

Week 10 - Irresistible Grace

Freely Choosing the Beauty of Christ

Learning Objectives

- Understand that God is the one who regenerates the human heart, and thus creates in us a heart that will choose him.
- Understand that it is not by our work that we are saved, but it is God's essential work in our lives that enables us to respond in faith.

Leader's Note: This study could potentially bring up a lot of questions about free will vs God's election. If your group is getting distracted and bogged down in these questions, pointing out that to some extent, we don't and will never fully understand how these two work together can be helpful.

Introduction

Read this hymn, "I Sought the Lord and Afterward I Knew" aloud:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me.
It was not I that found, O Savior true;
No, I was found of Thee.

Thou didst reach forth Thy hand and mine enfold;
I walked and sank not on the storm vexed sea.
'Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold,
As Thou, dear Lord, on me.

I find, I walk, I love, but oh, the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee!
For Thou were long beforehand with my soul,
Always Thou lovest me.

? What aspects of this hymn stand out to you?

The Beauty of Grace

Ephesians 2:1-10 (NIV)

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh

and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

? What stands out to you about “grace” in this passage?

Possible answer: That we gratify our cravings and deserve wrath and even still, God pursues us. That God made salvation as a means to purely display his grace and nothing about what we do to earn it. That we don’t EARN grace, but that he gives it. That God knew what our sin would be and still pursued us.

? What does this passage say we deserve? Why do we not get what we deserve?

Possible Answer: We were DEAD in our transgressions and therefore deserving of wrath-- by nature! We don’t get what we deserve because God is so loving and merciful! It is by the grace of God through the faith of Jesus.

“The point of irresistible grace is not that we can’t resist. We can and we do. The point is that when God chooses, he overcomes our resistance and restores a submissive spirit. He creates. He says, ‘Let there be light!’ He heals. He leads. He restores. He comforts.

“Therefore, we never boast that we have returned from backsliding. We fall on our faces before the Lord and with trembling joy thank him for his irresistible grace.” - John Piper

? Based on this text, why does it matter that it is God alone who regenerates our hearts?

Possible Answer: So that no one can boast about the good works they do, but God’s immense grace.

God’s Work

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NIV)

³¹ “The days are coming,” declares the Lord,
“when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.

³² It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,

because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,”
declares the Lord.

³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
after that time,” declares the Lord.

“I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,”
declares the Lord.

“For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.”

? What can you observe about the character of God from this passage?

Possible answer: God is merciful. He is all powerful. He is our father. He has made a covenant with us. He forgives. He changes our hearts.

? How does knowing that God plays the main role in our salvation prompt us to pray for friends and family who are not yet saved?

Possible answer: Knowing that it is not about the family a person grew up in or their desire to become a believer, this might cause me to pray for the hearts of my friends and family to turn towards the Lord and repent of their sin more boldly, knowing that even when I might view it as unlikely, I'll remember that there was nothing I did to deserve becoming a child of God.

? How does knowing that God alone has the power to transform hearts change how we interact with people?

Possible answer: Knowing that it had nothing to do with my “goodness of fit” for the kingdom of God, my heart is humbled and I want others (even the ones I might think are unlikely to know the Lord) to know how good the freedom found in Jesus is. Knowing that no one has gone “too far” might allow us to feel bold in talking with people about these things. It gives us freedom from the pressure of having to change people’s hearts.

Our Response

John 1:12-13 (NIV)

¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

John 6:44-47 (NIV)

⁴⁴ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life.

? In what ways have you seen God draw you in? How about other people in your life?

Possible answer: Through beholding his beauty and joyfully submitting myself to him. Through recognizing my sin and seeing that all the glory goes to Him and not to me.

? If God is the main character in our salvation, do we play a role? According to John 1, what role do we play?

Possible answer: Yes –we get to respond! And our response is one of faith. John 1 describes the response of faith as a privilege or a right. NOTE: this might start a side conversation about these two realities (God's movement and our response) being at odds. It's ok not to have the mechanics of how these two work together 100% figured out. The Bible describes both God's sovereignty and human choice without an owner's manual of how it all fits together!

? Where does "the one who believes has eternal life" fit in with our understanding of God's drawing us in? How do these roles work together?

Possible answer: God is doing all of the essential work and we need to respond in faith. We respond by embracing what he is doing all of the time.

For Discussion and Accountability

? It is God's grace alone that changes our hearts, and it is through the mouths of people that the good news found in the scriptures is shared. Are there any obstacles you see in sharing the gospel with people in your life? What do you think is at the root of those challenges?

? What holds you back from fully embracing and living in the freedom of God's grace? Is there a way you are resisting the Holy Spirit?