressed upon his students the great importance of not being satisfied with the investigation of any Bible subject until every related scripture had been examined (*I'll Stand on the Rock: a Biography of H. Leo Boles*,

Lipscomb and Choate, 1965).

1. We must seek in the proper order. Jesus said, "But seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things (food and clothing – Matt. 6:31-32) shall be added unto you" (v. 33). Any person or group who does this will use God's blessings to provide the basic necessities for life upon this earth.

2. We must seek in the right manner. God rewards those who "diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). Diligence requires making every effort. The man who found the treasure in the field went with joy and sold all he had and bought that field (Matt. 13:44). Many do not find the great treasures of life because they seek half-heartedly (Col. 3:23-24).

3. There is a time to seek. Isaiah warned, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (55:6). Jesus taught a person can wait too late to seek. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are" (Luke 13:22-30; John 7:33-36; 8:21-24). If these words do not strike terror in your soul now, they will when it is too late.

4. We can seek the wrong things. Certain scribes and Pharisees sought after a sign but most of them rejected the greatest sign of all, the resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 12:38-40). Whoever seeks to save his life shall lose it (Luke 17:33). We may seek honor from men and "not the honor that cometh from God only" (John 5:39-47). Paul told the Corinthians "the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after [worldly] wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:22-23).

5. We may seek the Lord at the wrong place, like the women at

the tomb who were asked by the two angels, “Why seek ye the living among the dead” (Luke 24:5). We may seek the truth from false teachers who teach the doctrines of men.

6. Men may seek the Lord for the wrong purposes. People came to Capernaum seeking Jesus but he confronted them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled” (John 6:24-29). James wrote, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3).

7. Sometimes we have to seek and wait. Jesus told the disciples they could not go where he was going at that moment but they would follow him afterward (John 13:33-36). Those who go to heaven must wait for the “revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor immortality , eternal life” (Rom. 2:5-11).

Ask, seek and knock are not unconditional promises. If we seek according to the will of God we will find; we will seek to excel in edifying (1 Cor. 14:12), to be unselfish (1 Cor. 13:5), things that are above (Col. 3:1) and peace (1 Pet. 3:11). John understood these promises when he wrote, “If we ask any thing *according to his will*, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14-15).

Holy Spirit in the New

Testament

By H. A. (Buster) Dobbs

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- I. Introduction

- A. The writers of the Old Testament looked for a time when the Holy Spirit would do a greater work than was done in their day.
- B. They stressed the importance of words that would be spoken and written because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Consider the importance of the words of revelation.
 - 1. “The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me; because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the year of Jehovah’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, that he may be glorified” (Isa. 61:1-3).
 - 2. The context of this passage shows these words were spoken to Judah before the Babylonian captivity and refer to the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple but have a second and ultimate fulfillment in Jesus (See Luke 4:16-21). The message was from “the Spirit of the Lord

Jehovah.”

- C. The power and importance of the revealed word is emphasized. The word heard, revealed, preached, believed and obeyed is dominant.
 - 1. Matthew 4:12-17 and Isaiah 9:1-2— Jesus began to preach.
 - 2. Matthew 11:2-6; Isaiah 35:5-10—gospel is preached.
 - 3. Matthew 12:15-21 and Isaiah 42:1-4—Jehovah’s servant shall declare judgment.
 - 4. Matthew 13:14-17 and Isaiah 6:9-10— see, hear, believe.
 - 5. Matthew 13:35 and Psalms 78:1-3— teach and reveal.
 - 6. Luke 4:16-21 and Isaiah 61:1-3—preach good tidings.
 - 7. John 12:37-41 and Isaiah 53:1; Isaiah 6:9-10—a message is to be believed.
- D. The Bible deals with the message more than the messenger. The real messenger was the Holy Spirit, and, being God, he is deep, inscrutable, and incomprehensible, but we can grasp the words the Holy Spirit revealed.
- II. The Holy Spirit and the Word in the New Testament
 - A. John the Baptist was a forerunner.
 - 1. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15).
 - 2. He was to prepare the way for Messiah (Isaiah 40:3).
 - 3. He would turn the hearts of the people to God (Malachi 4:5-6).
 - 4. He did his work by exhortation and preaching (Luke 3:18)
 - B. The work of Jesus was planned by God.
 - 1. “He that hath received his witness hath set his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of

God: for he giveth not the Spirit by measure. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:34-36).

- a) Note: Jesus is the one God sent. Jesus spoke the words of God: for (the reason is) he (God) giveth not the Spirit by measure. Obviously, the one who spoke the words of God, is the one who received the Spirit without measure—Jesus received the spirit without measure.
- b) Others must have received the Spirit by measure; otherwise it does not make sense to say Jesus had an immeasurable measure of the Spirit.
- 2. Emphasis was put on the teaching (the words) of Jesus: "Never man so spake" (John 7:46).
 - a) "The multitudes were astonished at his teaching" (Matt. 7:28).
 - b) "Hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5).
 - c) "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).
 - d) "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that y, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I

never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Every one therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock" (Matt. 7:21-24).

- e) "It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).
- f) "No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he that is from God, he hath seen the Father" (John 6:44-46).
- g) "Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I came forth and am come from God; for neither have I come of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and standeth not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof. But because I say the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convicteth me of

sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth the words of God: for this cause ye hear them not, because ye are not of God” (John 8:42-47)

- h) “If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also: from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; how sayest thou, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his works” (John 14:7-10; Amos 1:1). Daniel said, ‘heard I the voice of his words” (Dan. 10:9). Balaam said, ‘ ‘The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak” (Num. 22:38).

Comments on the Outline

God instructs the people of earth through the medium of words. The Holy Spirit used words in instructing chosen leaders who repeated the words to the public. The words would sometimes come to the receiver through the eye, at other times through the ear, and occasionally the words were put in the mouth, but the message always came in the signs and symbols of ideas and was communicated to the people in words.

“The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel...” (Amos 1:1). Daniel said, “heard I

the voice of his words" (Dan.10:9). Balaam said, "The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak" (Num. 22:38).

The Bible stresses the importance of inspired writings. The New Testament says the Holy Spirit influences human minds through a medium, except in some miracles—*miracles confined to the first century*.

God made the world by the creative power of his spoken word. God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters." God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place." God said, "Let the earth put forth grass, herbs yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, wherein is the seed thereof, upon the earth: and it was so." God spoke, and it was done. "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God" (Heb. 11:3).

"... It is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Paul's argument is that the same God who called light out of darkness in the beginning, demonstrated how weighty and mighty his word is, by giving the revelation of his gospel of salvation. We dare not ignore nor belittle it.

The force of God's word is well documented in the Bible. The gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). Still, some misguided souls call it "the mere word" and "the dead letter." Those who faithfully follow the teaching of the Bible are called strict constructionists and legalists. These terms are used in derision and are not unlike the Jews' calling Jesus a Samaritan to disgrace him. Jesus set the proper response pattern for us when he discounted their slap by saying they dishonored him and pointed out that he was doing his Father's will, but they were not so disposed. The apostle argues we do not handle the word of God deceitfully. ..The gods of this

world blind the minds of the unbelieving to prevent them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ...We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God" (2 Cor. 4:1-7). He calls the scriptures "the word of God...the gospel of the glory of Christ...a treasure...an exceeding great power."

We do not war according to the flesh, but "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; and being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be made full" (2 Cor. 10:5-6).

Our obedience is to be full, complete, perfect. It is the Comforter—the Holy Spirit—who gives to us divine revelation. "Wherefore, even as the Holy Spirit saith, Today if ye shall hear his voice" (Heb. 3:7). "Brethren, it was needful that the scripture should be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spake before by the mouth of David concerning Judas" (Acts 1:16). "The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, And his word was upon my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2). "But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1).

The word of truth revealed by the Holy Spirit is sufficient and adequate to make sinners acceptable to God. We are not to follow the ambiguous leadings of doubtful feelings but are to submit to the absolute standard of scripture inspired of God.

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

"Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth" (Matt. 6:10).

"The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul: The testimony of Jehovah is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalms 19:7).

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

“And that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work” (2 Tim. 3:15-17)

“It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, are life” (John 6:63).

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death” (Rom. 8:2).

“But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing” (James 1:25).

“For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves” (James 1:22).

“Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:18).

“Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently: having been begotten again, not of

corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever, For, all flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower falleth: But the word of the Lord abideth for ever. And this is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:22-25).

“For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God’s good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21).

“Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21).

John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth finished their God-given assignments through the power of words. The overriding importance of the message is prominent in the God-given scriptures (writings). As we look at the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles of Jesus, certain disciples in the first century, and all the saved, we will understand more fully the Spirit’s work of revealing, confirming, and protecting the plan of salvation as given in the new covenant.

“Now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give {you} the inheritance among all them that are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Inexcusable Excuses

By Terry R. Townsend

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Have you ever thought about what folks might say to God at judgment for their failure to obey him? It's sobering, isn't it, to know there's a coming judgment – a day in which all men will give account of themselves to the Lord! Paul writes, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Let's consider a few inexcusable excuses.

Without question, millions of people will blame their lack of obedience on preachers. Unfortunately, millions today put more faith in mortal man than they do God. Yet, the Bible is abundantly clear that one must be a doer of the word and not a hearer only (James 1:21-25). False teachers are deceiving millions into thinking they have "peace and safety," when in reality they're on a collision course with destruction (1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Pet. 2:1-3). Thus, it behooves us to test the spirits (1 John 4:1; Acts 17:11). Blaming false teachers at Judgment will be an inexcusable excuse.

There will be many on the Day of Judgment blaming the weather for their lack of involvement in the Lord's work. When asked why they fail to participate in spiritual activities, many blame mother nature – too hot in summer, too cold in winter, too wet in spring, too windy in fall, etc. If truth be told, people will do whatever their hearts so desire! Inclement weather does not negate one's responsibility to serve God (1 Cor. 15:58). Blaming the weather at Judgment will be an inexcusable excuse.

Undoubtedly, millions will blame their parents at Judgment for their failure to do God's will. How often have I heard non-members say the following in a Bible study, "I see what you're saying, but if what I believe was good enough for dad and mom, it's good enough for me!" But what if dad and mom were wrong? Will God still grant you entrance into Heaven despite your failure to obey that which you knew to be true? The Bible says that one must obey Christ above all else, including family

(cf. Luke 9:57-62; 14:26-35). In matters of faith, who should we ultimately listen to? Parents or Christ? Obviously, the answer is Jesus (Matt. 17:5; Heb. 1:1-3). Putting the blame on parents for your lack of obedience will be an inexcusable excuse.

Others at Judgment will use the excuse of profession for their failing to do the Father's Will. I'm sure some will say, "I would have obeyed and served you Lord, but my job wouldn't allow it." Truth be told, millions are more interested in money than they are in God. Paul had it right when he penned, "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Tim. 6:9-10 ESV). Jesus said that we're to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). To blame one's profession at Judgment will be an inexcusable excuse.

I'm sure that on Judgment Day some will use their lack of earthly substance (poverty) as an excuse for their failing to do the will of God. Some will probably say, "Lord, I wasn't as blessed as others; thus, I didn't do all I could." I wonder if God will have standing beside Him the widow who gave two mites as an example to those making such excuses (cf. Mark 12:41-44)? The Lord expects us to do what we can with what we have (Matt. 25:14 ff). Blaming our lack of service on poverty will be an inexcusable excuse.

Another excuse many will make at Judgment will be that of persecution. I can hear some now, "Lord, I would've served You, but I didn't because I feared persecution." But didn't he tell us in his word that Christians would be mistreated on occasion (cf John 15:20; 2 Tim. 3:12). Didn't he assure us his presence, protection, and panoply to help us overcome (cf. Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5-6; Eph. 6:10 ff)? Jesus said, "And fear

not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Thus, fear of persecution as a defense for failing to obey God will be an inexcusable excuse on Judgment Day.

Finally, millions will offer unto God the excuse of procrastination; that is, many will say, "I wanted to obey You Lord, but I simply ran out of time!" I wonder if Felix will be among the masses who will make such an excuse (Acts 24:25)? The Lord is patient, and he gives men ample time to obey (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9-14); thus, to use procrastination as a reason for failing to obey will be an inexcusable excuse on Judgment Day.

Simply put, we can make all the excuses we want to as to why we fail to do God's Will; however, on the Day of Judgment, God's answer to such excuses will be this:

"Depart from me, ye that work iniquity!"