

# Calvinism: Irresistible Grace

## Irresistible Grace

If you buy into Calvinism's definition of Total Depravity, that unbelievers are no more able to place their faith in Christ than a rock or a corpse, then how does anyone get saved?

Calvinism answers that question by saying that God chose specific people, from eternity past, who would be saved and who would (could) not be saved (Unconditional Election). Then how do the "elect" get saved? In Calvinism, if you're fortunate enough to be one of the "elect," then God "irresistibly" draws you to Himself. Basically, God "imparts" or gives the "elect" person the faith they need to believe the gospel and be saved. Without this impartation (or "gift") of faith, Calvinism believes a person cannot be saved. In essence, God regenerates the person before they believe anything so that they are able to believe.

## Calvinist Definition of Irresistible Grace

The "I" in TULIP stands for "Irresistible Grace." Faith is something that God irresistibly bestows (gives) to the "elect" without their first having believed anything. By such reasoning, man can't even hear the gospel, much less respond to the pleadings of Christ. Norman Geisler, a top Christian apologist, called Calvinism's doctrine of Irresistible Grace "cosmic rape."



### **Irresistible Grace as Described in the Westminster Confession X, i:**

*All those whom God has predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by his almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, **being made willing** by his grace.*

"...being made willing" - in Calvinism, God forces His will upon the unbeliever because that person has been elected. There is no choice made by the unbeliever to believe in God...they are *made* willing.

Calvinism completely removes any choice by a human being either to be saved or not to be saved.

Irresistible Grace is also the "*efficacious call of the Spirit*" (which) is "*the special inward call of the Spirit [that] never fails to result in the conversion of those to whom it is made. This special call is not made to all sinners [but] is issued to the elect only.*" [David N. Steel, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 2nd ed. (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1963), 52-53.]

*"No human being can possibly come to Christ unless something happens that makes it possible for him to come. That necessary condition Jesus declares is that 'it has been granted to him by the Father.' Jesus is saying here that the ability to come to Him is a gift from God. Man does not have the ability in and of himself to come to Christ. God must do something first."* [R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 68.]

The first sentence in the quote above is completely accurate...no one can come to Christ unless something makes it possible for him to come. No disagreement there, this is biblical. Where the disagreement with Calvinism comes in is "what" God does to make belief possible.

Calvinism says that God has to first "elect" a person before they can be saved, then He has to give them the gift of faith and regenerate them, in order for them to believe.

The Bible says that the Holy Spirit convicts the world (unbelievers) of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come (John 16:7-11). And it is through this conviction ministry of the Holy Spirit that a person is "convinced" that the gospel is true and they should believe it.

As will be clearly demonstrated below, nowhere does the Bible say that God elects some to be saved and elects others for eternal damnation. It also never says that faith is a gift from

God, or that we must first be regenerated by God in order to believe.

Andrew T. Lincoln said: "God takes the initiative and **enables** them [the murmuring Jews] to believe." [*The Gospel According to Saint John, Black's New Testament Commentaries* (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 2005), 230.

Another quote from a Calvinist that sounds biblically accurate on its face, but how they define "enables" is where the problem lies. The Bible says that God "enables" the unbeliever through the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Calvinism says that conviction is ineffective, and God must first elect, then give the gift of faith, to an unbeliever before they can believe.

*"Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not—indeed he cannot—choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. **Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance (conviction) to bring a sinner to Christ—it takes regeneration by which He makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to salvation, but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation—it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God.**"*

If the worldwide conviction of the Holy Spirit does not lead a single sinner to Christ, then why does God do it? Doesn't it seem strange, even heretical, to believe that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit after His ascension to heaven, but God the Holy Spirit, who is just as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, as both the Father and the Son, is unable to convince mankind that the gospel is true? If that's the case, why did Jesus specifically tell His disciples in the Upper Room to not be afraid, that it was to their advantage that He depart from them because when He did, He would send the Holy Spirit? Seems pointless if the Holy Spirit cannot do the job He was sent to do.

It's amazing how Calvinists rarely or never interact with John 16:7-11. It's almost like it's not even in their Bible:

7 But I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I am leaving; for if I do not leave, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

8 And He, when He comes, will **convict the world regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment:**

9 regarding **sin, because they do not believe in Me;**

10 and regarding **righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you no longer are going to see Me;**

11 and regarding **judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.**

I was in a Bible study at a Calvinist church, at a time when I didn't know much about Calvinism, and a couple of the hardened Calvinists in the group were completely unaware of this passage. They seemed astonished that Jesus said the Holy Spirit would be sent into the world to convict the world (unbelievers) of their sin of unbelief. In fact, they disputed that "the world" referred to unbelievers (which it clearly does)...they were so caught off-guard by this passage.

John Piper said: *"If our doctrine of total depravity is true, there can be no salvation without the reality of irresistible grace. If we are dead in our sins, totally unable to submit to God, then we will never believe in Christ unless God overcomes our rebellion."* [Piper and Pastoral Staff, *TULIP: What We Believe about the Five Points of Calvinism: Position Paper of the Pastoral Staff* (Desiring God Ministries, 1997), 10.]

Another Piper quote: *"Since men are blinded to the words of Christ, **a miracle is needed** for them to come to see and believe...Those who are called have their eyes opened by the sovereign creative power of God so that they no longer see the cross as foolishness but as the power and wisdom of God. The effectual call is the miracle of having our blindness removed. This is irresistible grace."* [Piper and Pastoral Staff, *TULIP: What We Believe about the Five Points of Calvinism: Position Paper of the Pastoral Staff* (Desiring God Ministries, 1997), 10.]

A conversation with John Piper:

- A question for Mr. Piper: You stated that "a miracle is needed." But Mr. Piper, who gets that blessing?
  - PIPER: Only those hand-selected by God before the foundation of the world, we call them the "elect"
  - ME: But Mr. Piper, what about the person who was not hand-selected by God? What happens to him/her?
  - PIPER: I'm glad you asked...in Calvinism, that person will go to hell, with no choice whatsoever in the matter. It is impossible for them to be saved, no matter if they hear the gospel 1000 times.
  - ME: By not giving people a choice to choose God and be saved, or not, isn't God being unfair? I mean, the consequences of not being saved are pretty harsh (to say the least).
  - PIPER: No my son, believe it or not, God is actually glorified by sending those who can't choose Him to hell for eternity. It's something He is looking forward to.
  - ME: So when a person is burning in hell and says, "What the hell, I never had a chance to believe?" What does God say to them?

- PIPER: He will say to them, Who are you to question Me? I am God and I can do as I please!

Now that we've covered what Irresistible Grace is, and what prominent Calvinist teachers say about it, let's look at the three Calvinist arguments in favor of Irresistible Grace:

### **Calvinistic Argument #1: Faith is a Gift**

Calvinism (TULIP) is a logically structured system, which makes perfect sense unless your starting point (Total Depravity) is wrong. If your starting point is wrong, the whole thing crumbles. See **Calvinism: Total Depravity** to understand Calvinism's distortion of this doctrine.

Here's what prominent Calvinist teachers say about faith being a gift...

*"Faith is God's gift. In no degree could a natural man produce faith. It is utterly beyond him. Let us adore the God who gives it."* [Tom Wells, *Faith: The Gift of God* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 55.]

*"Faith for salvation is a gift from the Saviour...The entirety of our salvation depends on God's gift of faith."* [James K. Bridges, *The Gift of Faith*, in Conference on the Holy Spirit, ed. Gwen Jones (Springfield, MO: Gospel, 1983), 225.]

*"The elect of God are chosen by Him to be His children, in order that they might be **made to believe**, not because He foresaw that they would believe."* [Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932, 14th printing), page 101, citing Augustine]

Some Calvinists today will say that Calvin never taught this doctrine, and that it was actually defined after Calvin's death. Not true. Calvin taught this doctrine as clear as day: *"Had he [Paul] said men are not willing to be wise, that indeed would have been true, but he states further that they are **not able**. Hence we **infer**, that **faith is not in one's own power, but is divinely conferred**."* [Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, n.d. re-print, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 116-117.]

- "...not able" - demonstrates that Calvin himself believed and commented that mankind, in his Total Depravity, cannot seek God.

- "...infer" - a key word! Note that Calvin didn't get this theology from exegesis of the text...he has to "infer" it based upon a logical syllogism, but the logic (major premise, minor premise, conclusion) it is based on is not found in the Bible.
- Logic is great, but even logic has its limitations. If your starting point (major premise) is wrong, your conclusion will be wrong as well. This is why understanding Total Depravity both biblically and Calvinistically is so important, because Calvinism's doctrine of Total Depravity is the starting point (major premise) of their entire belief system.

But according to the Bible, faith is NOT a gift...it is the one thing that God can receive from us that is non-meritorious. God will not receive ANY type of work for a person to be justified...but He will receive one thing: our faith.

Calvinism goes to great lengths to make sure man does not have any role in believing because they believe that faith is a work. However, the Bible is clear that in God's eyes, faith is non-meritorious, it is NOT a work. It is the only thing required by God for a person to be justified before Him.

Here are some quotes from John MacArthur, a noted Calvinist:

*"...Genuine faith...is granted by God...Faith is a supernatural gift of God... It seems that what Paul had in mind [in Eph 2:8-9] was the entire process of grace, faith, and salvation as the gift of God...Faith is not something that is conjured up by the human will but is a sovereignly granted gift of God (Cf. Phil 1:29)... The faith that God begets includes both the volition and the ability to comply with His will (Cf. Phil 2:13)." [MacArthur, The Gospel According to Jesus, 172-173.]*

*"Either way, the meaning is inescapable: Faith is God's gracious gift. Jesus explicitly affirmed this truth: 'No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father' (John 6:65). Faith is also spoken of as a divine gift in Acts 3:16 ('The faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all'), Phil 1:29 ('To you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake'), and 2 Peter 1:1 ('Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostles of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours')." [MacArthur, The Gospel According to Jesus, 69.]*

MacArthur, like all Calvinists, has to abuse and remove from their context all of the verses he quotes above: Eph 2:8-9; Phil 1:29; 2:13; John 6:65; Acts 3:16; 2 Peter 1:1. MacArthur's

interpretation of each of these passage, and many more, are clearly refuted in Scripture when you understand the context. Examples below.

### **Is Faith a Work?**

Calvinism believes that faith is a work, and since Eph 2:9 (and other passages) are clear that salvation is by faith alone, not by works, then according to Calvinism the faith we need in order to believe must be given to us by God rather than come from within ourselves. That is their logic for the doctrine of Irresistible Grace.

*"Faith and works are not incompatible. There is a sense in which Jesus calls even the act of believing a work (John 6:29)—not merely a human work, but a gracious work of God in us. He brings us to faith, then enables and empowers us to believe unto obedience" (Rom 16:26). [MacArthur, The Gospel According to Jesus, 33.]*

*"...even if what he or she does is simply to repent and believe the gospel, God's grace is seriously, albeit unwittingly, compromised." [Sam Storms, Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, a ministry of Good News Publishers, revised and expanded edition, 2007), 77.]*

In Calvinism, if you say that you were saved by the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit and you exercised your own free will to place your faith in Jesus Christ, then you are preaching a "works" gospel (because to them faith is a work) and you just diminished the glory of God.

However, the Bible clearly teaches that God gives every person free will, and when His creatures use their free will against Him, but God's will is still accomplished (Cf. Gen 50:20), that does not take away from God's glory...it *maximizes* it. Only God can use the free moral will of His enemies to achieve His purposes. He doesn't need to puppeteer every human thought, emotion, or action in order to be sovereign or to receive glory.

Rom 4:4-5 destroys the Calvinist belief that faith is a work. It is clear from these verses that faith is not a work in God's eyes. It is the only thing man can do before God that is non-meritorious.

Rom 4:4-5:

4 Now to the one who works, the wages are not credited as a favor, but as what is due.

5 But to the one who **does not work, but believes** in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

- See how Paul says a person DOES NOT WORK, BUT BELIEVES he is separating works from belief (faith). To the Apostle Paul, faith is not a work.

*"Scripture never considers faith a work. Instead faith is always juxtaposed to works, as Paul stated in Rom 4:3-5. Human faith is but a passive response that receives God's free gift of eternal life. Who would accuse a beggar of working by holding out his hand to receive a dollar bill? No one!" [Rene A. Lopez, Is Faith a Gift From God or a Human Exercise?, Bibliotheca Sacra 164 (July-September 2007): 266.]*

### **Calvinist "Proof-Texts" Used to Support Irresistible Grace**

John 6:27-29:

27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that lasts for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."

28 Therefore they said to Him, "What are we to do, so that we may accomplish the works of God?"

- "...What are we to do" - this inadvertently kills the Calvinist belief system because they are asking Jesus what "we" (they) have to do to be saved...any Jesus responds, "believe"
- "...works" - plural; this is a conversation between the unbelieving crowd and Jesus, and they want Jesus to list for them the works that they must do to be saved...Jesus tells them the "work" they have to do in v29...

29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

- "...work of God" - this expression is not a *subjective genitive* "work" of God (meaning it's not a work "by" God). It is an *objective genitive*, meaning it is a work "for" God.
  - Like most passages that Calvinism cites to bolster their belief system, this one hurts their belief system in that it demonstrates that faith is *not* a gift from God
    - If faith was a gift from God, "work of God" would be a subjective genitive, meaning God does the believing for them. But it's not. Case closed.
  - "work" - singular; Jesus does not correct their meaning of "works" (v28)...He's telling them that if they're looking for a "work" to do, that single "work" is to believe in Him
- "...believe" - Calvinists connect "works of God" (v28) with "believe" (v29) in order to teach that exercising faith/believing is a "work"
  - But Jesus is not laying out theology here (Paul will do that later in Rom 4:4-5)...He's answering their question. He tells them...you want a "work" I'll give you a work...believe. There, that's your "work."



John 6:44-45:

44 No one can **come** to Me unless the Father who sent Me **draws** him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

- "...come" - Calvinism defines "come" here as belief, and it is the Father who imparted that (belief) to them
- "...draws" - the Calvinist interpretation of this word is that the "drawing" is God infusing faith into some people (the elect)
  - In John 12:32, Jesus says that if He is "lifted up" (crucified) He will draw all men to Himself (everyone, not just the elect)
  - This "drawing" of the Father (6:44) and the Son (12:32) is explained in John 16:7-11 as the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is actually a beautiful picture of the Trinity.
  - Indeed, both the Father and the Son "draw" people to faith, but this verse does not state that the means by which They "draw" is to first give them the gift of faith. In order to get to this interpretation, you have to have a preconceived theology, then read that theology into this passage.
  - See below for a more detailed interpretation of John 6:44

45 It is written in the Prophets: '**AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.**' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.

- Notice that the "drawing" of the Father in v44 is not to salvation/faith...it is a drawing to discipleship (sanctification, not justification)

Acts 3:16: And on the basis of faith **in His name**, *it is* the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and **the faith which comes through Him** has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.

- "...in His name" - the object of the man's faith, which is the means by which the healing took place
- "...the faith which comes through Him" - Calvinism reads this as the faith this man had was given to him by God
  - The context of this passage, however, is healing—not salvation
  - The first part of the verse is repeated again in the second part of the verse
- What exactly was the healed man believing? He was believing in Peter's proclamation (v6) that God had the ability to heal the lame man.
  - It was the proclamation of God's power that made it possible for the man to have faith that he could be healed
  - Peter's words were a true statement of God's power, and the man's faith in Peter's words (God's power) is what brought him healing

There's a quote above from John MacArthur that references Acts 3:16:

*Faith is also spoken of as a divine gift in Acts 3:16 ('The faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all')*

MacArthur interprets the phrase "faith which comes through Him" as faith is a divine gift. However, in the first part of this verse, faith is the means by which the healing took place, and "in His name" stresses the object (God) of that faith. The latter half of the passage is repetitious in order to rule out anything magical about the source of the healing. The man's faith in Peter's words resulted in healing. Such faith was possible through Jesus: it was the proclamation of His power made it possible for people to believe. Therefore, nothing in Acts 3:16 supports Calvinism's gift-of-faith view.

Acts 11:18: When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has also **granted** to the Gentiles the repentance *that leads* to life."

- "...granted" - *didōmi*, a gift; to give something; it doesn't mean something that is rammed down your throat or given to you irresistibly
  - The gift here is not faith, as Calvinists argue; the gift here is the "drawing" or the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, which convinced Cornelius that the gospel presented to him by Peter was true and worthy of belief by faith

Acts 16:14: A woman named Lydia was listening; *she was* a seller of purple fabrics from the city of Thyatira, *and* a worshiper of God. **The Lord opened her heart** to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

- "...The Lord opened her heart" - Calvinists argue that Lydia was given the gift of faith here so that she could respond to the gospel
  - But that's not what the verse says...the Lord opened her heart for what? So that she *could* respond...Lydia is the person responsible for responding.
- "...opened" - *dianoigō*, refers to opening of the eyes to make understanding possible and enable perception
- "...her heart" - *kardia*, many NT occurrences of *kardia* refer to the mind, as it does here
  - So God "opened the eyes of Lydia's heart" here, as if removing a mental veil (2 Cor 4:3-4) so that she could understand and respond (of her own free will). God enabled her to understand Paul's message so that she could believe and be saved. This is not the same as giving her the gift of faith so she could believe.
  - God did not give Lydia the gift of faith here. Instead, He enabled her to understand so that she could exercise faith. Giving the person the ability to understand (opening the eyes to their heart) is very different than giving them the gift of faith to believe. God enlightened Lydia so that she could believe, but it was still her faith, not God's gift of faith.

- The verse doesn't say that the Lord believed for her, or that He infused faith into her in order for her to believe. You have to read those things into the verse because it doesn't say that. The Lord simply "opened her heart" which again is the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Rom 12:3: For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as **God has allotted to each a measure of faith.**

- This verse is in a spiritual gift context, not a salvation/justification context. This should be blatantly obvious by reading the passage, but Calvinism points to this verse as a proof-text for the gift of faith.
  - This is the problem with single-verse proof-texts...you can pick a variety of single verses from throughout the Bible to make up any doctrine you want. However this is not proper Bible study, as these verses need to first-and-foremost be understood *in their context*.
  - Paul is saying here that the spiritual gift you received was accompanied by a measure of faith in order for you to use it
  - This is not talking about a faith that an unbeliever received from God without believing anything because they were one of the elect

1 Cor 12:9: to another **faith** by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,

- Again, the context of this passage (in fact, the entire chapter) is spiritual gifts, one of which is faith. Nothing in the context here is speaking of salvation/justification. Faith is a spiritual gift *some* believers receive *after* they put their faith in Christ and are saved.
  - The faith Paul is referring to here is the faith a believer will use in the sanctification tense of their salvation, not the justification tense. It's a supernatural ability, given by the Holy Spirit, to some believers to have greater faith in the trials of life than others.
  - It's not a gift of faith from God in order to believe because the context of the passage (and chapter) is spiritual gifts

Eph 2:8-9: (these are Calvinism's "big kahuna" verses on faith is a gift)

8 For by grace you have been saved through **faith** [*pistis*, feminine noun]; and **this** [*touto*, neuter demonstrative pronoun] *is* not of yourselves, *it is* the **gift** [*dōron*, neuter noun] of God;

9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Here is a common Calvinist interpretation of Eph 2:8...

*"A dead man cannot...exercise faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is an activity of spiritual life, and without the life there can be no activity. Furthermore, faith...does not come by any independent decision. The Scripture is explicit, plain, and unmistakable: 'for by grace you are saved through faith, and that is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God' (Eph 2:8). Look at the words again, 'it is the gift of God.' If God does not give a man faith no amount of willpower and decision can manufacture it for him."* [Gordon H. Clark, *Predestination* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1987), 102.]

This is just lazy Bible study. If you dig just slightly below the surface here, you can clearly see that "it is a gift of God" is not referring to faith. It *can't* refer to faith. If you look at the Greek genders of "faith," "that," and "gift," it is clear that neither "that" nor "gift" can be modified or refer to "faith" because "faith" is a *feminine noun*, and "that" and "gift" are both in the *neuter gender*.

In Greek, like many other languages, if a word is modifying (describing) another word, the genders **MUST** be the same...feminine to feminine, neuter to neuter, masculine to masculine. For example, if I said "she" went to the store to buy broccoli, you would immediately know I'm not talking about my father because I used the feminine pronoun "she." It works the exact same way in the Greek language.

Here's a quote from Harold W. Hoehner, double doctorate from Oxford University and Dallas Theological Seminary, and maybe one of the most decorated and lauded theologians in the past 50 years...

*"The real problem is with the demonstrative pronoun touto ("this"). Barth states, 'The neuter pronoun 'this' may refer to...the noun 'faith.''" Some commentators think that it refers to 'faith,' the nearest preceding noun. **A serious objection to this is that the feminine noun does not match the neuter gender of the pronoun...**Furthermore, to refer back to any one of these words seems to be redundant. **Rather than any particular word it is best to conclude that touto ("this") refers back to the preceding section.** This is common and there are numerous illustrations of such in Ephesians. For example, in 1:15 touto refers back to the contents of 1:3-14; in 3:1 it refers back to 2:11-22, and in 3:14 it refers back to 3:1-13. Therefore, in the present context, touto refers back to 2:4-8a and more specifically 2:8a, the concept of salvation by grace through faith. [Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 342-343.]*

Throughout the Bible, "gift" [dōron] never refers to "faith" [pistis]. Instead, it refers to:

- Everlasting life (John 4:10)

- Eternal life (Rom 6:23)
- Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17)
- Justification (Rom 5:15,17)
- Jesus Christ (2 Cor 9:15)

Nowhere in the NT does "gift" [*dōron*] ever refer to "faith" [*pistis*], including Eph 2:8.

Elsewhere in Scripture, the words "gift" and "not by works" refer to:

- Justification (Rom 3:20,27,28; 4:2,6; Gal 2:16)
- Election (Rom 9:11; 11:6)
- Righteousness (Rom 9:32)
- Salvation (Titus 3:5; 2 Tim 1:9)
- Calling (2 Tim 1:9)

*"In the present passage (Eph 2:8), the gift of God does not refer to 'faith' but rather **it refers to the whole concept of salvation**. The contrast is stark not only in the words themselves but also in their position in the sentence. The word order in Greek reads: and this is not of yourselves, of God is the gift. In conclusion, the 'gift' is that which is outside of ourselves and is to be received. **Therefore, the gift of salvation has its origin in God, its basis is grace, and it is received by means of faith.**"* [Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 343-344.]

After Eph 2:8, the next most referred to verse Calvinism uses to argue that faith is a gift is Phil 1:29:

Phil 1:29:

29 For to you **it has been granted** for Christ's sake, not only to **believe in Him**, but also to **suffer on His behalf**,

- "...it has been granted" - *charizomai*, means to "give graciously"; the conveying of a privilege
  - It is a "graciously granted privilege" that God allows a person to believe in Christ and to suffer for Him. God has granted people the *privilege* or *opportunity* to believe, but it is the responsibility of the person to actually believe. God does not believe for us.
- In the Greek, "believe in Him" and "suffer on His behalf" are parallel (equal) in this verse, so if faith is a gift (as Calvinists believe) then so is suffering. But nowhere in Scripture do we see that suffering is a gift from God.

- Calvinism argues that this verse shows that God "grants" (gives) us the ability to believe in Him, meaning that He gives us the gift of faith in order that we are able to believe
  - However, both "to believe" [*pisteuō*] and "to suffer" [*paschō*] in this verse are both in the active voice, meaning that they are the actions of people, not God. The subject (man) is the doer or performer of the actions of believing and suffering.
  - If Paul intended to communicate the Calvinist meaning of this verse (that faith is a gift), he would've used the *passive voice* for both *pisteuō* and *paschō*. The passive voice communicates that the subject (man) has something done to or given to them.

Rene A. Lopez agrees:

*"...the gift of faith is not the topic of the verse [Phil 1:29]. In fact the word 'granted' ('to give graciously') should be understood here as conveying a privilege. It is a graciously granted privilege that God allows a person to believe in Christ and to suffer for Him. Since 'to believe' and 'to suffer' are parallel, it follows that if faith is a gift, then so is suffering. But the Bible nowhere speaks of suffering as a divine gift. Furthermore, 'it is not God who suffers but man. Likewise, it is not God who believes but man. Both believing and suffering are actions of people.'" [Is Faith a Gift From God or a Human Exercise?, Bibliotheca Sacra 164 (July-September 2007), 269-270.]*

2 Peter 1:1:

**1** Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those **who have received a faith** of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ:

- Calvinism uses this verse as a proof text that God must give a person the gift of faith in order for them to believe ("Irresistible Grace"). At first glance, it would appear by reading this verse that this is true, but there are two ways to handle this verse:
- The easiest and most straightforward way to argue against the Calvinist interpretation is that "who have received" [*lagchanō*] is in the *active voice*, meaning the object/person did something to receive the action. The subject is the doer or performer of the action
  - Active voice means the person is not the recipient of the action, it means they did something to receive the action. If this was something that was being done to us (such as God giving us the gift of faith), *lagchanō* would be in the *passive voice*.
- The second way to handle this verse (as if the above is not enough to prove the Calvinist interpretation false), is a bit more complicated:

- "faith" is not always subjective, but is sometimes objective. This means that faith is not always something that is inside of us, but rather is receiving objective content (Scripture).
  - This is the interpretation of many Bible teachers and commentators, but may have a downfall in that "faith" (*pistis*) does not have a definite article ("the") before it. If it did have an article in front of it, "faith" could then be interpreted as being objective content rather than something subjective taking place in the life of a believer.

## Miscellaneous Problems That Argue Against Irresistible Grace

### Degree of Faith

Matt 8:10: Now when Jesus heard *this*, He was amazed and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such **great faith** with anyone in Israel.

- Jesus' reference to this man's "great faith" only makes sense if the man's faith came from himself and not from God. If the faith came from God, why would Christ emphasize the centurion's degree of faith? (Cf. Luke 22:32)

— If faith was a gift, as Calvinism believes, why would Jesus marvel at this man's faith? If his faith came from God, Jesus would not marvel at it or emphasize it as He did here.

### Responsibility is Placed on Mankind to Believe

If faith was a gift, why does the Bible put the responsibility to believe solely on man? In the following verses, God puts the responsibility to believe on man, not on God.

John 1:12-13

12 But **as many as received Him**, to them He gave the right to become children of God, **to those who believe in His name**,

13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God.

- The wording here strongly implies free will on the part of mankind to both "receive Him" and "believe in His name"

John 3:16

**16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.**

John 3:36

36 The one who believes in the Son has eternal life; but **the one who does not obey the Son will not see life**, but the wrath of God remains on him."

- What do they need to obey in order to see life? Look earlier in the verse...they must believe.

John 5:24

**24** "Truly, truly, I say to you, **the one** who hears My word, and **believes Him who sent Me**, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

John 6:47

**47** Truly, truly, I say to you, **the one who believes** has eternal life.

Acts 16:31

**31** They said, "**Believe in the Lord Jesus**, and you will be saved, **you and your household.**"

Rom 3:21-22

**21** But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

**22** but *it is the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ **for all those who believe**; for there is no distinction,

Rom 3:25-26

**25** whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in God's *merciful* restraint He let the sins previously committed go unpunished;

**26** for the demonstration, *that is*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of **the one who has faith in Jesus**.

Rom 4:3-6

**3** For what does the Scripture say? "**ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.**"

**4** Now to the one who works, the wages are not credited as a favor, but as what is due.

**5** But to **the one who** does not work, but **believes in Him who justifies** the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

**6** just as David also speaks of the blessing of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

Eph 2:8



8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this *is* not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;

### **Mankind Held Responsible for Not Believing**

Just as the above (and many other) passages place the responsibility squarely on mankind to believe, God also puts the responsibility for not believing squarely on man...

John 3:18: **The one who believes in Him is not judged; the one who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.**

- On the day of judgment, the unbeliever cannot blame God for his own unbelief by saying, 'It was impossible for me to believe' because God gave mankind everything necessary in order to believe unto salvation
- In Calvinism, a person could rightly blame God for sending them to hell for eternity because God did not "elect" them. Under this belief system, a person's eternal state in hell is not because of them or their unbelief, it's because God didn't choose them.

John 5:40: **and yet you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.**

- Jesus is clear in this verse that you have the opportunity to come to belief in Him, but instead you didn't want to ("unwilling")
  - In this verse there is no denial of the ability to come to Christ because you were not "elected" by God...Jesus says that people don't come to belief in Christ because *they don't want to* (Cf. Luke 16:29-31)
  - This verse doesn't make any sense if a person has no ability to come to God. There is no way the Lord could hold a person responsible for their unbelief if they never had an opportunity to believe in the first place. That would be unjust.
  - God does not simultaneously call all unbelievers to be saved, desire that all come to repentance, but only give a small percentage the actual ability to do so
  - If it is impossible for an unbeliever to respond to the gospel without first being given the gift of faith, why does God hold unbelievers responsible for what it is impossible for them to do? This is the same as holding a legless man responsible for being unable to walk.

### **Calvinism Confuses the Instrument with the Agent**

The instrument of salvation is faith, and the agent of salvation (the power within a person's life) is the Holy Spirit. Faith is not the agent...it's the instrument that unlocks the power of the agent. If you believe that faith is something that God infuses into a person in order for them to believe (as Calvinism does), you are confusing the instrument (faith) with the agent (Holy Spirit).

*"When faith is called a dynamic (the same as calling it a power), it is confused with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the agent of salvation and the power that effects a changed life. Faith is the instrument of salvation which, when exercised as a response to God's grace, secures the Spirit's salvation." [Charles C. Bing, Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991), 53.]*

### **Calvinism Reverses the Subject (man)—Object (God) Relationship**

Calvinism believes that God has to believe for man because man cannot believe for himself. But the Bible teaches that it is not God who believes, but man, even though a work of God (conviction of the Holy Spirit) may have occurred beforehand to enable man to believe. Nevertheless, it is still man who performs the action of believing.

Linguistically, man is the subject, God is the object of belief. Saying that faith is a 'gift of God' reverses the subject-object relationship.

Rom 10:17: So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

- This verse gives us the origin or the source of faith...
  - Notice that faith doesn't come from God as a gift...it comes from hearing "the word of Christ" (Scripture)
  - So intake of God's Word produces faith in us...the more we intake, the stronger our faith
  - A person cannot get saved without God's Word (the Gospel), for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe (Rom 1:16)

### **Calvinism Confuses How the Gospel is Shared**

The Calvinist gospel confuses how the gospel is shared. Rather than conditioning justification on faith alone in Christ alone, the Calvinist gospel asks unbelievers to do something that is nowhere found in Scripture.

If faith is a gift of God, then how do we get it? Do I do nothing and hope that God will sovereignly bestow it upon me? Or, do I cry out to God and pray that He will give me the gift of faith? Dr. MacArthur apparently holds to the latter view because at the end of one of his messages he gave a salvation appeal and said:

*"Faith is a gift from God...it is permanent...the faith that God gives begets obedience...God gave it to you and He sustains it...May God grant you true saving faith, a permanent gift that begins in humility and brokenness over sin and ends up in obedience unto righteousness. That's true faith and it's a gift that only God can give, and if you desire it pray and ask that He would grant it to you." [Tape GC 90-21 on Lordship Salvation, last part of tape, comments made during closing invitation.]*

There is not a single example anywhere in the Bible where we're told to pray that God will grant us the gift of faith. The gospel we preach is not "pray for the gift of faith and hopefully you'll receive it." And what MacArthur doesn't tell those in attendance, but instead hides in plain view, is that God will NOT give you the gift of faith, no matter how much you pray for it, if He didn't "elect" to save you. In fact, He may have purposefully NOT elected you to salvation, and therefore He created you solely to glorify Himself by sending you to hell for eternity. And as you're on your way to hell forever, Calvinism believes that God is glorified.

And another question arises...if an unbeliever is dead in their trespasses and sins and cannot respond to God any more than a rock or a dead man (as Calvinism believes through their doctrine of Total Depravity), then how is that unbeliever supposed to have enough spiritual sensitivity to pray to God to receive the gift of faith?

*"The unscriptural doctrine of total depravity leads to an unscriptural and inconsistent plan of salvation. Doubtless the sinner is 'dead in trespasses and sins' (Eph 2:1). If this means that regeneration must precede faith, then it must also mean that regeneration must precede all three of the pious duties.... A doctrine of total depravity that excludes the possibility of faith must also exclude the possibilities of 'hearing the word,' 'giving serious application to divine truth,' and 'praying for the Holy Spirit for conviction and regeneration.' The extreme Calvinist deals with a rather lively spiritual corpse after all. If the corpse has enough vitality to read the Word, and heed the message, and pray for conviction, perhaps it can also believe." [Roy L. Aldrich, *The Gift of God*, Bibliotheca Sacra 122 (July-September 1965), 249.]*

Like other doctrines in Calvinism (i.e. Perseverance of the Saints), the idea that faith is a gift from God has its roots in Roman Catholicism.

*"...the concept of infused faith for salvation bears a marked resemblance to the sacramentalism of the Roman Catholic Church. That is to say, faith becomes a transmitted and efficacious element which God gives to men for salvation." [Gary L. Nebreker, *Is Faith a Gift of God? Ephesians 2:8 Reconsidered*, Grace Evangelical Society News, July 1989, 1.]*

*"Most of those today, including evangelical leaders who hold Calvin in great esteem, are not aware that they have been captivated by the writings of a devout Roman Catholic, newly converted to Luther's Protestantism, who had broken with Rome only a year before. Oddly, Calvin kept himself on the payroll of the Roman Catholic Church for nearly a year after he claimed to have been miraculously delivered from the 'deep slough' of 'obstinate addiction to the superstitions of the papacy.'" [Dave Hunt, *What Love Is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God*, 4th ed. (Bend, OR: Berean Call, 2013), 42.]*

## Calvinist Argument #2: Regeneration Precedes Faith

Because of the Calvinist doctrine of Total Depravity, they believe that an unbeliever in and of themselves, even with the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, cannot come to belief in the Gospel. Thus, there is a need for a person (but only the "elect") to be regenerated by God first before they are able to believe.

Regeneration [*palingenesia*, *palin* = again; *genesia* = begin] means to "begin again"; it is the impartation of divine life (Titus 3:5)

Titus 3:5: He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we did in righteousness, but in accordance with His mercy, by the washing of **regeneration** and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

Regeneration is necessary because of spiritual death (separation from God) due to sin (Gen 2:16-17; Eph 2:1). This "new beginning" and impartation of divine life occurs at the moment of the new birth (John 3:5).

- This new birth is accomplished through exposure to God's Word (Rom 10:17; 2 Tim 3:15; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). God's Word is the instrument that God uses to make people aware of the fact that they need to be saved. An unbeliever receives God's Word (the Gospel) through either reading it themselves, or more often, from the mouth of a believer who is evangelizing them. The Word/Gospel creates within an unbeliever the understanding that they need to be born again.
- Regeneration is the operation of God, after a person places their faith in Christ, that bridges the gap between a sinful person and a holy God. It's when the dead sinner, dead in their trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) comes alive spiritually.
- Jesus, in His "Nic at Night" discourse with Nicodemus, referred to regeneration as being the same as being "born again." We are born again at the moment we place our faith in Jesus Christ.

In Calvinism, regeneration is not a *consequence* of believing, it's the *cause* of believing. If God doesn't regenerate a person beforehand (due to their Total Depravity), a person is wholly unable to believe in and of themselves (even with the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit). Thus, they believe, there's a need for them to first be "born again" in order so that they can believe. This belief is 180 degrees backward from what Jesus presented to Nicodemus in John 3.

## Calvinistic Examples

Calvinists do not deny the need to be born again to be saved/justified. What they do deny is the instrument that God uses to cause people to be born again.

They believe man cannot come to God on his own, and has no ability to seek God or to understand the Gospel. They believe that if a person is born again, it is because God caused them to be born again (against their will = "irresistible"), and then they believe.

*"Thus, the once dead sinner is drawn to Christ by the inward, supernatural call of the Spirit, who through regeneration makes him alive and creates faith and repentance within him."*

[David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 2nd ed. (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1963), 53.]

*"Furthermore, because of human depravity, there is nothing in a fallen, reprobate sinner that desires God or is capable of responding in faith...From the viewpoint of **reason**, regeneration **logically** must initiate faith and repentance."* [MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1993) 62 & n.8.]

- Notice how MacArthur uses words like "reason" and "logically" to back up his claims, but no Scripture passages. He didn't come up with these conclusions "biblically" or "exegetically," but rather "logically" based on Calvinism's unbiblical starting point of Total Depravity.

Tom Wells shares a common Calvinistic viewpoint...

*"I'm afraid we have come to think of faith and the new birth in just the opposite way.... If a man must repent and have faith in order to be born again—if he must make some such decision about it—**then he is the cause**, in part at least, of his own birth. No, the Biblical view is quite the opposite. Put simply, it is this. A man must be born again in order to exercise faith."* [Tom Wells, *Faith: The Gift of God* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 58.]

*"No one just wakes up one morning and decides to believe in Jesus Christ. The reason he believes is because **the Holy Spirit convicts him of sin, draws him to Christ, raises him to life, and grants him faith.**"* — Steve Lawson

- "...the Holy Spirit convicts him of sin" - YES!
- "...draws him to Christ" - YES!
- "...raises him to life" - by this, Lawson means that God regenerates him - NO!
- "...grants him faith" - NO!

R.C. Sproul explains that according to the *"Reformed view of predestination, before a person can choose Christ he must be born again."*

- So according to Calvinism, I'm born again first (by God) then I choose Christ second. But by "choose" I really didn't have a choice in the matter because God "elected" me from before the foundation of the world, so I had no choice but to be saved. Those who aren't "elect" also have no choice to not place their faith in Christ...in Calvinism, God has decreed that they will have no ability to do so, no matter how many times they are presented with the gospel, and whether or not they actually want to. It's impossible for them...they are damned to hell from birth. Or as John Calvin calls it, "Doomed from the womb."

James R. White says, *"The Reformed assertion is that man cannot understand and embrace the gospel nor respond in faith and repentance toward Christ without God first freeing him from sin and giving him spiritual life (regeneration)."* [*The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 101.]

White also said, *"Irresistible grace is a reference to God's sovereign regeneration of His elect: any other use of this phrase is in error."* [Ibid, 137.]

*"Without [regeneration] there is no faith in the redeemer, and therefore no benefit from His death...we are impotent to turn to Christ in repentance and faith; part of the effect of regeneration, however, is that faith dawns in our hearts."* [J.I. Packer, *Great Grace* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1997), 67.]

### **Calvinist Proof Texts for Regeneration Before Faith**

John 1:12-13:

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name,

13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God.

- Calvinists love John 1:13 because they believe that this verse, alone and by itself, bolsters their argument for Irresistible Grace and their belief that God gives us the gift of faith before we can believe
  - However, they don't consider the context given in v12...notice "received" and "believe" are synonyms for faith in Christ
  - Verse 13 talks about what happens to those who "received Him" and "believed in His name"—you are born again and the Holy Spirit enters you, and this Spirit indwelling is not accomplished by blood, will of the flesh, will of man, but of God.
  - It's the Spirit indwelling that v13 is referring to, which happens at the point of faith (after one is born again)

Ezek 36:24-28:

24 For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the lands; and I will bring you into your own land.

25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

26 Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

27 And I will put My Spirit within you and bring it about that you walk in My statutes, and are careful and follow My ordinances.

28 And you will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

- Calvinists also love Ezek 36:24-28, but what they don't understand (like John 1:12-13) is that this passage refers to an "already regenerated" people
  - And another thing that Calvinists, and all of Reformed Theology doesn't comprehend, is that the nation of Israel and the Church are two separate programs of God. They are never mixed, anywhere in Scripture, ever. Even into the Eternal State, Israel and the Church are distinct.
  - At the time God is referring to in this passage, Israel will be regenerated...this passage documents what God will do for them *after* their regeneration
  - Again this is a problem with out-of-context proof-texts used by Calvinism, and all other non-biblical belief systems, including the cults. They pull verses out of context to argue in favor of a certain non-biblical doctrine, then claim that the Bible firmly backs up with they believe.

Matt 23:37-39:

**37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.**

**38 Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!**

**39 For I say to you, from now on **you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'**"**

- In this passage, Jesus lays out the condition Israel in the last days will need to meet, of their own volition/free will, in order to be regenerated

John 3:8: **The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it is coming from and where it is going; so is everyone who has been born of the Spirit."**

- Calvinists pull this verse and say that the wind blows wherever it wishes, man has no control over the wind...same thing with the new birth. It happens spontaneously in the elect, without their having made any decision whatsoever for Jesus Christ.
  - To them, the wind is a mystery, cannot be controlled, and same thing with how salvation occurs (but only in the "elect")
  - Their interpretation of this verse is that the wind (the Holy Spirit) comes arbitrarily upon pre-selected (elect) individuals, forcibly regenerating them, regardless of personal choice
- But like most verses used as proof-texts by Calvinism, if you put this verse back in its context with the rest of John 3, it's very clear that the people who experienced this "wind" (the Holy Spirit) first believed (were born again).
- This is so clear when you read this chapter that it's difficult to understand how anyone can come up with a different interpretation:
 

John 3:12: If I told you earthly things and you do not **believe**, how will you **believe** if I tell you heavenly things?

John 3:15 so that everyone who **believes** will have eternal life in Him.

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who **believes** in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:18: The one who **believes** in Him is not judged; the one who does not **believe** has been judged already, because he has not **believed** in the name of the only Son of God.

John 3:36: The one who **believes** in the Son has eternal life; but the one who **does not obey** the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."

  - "...does not obey" - to not obey Christ's instruction
  - What is Christ's instruction? To "believe in Him."

Eph 2:1,5:

**1** And you were **dead** in your offenses and sins,

**5** even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, **made us alive** together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

- In Calvinism, "dead" means non-existent, wholly unable to have faith or receive spiritual insight; it believes that an unbeliever is completely unable to understand the gospel or believe in Christ
- It stems from their completely unbiblical interpretation of what "dead/death" means in Scripture...it never means "non-existence" but always, throughout the Bible, means "separation"



- Taking their wrong interpretation of v1 (that "dead" means non-existent, not separated from God), they then go to v5 and interpret "made us alive" as God had to do something to make a person believe, which in their mind (reading into the passage) that means He had to regenerate them and give them the gift of faith
- But this verse doesn't tell us HOW God made us alive, just that He did so. Calvinism reads into the verse that God "made us alive" by giving us (only the "elect") the gift of faith and regenerating us so that we could believe. But the verse does not say anything close to that...it has to be read into the text.
- This is reading the Bible with a Calvinistic lens, interpreting it based on the doctrines of TULIP rather than reading the Bible for what it says. A person who knew nothing of Calvinism reading Eph 2 on a deserted island would *never* get a Calvinist interpretation from this verse.
- So if God doesn't "make us alive" through regeneration and giving us the gift of faith, how does He make us alive? Since Paul doesn't tell us in this passage, we learn how He makes us alive from other passages, which essentially says that an unbeliever falls under the conviction of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11), hearing the gospel, and then responding to it of our own volition in faith alone.

### **The Biblical Order of Salvation (*Ordo-Salutis*)**

The Bible clearly teaches (Gen 15:6; John 3:16; 5:24; 6:40,47; Acts 16:30-31; 2 Cor 5:17) that a person first believes, then they receive eternal life, are regenerated, receive the Holy Spirit, etc. Belief in Christ by faith alone is always the FIRST act an unbeliever must take before receiving any of the other aspects of God's "grace package."

The biblically proper *Ordo-Salutis* (order of salvation) is:

1. Conviction by the Holy Spirit (don't confuse conviction with believing)
2. Hearing the Gospel (Rom 10:17)
3. Faith alone in Christ alone, as a result of #1 & #2
4. Regeneration (born again, new creation, in Christ), as a result of #3

Calvinism reverses the order: they place regeneration/born again first, before an unbeliever does or believes anything of their own free will (which they don't have in Calvinism). God "automatically" regenerates a pre-selected person (the "elect") with no knowledge or compulsion on the part of the unbeliever, then the unbeliever believes.

In Calvinism, the *Ordo-Salutis* is:

1. Regeneration ("elect" unbeliever is given the gift of faith)
2. "Elect" believe (because they are "made" to believe, i.e. Irresistible grace) by faith alone in Christ alone

Calvinism sees no need for the conviction ministry of the Holy Spirit because a "dead" person cannot respond to God. Thus, to them, the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit to unbelievers, as Jesus promised to the disciples in the Upper Room, is irrelevant and unnecessary to a believer coming to Christ.

Calvinism also doesn't emphasize the Gospel as the means to generate faith in a person because they believe that even the Gospel, coupled with the convicting ministry of the Spirit, is not enough to convince an unsaved person to come to Christ. In their minds, God has to do a work first, only in the "elect," to regenerate a person prior to them coming to belief.

### **Calvinist Argument #3: Lost Man Cannot Seek God**

If you talk to a Calvinist for more than 5 minutes, they will bring up Rom 3:11:

Rom 3:11: THERE IS NO ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NO ONE WHO SEEKS OUT GOD;

Part of the reason why no one seeks out God is because Satan blinds their minds to the gospel:

2 Cor 4:4: in whose case **the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving** so that they will not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

But there is a counter passage to Rom 3:11:

Acts 17:26-27:

26 and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,  
27 **that they would seek God**, if perhaps they might **feel around for Him and find Him**, though He is not far from each one of us;

- "...that they would seek God" - but according to Calvinism and Rom 3:11, I thought that no man can understand and no one seeks God because they are basically no more spiritually able to than a corpse or a rock? Rom 3:11 says that "no one seeks out God" but Acts 17:26-27 says that God created the nations, and determined their appointed times and actual borders...so that man would seek God!
- Basically, the de-centralization of power and the creation of nation-states around the world, with borders, was determined by God to prevent the global tyranny that Nimrod was trying to bring in at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11)
- And in God's plan, these de-centralized nation-states would give people the time, space, and resources to seek after God

So how can we reconcile Rom 3:11, which says no one seeks God, with Acts 17:26-27, which says that God setup the planet so that people would seek God?

First of all, no verse in the Bible indicates that lost man cannot believe when convicted by the Holy Spirit. While it is true that people have a natural proclivity to not seek eternal things, God has programmed into His universe certain provisions that give man enough grace to seek the truth...if they want to. Unfortunately, what most people do is to take the truth of God that is "plainly seen" and "suppress it in unrighteousness" (Cf. Rom 1:18-20). At that point it's not inability, it's unwillingness.

Once you take these provisions that God gives to lost man and suppress them, God says *you* now have a problem. The problem is not your inability to hear and understand the Gospel, the problem is that you weren't "elected" before the foundation of the world, the problem is that you have suppressed the truth you receive and now the problem is on you. What are some of these "grace provisions" that God gives to lost man:

- The convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11)
- God's Word: The Bible (2 Tim 3:15; Rom 10:17; Is 55:10-11; Acts 2:37)
- The Gospel (the power of God unto salvation) (Rom 1:16)
- Creation (general revelation) (Rom 1:18-23)
- Conscience (Rom 2:14-15)

Rom 3:11 is describing man's natural proclivity *without* all of the above "grace provisions" from God. But because God has built into creation all of these provisions for lost man to come to a knowledge of Him, lost people *have* the ability to do what Acts 17:26-27 says they have the ability to do, which is to seek God.

So if a person is in unbelief, it isn't because they didn't have the ability to come to Christ, it is because they suppressed it in unrighteousness (John 3:19; Rom 1:18).

*"While I do agree that salvation comes through the workings of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, I disagree with the idea that God must first predispose some to believe and receive it, for **the Word of God and the Holy Spirit are sufficient in and of themselves in bringing about the new birth**. Instead of forcing individuals to be saved through the irresistible prompting of the Holy Spirit, God uses His Word and the convicting work of the Holy Spirit to confirm its truth in order to bring individuals to the point of decision. It is certainly God's grace that offers it, but at this point they are free to accept or reject salvation...their (Calvinism's) definition of Total Depravity negates the sufficiency of the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to give life..." [Robert Congdon, Oops! I*

*Thought I Was a Four-Point Calvinist* (Greer, SC: Congdon Ministries International, 2014), 48, 69–70.]

### **Lost Man is Held Accountable for Believing in Christ**

Calvinism camps on Rom 3:11 and says, See, there it is in the Bible...lost man cannot seek God. Then they reject (don't pay any attention to or interact with) any other passages that demonstrate that lost man *can* seek God, such as Acts 17:26–27, among others. They don't understand that Rom 3:11 is a statement about lost man on his own, without God's intervention, and Acts 17:26–27 is a statement about lost man *with* God's intervention.

If lost man cannot seek God, as Calvinism believes, then why does God hold them accountable for their unbelief? The Bible is clear that if a person is in unbelief, it is their own fault, not God's fault. In reality, it's not an *ability* issue (as Calvinism believes), it is an *unwillingness* issue. ***God would be unjust to hold people accountable to believe what they don't have the ability to believe.***

Matt 23:37: ***"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling."***

- "...you were unwilling" - it doesn't say they were unable to believe, it says they were unwilling to believe. They simply didn't want to believe for whatever reason.
  - Jesus is saying that, even after all of the light that He gave them, they still didn't want Him

John 3:18: ***The one who believes in Him is not judged; the one who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.***

- The reason they did not believe is because they didn't want to believe
  - And their unwillingness to believe has brought them under judgment

John 4:48: Then Jesus said to him, ***"Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe."***

- The problem of their unbelief was not Jesus, it was the people...they are the ones who simply would not believe
- The Bible never says anywhere that mankind didn't believe because they were not "elected" to believe

John 5:40: ***and yet you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.***

- Again, lost man was unwilling to believe; it doesn't say that they were "unable" to come to Him

### **Lost Man Has the Ability to Believe**

John 1:12: But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name,

- Light has come into the world, thus it is incumbent upon lost man to receive and believe

John 20:31: but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name.

- The purpose of John's Gospel is to document some of the signs that Jesus performed so that people may read it, then believe in Him
- If man had an inability to believe without first being regenerated by God, why would John have believing in Him as the purpose for writing his gospel?

1 Cor 1:21: For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to **save those who believe.**

- Clearly shows that people have the ability to believe, even though the Gospel seems "foolish" to them

1 John 5:10: The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; **the one who does not believe** God has made Him a liar, **because he has not believed** in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son.

- The responsibility is clearly on each person to believe

### **Lost Man Can Resist God's Grace**

Calvinism argues, through their doctrine of Irresistible Grace, that God's grace cannot be resisted by mankind. The problem is that this doctrine is refuted throughout Scripture...there are numerous instances where God's grace goes out to people and they resist it.

Gen 6:3: Then the LORD said, "**My Spirit will not remain with man forever**, because he is also flesh; nevertheless his days shall be 120 years."

- The grace of God went out to pre-Flood mankind for 120 years, and every single person on the planet resisted God's grace except for Noah and his family (8 people)

- The pre-Flood world completely resisted the grace of God for 120 years. Population estimates from that time are between 7-19 billion people, and only 8 people did not resist God's grace.
- How can God's grace be "irresistible" if somewhere between 7-19 billion people resisted it for 120 years?

Prov 1:24-25:

24 "Because **I called** and **you refused**, **I stretched out my hand** and **no one paid attention**;

25 And **you neglected all my advice** And did not want my rebuke;

- "called...stretched out" - God's grace to people

Matt 23:37: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her! How often **I wanted to gather your children together**, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and **you were unwilling**."

- "...you were unwilling" - Jesus' desire was to "gather them (Israel) together"—but they resisted Him

John 12:32: **And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself."**

- Jesus was "lifted up" (crucified), therefore He is now drawing all people to Himself
  - No mention of people's inability to be drawn...the people who decide to not believe in Christ either suppressed the truth they received, or simply decided to not believe in Him

Acts 7:51: "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.

- Stephen didn't say that these people didn't have the ability to believe the Holy Spirit; he said they had the ability to believe, but they resisted in unbelief
- How can God's grace be "irresistible" if these first century religious leaders always resisted the Holy Spirit?

Heb 12:25: See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, much less *will* we escape who turn away from Him who *warns us* from heaven.

- Speaking of the Kadesh-Barnea generation in the wilderness, the author of Hebrews says that they refused Him
- They were the generation that missed God's best because they rejected God's grace

**Man Can Resist God By Disbelieving**

(i) John 10:25

John 10:25: Jesus answered them, "I told you, and **you do not believe**; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me.

- "...you do not believe" - doesn't say "you *cannot* believe"; Jesus showed them a bunch of signs, and they still didn't believe

John 12:37: But though He had performed so many signs in their sight, **they *still* were not believing in Him.**

- The turning point verse in John's Gospel; from here, John moves from the "book of signs" into the Passion narratives
- Here, after performing so many signs in front of them, they continued to *make the choice* to not believe in Him

Acts 9:26: When he came to Jerusalem, he tried *repeatedly* to associate with the disciples; and yet they were all afraid of him, as **they did not believe** that he was a disciple.

- Man's choice to believe or not believe...

Acts 19:9: But when some were **becoming hardened and disobedient**, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took the disciples away *with him*, and had discussions daily in the school of Tyrannus.

- The disobedience of people pushed Paul to withdraw from them and go to the school of Tyrannus
- It doesn't say they couldn't believe, it says they wouldn't believe, and they suffered the consequences for not believing

2 Thess 2:12: in order that they all may be judged **who did not believe the truth**, but took pleasure in wickedness.

- Doesn't say they could not believe, it says they did not believe, even after all of the light that God will give them during the Tribulation period

### **What About John 6:44?**

If you talk to a Calvinist, undoubtedly they will bring you to this verse. Calvinism thinks this verse means that no one comes to Jesus without God dragging them kicking and screaming to Jesus. It doesn't matter what you want or what you think, Calvinism believes that God irresistibly drags people to belief in Christ.

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

- "...draws" - *helkyō*, "to draw"; "drag"; "to draw by inward power"
  - It can mean "drag," and is used that way elsewhere in the NT (Cf. Acts 21:30; James 2:6)
    - Acts 21:30: Then the whole city was provoked and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they **dragged him** [*helkyō*] out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut.
    - James 2:6: But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally **drag you** [*helkyō*] into court?

The problem with the Calvinist interpretation of this verse is that this is not how you study the Bible. You do not take a single verse as a proof-text, then develop the definition of a word in that verse from other books of the Bible. When you do this, you often end up with an out-of-context, erroneous interpretation.

To do a word study properly, you first look at the word itself...what are the different meanings of the word (because frequently words have many different meanings). Once you determine the various meanings of a word, then you ask yourself 'what does that word mean here, in this context'? Words mean things based on the context in which they are used (this is basic language).

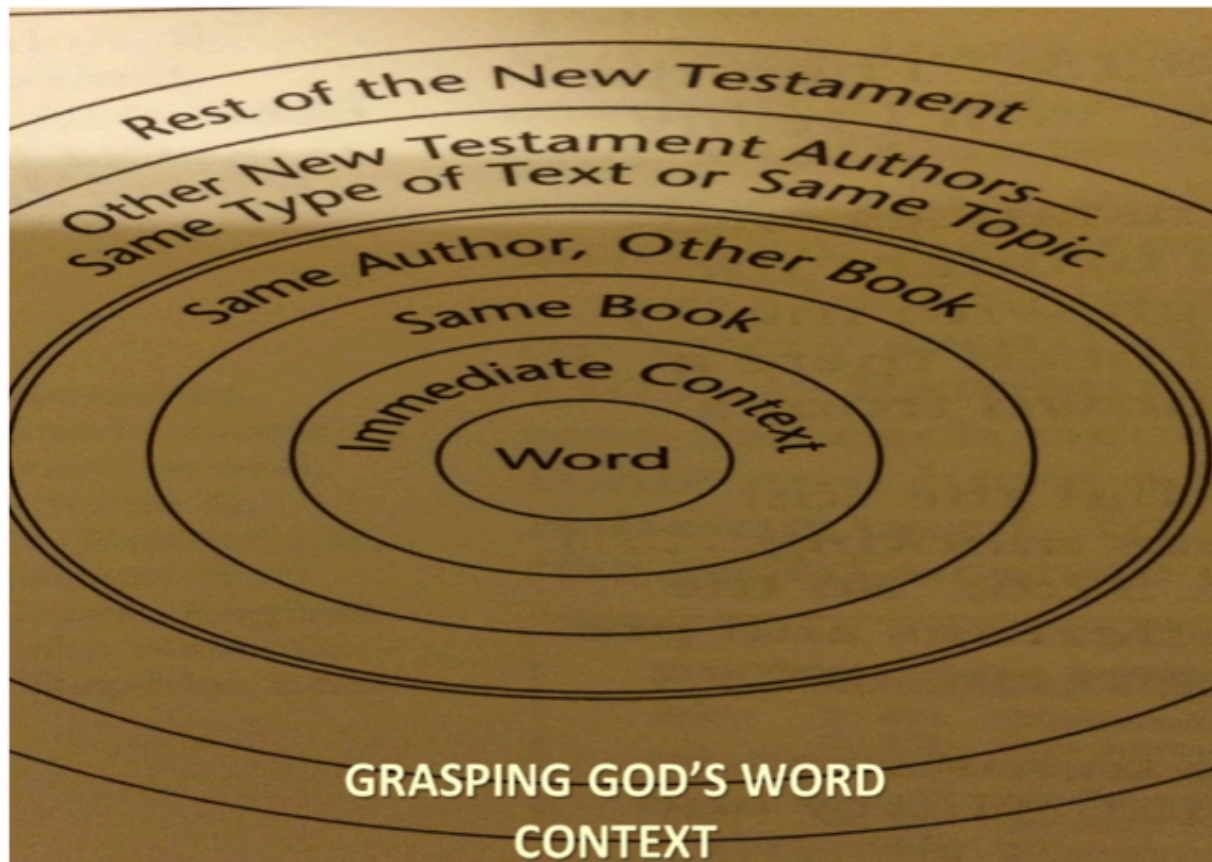
For example, take the word "apple." It has many different usages, and the usage that I choose to apply to the word is based on the context in which it's used. Some definitions or usages of "apple" include: the fruit, the "apple of one's eye," the "Big Apple" (NYC), or the company that makes iPhones and MacBooks (Apple Computer).

So if I say to my wife, I'd like to eat an apple for breakfast, she doesn't bring me my iPhone and a fork because the context of my statement is eating something, and the only definition/usage of "apple" that fits is the fruit.

If I tell my wife that she's the "apple of my eye" she doesn't think I think my laptop is better looking than her.

So the context in which it is used makes all the difference in how a word with many different definitions or usages is interpreted.





If looking at the different definitions and usages doesn't get you the answer, then you next move outward in the concentric circles to how the word is used in the immediate context (same paragraph, passage, or chapter). If that doesn't get you the answer, you move one circle further and expand into how that word is used in the same book. So if you're doing a word study from a verse in John's Gospel, I'm going to look at how John uses this word elsewhere in John's Gospel.

If that doesn't yield the answer, then you would look at how John uses the word in his other books (John also wrote 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation). Did he use this same word in any of those books, and if so, how was it used. When you do this, you also need to consider the context of the word usage in the other book(s).

If that still doesn't yield the answer, then you would look at how other NT authors used the words when they wrote about the same topic. Then your last resort, if you cannot determine the meaning of the word through all the previous means, is to study how the word is used elsewhere in the NT, or possibly how it was used in the LXX (the Greek translation of the OT).

The further you go outside of the center, the less likely you are to get a good interpretation. And you certainly don't want to start at the outside ring and move inward to determine the definition or usage of a word, as that will almost always give poor results.

But notice what Calvinism does to get to their definition of *helkyō*...they start at the outer edge, how the word is used elsewhere in the NT, and skip all of the previous steps. They run immediately to Acts 21:30 and James 2:6 to get the definition, completely ignoring the more important and accurate first four steps (immediate context, same book, same author/other book, and another NT author writing on same topic).

What they do is develop the definition or meaning of a word that fits their preconceived theology, then read that definition back into John 6:44. By doing this, they commit a logical fallacy called "illegitimate totality transfer" which is an unwarranted adoption of an expanded semantic field. The fallacy in this instance is in ***the supposition that the meaning of a word in a specific context is much broader than the context allows***, and may bring with it the word's entire semantic range.

So let's determine what *helkyō* means the right way...starting at the center of the circle with how John uses the word in his Gospel...

John (Jesus) uses the word again in John 12:32: **And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw [helkyō] all people to Myself."**

- In this verse, *helkyō* means "to attract" rather than "coerce" or "irresistibly draw." It doesn't mean "dragged against their will with no choice in the matter."
- Notice that this "attraction" goes out to "all people" not just the elect. Jesus clearly does not "irresistibly drag" all people to Himself, otherwise all people would be saved.
- In John 6:44, Calvinism talks about the Father irresistibly dragging a small group (only the elect), but in 12:32 Jesus is talking about "attracting" all people to Himself

Now look at John 12:37-38...just five short verses after John 12:32...

37 But though He had performed so many signs in their sight, **they still were not believing in Him.**

- Even after Jesus' "drawing" all people to Himself (v32) they *still* were not believing in Him (v37)

38 *This happened* so that the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke would be fulfilled: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?"

- Pre-northern kingdom exile, God worked through Isaiah's ministry to give the northern kingdom an opportunity to repent before He would send them into exile
- But in spite of the "drawing" or "attracting" that God was trying to do, Israel still rejected Him, and thus was scattered by Assyria in 722 BC

- What Jesus is saying here is that the same exact thing is happening right now (in first century Israel). Paul quotes the same Isaiah passage in Acts 28 stating that the same thing was happening at that time.

John also uses *helkyō* to speak about the "drawing" of inanimate objects...

John 18:10: Then Simon Peter, since he had a sword, **drewit** [*helkyō*] and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus.

- In this instance, the use of *helkyō* is of an inanimate object (Peter's sword)
- Notice though that the sword did not resist coming out of its sheath...Peter didn't "drag" the sword out of its sheath against its will

John 21:6,11

6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you will find *the fish*." So they cast *it*, and then they were not able to **haul** [*helkyō*] it in because of the great quantity of fish.

11 So Simon Peter went up and **hauled** [*helkyō*] the net to land, full of large fish, 153; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

- In this passage, when the disciples tried to haul the net full of fish while they were in the boat, they were unable to do so (because of so many fish, v6)
- Later, after arriving on shore, Peter by himself was able to haul in the net full of fish (v11)

So these are all examples of how John uses *helkyō* in his Gospel. Not all are in the same context as *helkyō* is used in John 6:44. Looking at these various usages of the verb *helkyō* demonstrates that it can, and often does, mean "attract" or "draw" rather than "coerce." Additionally, there are no other Scripture passages that state (or even hint) that God's "drawing" of unbelievers is more "coercion" than it is "attraction."

Frederick L. Godet agrees: "*helkyō, to draw, does not necessarily denote an effectual drawing. This word may refer only to the preaching of the cross throughout the whole world and the action of the Holy Spirit which accompanies it. This heavenly drawing is not irresistible.*" [Godet, Commentary on the Gospel of John, trans. Timothy Dwight [n.p.: Funk & Wagnalls, 1893; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.], 228]

So that covers Irresistible Grace. In this study, we looked at the Calvinist definition of Irresistible Grace, including their three arguments in favor:

1. Faith is a gift

2. Regeneration precedes faith
3. Lost man cannot seek God

For each of these arguments, we examined the proof-texts they use, what prominent Calvinist theologians/teachers say, and what the Bible (in context) really teaches. From multiple verses provided, it is clear that God goes to great lengths to reach the unsaved. In fact, He goes so far that the only way man does not believe is by suppressing and resisting the grace that God gives. The reason why God goes to such great lengths is because the consequence for unbelief is so great, but He never impedes on mankind's free will because we are created in His image.