

February 25th, 2018

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS: HIS IMPOSSIBLE SALVATION

John 20:30-31

The punishment fits the crime

A person's punishment tells us much about the seriousness of his crime. Recently the sentencing hearing for the ex-Olympic doctor, Larry Nassar, took place. Nassar's crimes were horrific, assaulting young girls—one as young as six over the course of several decades.¹ Nassar received a 175 year sentence. Society judged that his crime was so horrific that a 175 year sentence is what he deserved.

A quick Google search can find greater sentences than that of Larry Nassar. Recently a Pennsylvania man receives four life sentences plus 155 years.² An Illinois man sentenced to 4 consecutive life sentences plus 280 years.³ What were their crimes? We can only conclude that these men did unspeakable things to deserve such punishment.

An eternal life sentence

Enter the gospel John. In his final book, John spoke of the most terrible punishment I've ever heard. **Revelation 14:11** "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night." As horrific as Nassar's crimes were, they *must* pale in comparison to the crime that deserves

¹ Source: <http://abcnews.go.com/US/disgraced-olympic-doctor-larry-nassar-sentenced-40-175/story?id=52577459> accessed February 24, 2018

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 These women will never be the same, they will carry this with them for life. My one hope for them is that they would find comfort in Jesus Christ, the One who was assaulted, and abused and ruined before the whole universe. May they find true hearing in His wounds.

² Source: http://www.thedailytimes.com/news/pennsylvania-man-gets-four-life-sentences-plus-years/article_0dfd35f4-0804-5123-9a37-42f2cae54be1.html accessed February 24, 2018

³ Source: <http://www.rrstar.com/news/20170908/calvin-carter-sentenced-to-four-life-terms-plus-280-years-for-quadruple-murder> accessed February 24, 2018

that punishment. He *only* got 175 years. John speaks of eternal punishment. What's the crime? How would you answer that question? What is God's quarrel with planet earth?

Humanity's crime

Humanity has forsaken God. Humanity has forgotten Him. You were born into a world that constantly belittles the most supreme and most lovely and most holy Being conceivable. Were you to catch just one glimpse of this holy God, you would be terrified, because you will have realized that you have never given Him the proper reverence and honor and praise that He deserves in your whole life.⁴

That's God's quarrel with planet earth. He made you to love and honor and adore Him and you have loved and honored and adored yourself. "God is the main reality in the universe and He is treated as a non-reality."⁵ Where's the outrage on twitter for the nations failing to worship this great God. Where's the supreme court indictment against humanity for failing to worship and love God yesterday?

The greatest rescue plan ever conceived

That is the global context for the gospel of John. Heaven has leveled the indictment of hell against humanity for its failure to love and cherish God as he deserves. John's gospel is an account of the greatest, most dangerous, most unlikely, most impossible rescue that has ever occurred. The gospel of Jesus Christ is *the* greatest superhero story. Every superhero story is modeled after

⁴ That's what happened to prophet Isaiah. He saw the LORD of Hosts upon the throne of His Universe. The surround angels were so stunned by the blazing white light of His holiness that they had to cover their sinless eyes. And smoke erupted out of His temple as they cried out "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" When Isaiah saw and heard these things, he called out the greatest curse upon himself "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5) Isaiah was the most devoted man of his time and he saw in one moment that God was infinitely holy, that he was infinitely sinful.

⁵ John Piper, *Five Points: Towards a Deeper Experience of God's Grace*, (Scotland, Great Britain,; Christian Focus Publications, 2013), pg. 80

this story. What is the main theme of every superhero story? Humanity is in trouble of being destroyed, the superhero comes in and willingly sacrifices his own life to save them. But the difference is that in *this* superhero story, is that the ones who are being rescued are not helpless victims. The ones being rescued are the superhero's arch enemies. God's arch enemies are not limited to people like Larry Nassar or Adolf Hitler. You were born as an arch enemy of God. That has been the point in John's gospel. And as he summarizes it now for us at the end of chapter twenty, he wants us to see it again. v.31 "these are 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 Big Idea...

This gospel was written for you, so that you would believe and have life in Jesus Christ, the Son of God

We've been laboring to summarize John's gospel the last two weeks. We've seen who Jesus tell us who He is in His I AM statements. We've seen Him show us who He is in His miraculous signs. This morning we are going to see how Jesus saves. And this is seen most clearly in what is called the Doctrines of Grace, or as known by another name Calvinism. These five points are easily seen throughout John's gospel. And they will make up our outline this morning.

- ☆ Total Depravity
- ☆ Unconditional Election
- ☆ Limited Atonement
- ☆ Irresistible Grace
- ☆ Perseverance of the Saints

These five points are going to answer two basic questions: 1) What can man do about his sin? 2) What has God done about man's sin?

I. Total Depravity

Summary

Total depravity means that because of sin, mankind in his *total* person—mind, heart, and will—is both guilty and corrupt (*depraved*) and therefore he is unable to do anything toward his salvation.

The opposing view (Arminianism or others who would reject Calvinism) says that because God commands man to repent and believe the gospel, he must therefore be able to do so.⁶

How sin affects your mind

Let's first look at how sin affects your mind—your thinking. [Please turn to John 3] Nicodemus, a Pharisee, comes to Jesus at night to question him regarding His teachings. But Jesus responds by saying 'Nicodemus, your mind will not understand My teachings until you are born again.' Look at v.3 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot *see* the kingdom of God." Meaning, until the new birth happens, you are completely blind—spiritual blind—to the things of God.

But you are also spiritually deaf. Later in John 8, when Jesus was preaching to the Jewish leaders, they were completely missing what He was saying. In **John 8:43** He says "Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to *hear* my word." That's how sin affects your mind. You were born into this world spiritually blind and spiritually deaf to the things of God.

⁶ R. Bruce Steward, *The Doctrines of Grace in the Gospel of John: a brief study from the pages of Scripture* (Pensacola, FL.: Chapel Library), pg. 2

How sin affects your heart

Secondly, how does sin affect your heart—your feeling? I don't want you to get the wrong idea. Sin is not *merely* an intellectual problem. Sin is chiefly a heart problem. Your sinful heart is not *neutral* when it comes to God.⁷ Aldous Huxley once said “Most ignorance is invincible ignorance—we don't know because we don't want to know.”⁸ And that sums up what Jesus says in **John 3:19-20** “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people *loved* the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things *hates* the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.” This is the offensiveness of the gospel. You were born hating God. Jesus said in **John 15:18** “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.” People refuse to come to God not because they lack information, or the right opportunity but because they want nothing to do with Him. That's how sin affects your heart.

How sin affects your will

How does sin affect your will—your doing? Here's the sticking point of all sticking points. In what sense is your will free? [Please turn with me to John 6]. We've been here the last two weeks. Jesus is speaking to the crowd the day after He feeds 5,000 of them miraculously. He says in v.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.” What is Jesus saying? Jesus is *not* saying “I'm closing my heart to you.” He's *not* saying “I'm closing up Heaven so that even though you want to come in, I'm shutting the door in your face.” No. He's saying ‘You have no ability to believe in the gospel, unless God the Father makes you believe.’ The

⁷ The British philosopher Bertrand Russell who was an atheist once said, “It's in our hearts that the evil lies, and it's from our hearts that it must be plucked out.” Source: <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/media/daily-broadcast/addressing-the-human-condition> accessed February 23, 2018

⁸ Iain Murray, *D.M. Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 57

problem is on your end. *You cannot come to God because you do not want to come to God.*

The problem is that you both love and hate your sin. You hate your sin because you know that because of it you are a monster. Our depraved minds imagine unspeakably evil things. When I was in the hospital with Josiah, do you know where my sinful mind led me in my thinking? ‘I wonder what kind of sympathy I could get if Josiah died?’ And then as I was preparing this message, my sinful mind thought ‘I bet they will think I’m being super transparent if I share that with them.’ Who has thoughts like that? Sinners do.⁹ You hate yourself because of such sinful thoughts. But you also love your sin, and refuse to part with it on your own. Because that would mean that you would have to love God with your whole heart. You would have to give Him control of the throne. And sinners refuse to part with that.¹⁰ That’s how sin affects your will. Yes you have a free will. You always choose exactly what you want. But because you were born spiritually blind to God; and because you were born with a heart that hated God; you would never choose God on your own. That’s why Jesus said “No one *can come* to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” Albert Einstein once said, “It’s easier to denature plutonium than to denature the evil spirit of man.”¹¹

⁹ “Poor ignorant souls for want of light in God’s Law, they look upon their sins, as we do upon the stars in a cloudy night; they see only the great ones of the first magnitude; and here one, and there one: But if they were further enlightened, and informed aright, they might behold them as those infinite ones in the fairest, frosty winter’s midnight.” Iain Murray, *Old Evangelicalism*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), pg. 25

¹⁰ “It is from the power of this principle that the difficulty of conversion ariseth: as there is no greater pleasure to a believing soul than the giving itself up to God, and no stronger desire in him than to have a fixed and unchangeable will to serve the designs of his honor; so there is no greater torment to a wicked man, than to part with his carnal ends, and lay down the Dagon of self at the feet of the ark.” Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God Vol. 1*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker House Books, Reprint 1979), pg. 138

¹¹ Source: <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/media/daily-broadcast/addressing-the-human-condition> accessed February 23, 2018

The Gospel Vice

Benjamin Morgan Palmer a preacher in the nineteenth century here in America recounts a story on a Monday morning after Lord's day. This visitor appeared and said "You preachers are the most contradictory men in the world; you say, and you unsay, just as it pleases you, without the least pretension to consistency." Palmer responded "Well, what now?" The man said "Why yesterday you said in your sermon that sinners are perfectly helpless in themselves—utterly unable to repent or believe and then [you] turned around and said that they would all be damned if they did not." "Well," Palmer responded, "there is no use in quarreling over this matter; either you can or you cannot. If you can, all I have to say is that hope you will just go and do it." After a few moments of silence, the man's demeanor changed and choked out the words "I have been trying my best for three whole days, and cannot."¹²

That's what sin has done. Sin has rendered man are unable to come to God on his own, because in his heart of hearts he does not want him. You must come to Christ to be saved, but because of sin you are unable to. If someone were to say "then God is unjust because He holds man responsible to do something He can't do." Imagine someone owes a massive debt. Yet because of their loose living, they don't have any money to pay it back. The fact that they now are unable to pay it, doesn't remove their responsibility to do so.¹³ Yes they are in an impossible situation. But they are responsible nonetheless.

¹² Iain Murray, *The Old Evangelicalism*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), pg. 16-17

¹³ John Benton, *Evangelistic Calvinism: Why the Doctrines of Grace Are Good News*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 26

This answers our first question: What can man do about his sin? Nothing. He's shut in. There's no hope.¹⁴ All is lost if man is left to his own. That's the doctrine of total depravity.

II. Unconditional Election

Summary

Unconditional election means that God choose or predestines man to salvation apart from any foreseen conditions. God doesn't elect on foreseen faith, nor does He reject based on foreseen sin. Rather God chose some to salvation because of His great love for sinners and His passion to glorify His own name. The opposite view teaches that God elects based on foreseen faith. All those that God sees will believe, He chooses for salvation. In Calvinism, election is the cause of faith. In Arminianism or other systems, faith is the cause of election.

Predestination is not the formative principle of Calvinism

There are some who think that predestination is the most foundational principle of Calvinism. It's not. God's grace is. His free and loving favor on undeserving sinners. Election and predestination are the fruit—the effect—of grace.¹⁵ God elects *in order* to show His kind heart. In light of everything we have just seen, why should God choose anybody?

¹⁴ “Now I think I hear passing through the congregation at this moment the whisper of many hearts who are saying, ‘This is very discouraging. We like to hear “Only believe, and you shall be saved” ‘...Would to God we could bring you, not only to discouragement, but to despair of yourselves. When you shall feel you are powerless we shall have hope for you, for then you will leave yourselves in the hands of him who can do all things. When self's strength is gone, God's strength will come in...I do not want to rouse your activity, you unconverted people: I want to rouse you to the conviction that you are lost, and I pray God the Holy Spirit may convince you.”
Iain Murray, *The Old Evangelicalism*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), pg. 53

¹⁵ B.B. Warfield says here “The doctrine of predestination is not the formative principle of Calvinism, the root from which it springs. It is one of its logical consequences, one of the branches which it has inevitably thrown out...the central truth [is] complete dependence upon the free mercy of a saving God.” *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield, Vol. 5: Calvin and Calvinism*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, Reprinted 2003), pg. 357

Loved from before the foundation of the world

[Please turn to John 17] This is Jesus' high priestly prayer before He goes to the cross. The greatest prayer ever prayed. We get to hear inter-Trinitarian dialog as God the Son addresses God the Father. I want us to see two things here. **First**, consider how Jesus recognizes that there are a certain set of people that God the Father has given God the Son.

v. 6 "I have manifested your name to *the people whom you gave me* out of the world. *Yours they were, and you gave them to me,*"

v. 9 "I am praying for *them*. I am not praying for the world but *for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.*"

Secondly, notice that this group was not robotically, stoically, or dispassionately given to the Son. Jesus prays in v. 23 "I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and *loved them even as you loved me.*" Father loves the elect even as He loves the Son. How does He love the Son? v.24 "you loved me *before* the foundation of the world." Christian, Father loves you like He loves His own Son. With an infinite, eternal, unchangeable love. That's why He chose you. You ask "Didn't He choose to love me because I chose to believe in Him?" No Jesus specifically says in **John 15:16** "You did not choose me, but I chose you."

Doesn't God choose everybody?

Some object at this point and say that God chooses everybody, or at least He draws everybody, and then He leaves it up to them to choose Him back. In **John 12:32**, "Jesus says And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." So the logic goes, that at the cross Jesus purchased enough grace for every single person, making it possible for people to choose salvation or reject it. This is called prevenient grace.¹⁶ Two main problems with this

¹⁶ Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevenient_grace accessed February 24, 2018

view.¹⁷ **First**, Jesus is not saying this. By ‘drawing all people’ He’s saying that salvation is not limited to Jewish people, but He will save people from every tribe and tongue and nation. **Second**, Jesus uses this same language in **John 6:44** but there He makes it clear that everyone who is drawn, is saved. There is no such thing as drawn people that will not be saved. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise *him* up on the last day.” God’s choice is the decisive cause in our salvation. Ours is not.

Unconditional election is good news for unbelievers

And this is good news for unbelievers. How? Because nobody in this room, nobody listening to my voice can say “I’m not the kind of person that God chooses. Or I’ve done horrible things—God would never choose me.” Listen, the only type of people that God chooses are the worst type of people. God only chooses the least likely type of people to be saved, because there is no such thing as someone who is more likely to be saved. As one author has said “The witness of Scripture is that God has chosen all types, from sensuous party-going Samson to cunning, lying Jacob, and from beautiful, gentle Esther to the murderous religious bigot, Saul of Tarsus. He has chosen poor and rich, respectable citizens and despicable criminals, heterosexuals and homosexuals, all as objects of his transforming grace.”¹⁸ Unconditional election is the only hope for anyone to be saved. If you are thinking “How do I know if I am one of those God has chosen?”¹⁹ Don’t look at yourself—what you’ve done. The question is “Will

¹⁷ There are two additional problems. First, those who choose salvation are doing it from some inward goodness that they have—either a greater humility or a greater intelligence or some other thing that those who don’t choose don’t have. So those who choose salvation in effect are righteous in themselves to some degree over those who do not. Secondly, as Jonathan Edwards says “For the Spirit of God, by assisting in the alleged manner, becomes not the efficient cause of those things, as the Scriptures do certainly represent him. If God be not the proper bestower, author, and efficient cause of virtue, then the greatest benefits flow not from him; are not owing to his goodness; nor have we him to thank for them.” *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 548

¹⁸ John Benton, *Evangelistic Calvinism: Why the Doctrines of Grace Are Good News*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 13

¹⁹ *ibid*, pg. 13-14

you have Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior?” If your answer is a sincere yes, then you can know that God has chosen you. That’s the doctrine of unconditional election—God the Father has chosen some to salvation to give to His Son Jesus Christ not based on anything in them but only because of His free love towards undeserving sinners.

III. Limited Atonement

Summary

Limited atonement means that when Jesus gave up His life on the cross, He actually and decisively died for all the sins of those whom the Father has given them. He perfectly secured the salvation of all the elect through His blood and righteousness. The opposing view is that Christ died for all people such that it makes salvation possible by removing legal obstacles that prevent man from being pardoned. In Calvinism, the atonement guarantees salvation. In Arminianism, the atonement *merely* makes men savable.

“I lay down my life for the sheep”

There are several places in John that demonstrates that Jesus died specifically for all those the Father gave Him—John 11:50-52, John 15:13-15, John 17:9. But perhaps the clearest place is in **John 10** [please turn there with me]. Look with me at **v.11** “I am the good shepherd. *The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*” He says the same thing in **v.14-15** “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and *I lay down my life for the sheep.*” Now we know that Jesus is not referring to all humanity as sheep here because in **v.3**, He says “The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” There is a distinction between sheep who hear his voice and others (the gospel of Matthew calls these others goats—**Matthew 25:32**), and a distinction between those who follow Him and those who do not. This is very clear when He tells the unbelieving Jews in **v.26** “...but you do not believe *because you are not among my*

sheep.” The reason they didn’t believe is because they were not of Jesus’ sheep. He could have said it the other way and completely changed the meaning. He could have said ‘You are not my sheep *because* you don’t believe.’ He didn’t say it that way. People believe because they are sheep of Jesus. People don’t believe because they are not His sheep. Being His sheep is decisive in our believing. So put together v.26 with v.15. The unbelieving Jews were not among Jesus’ sheep (v.26), and therefore were not among those whom Jesus died for (v.15).

A less loving point?

This seems to always be the hardest point out of the five points, mainly because it *seems* at least on the surface to be less loving than the other view. But after a closer look, this is not the case. Arminianism claims that Jesus died for all people in the same way. But this death doesn’t actually save anyone. Listen to Charles Spurgeon here: “Ask them what they mean by [Christ died for all men]. Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of all men? They say, ‘No, certainly not.’ We ask them the next question—Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of man in particular? They answer ‘No...Christ has died that any man may be saved *if*’—and then follow certain conditions of salvation.”

Dear congregation, that view of the atonement is the less loving view. Christ does not give *Himself* to you in it. He only makes your salvation possible. You have to do the rest. The question is this: what did the death of Christ accomplish? Did His death save sinners, or did His death make sinners savable? How bizarre would it be for Jesus to have died only to make sinners merely savable and then turn around and refuse to pray for them? In **John 17:9** He says “I am praying for them (the elect—His sheep) *I am not praying* for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.”

Objection: You can't tell the unconverted that God loves them²⁰

At this point, someone may say “but this means that you can't declare God's love to the unconverted man.” That's false. Over and over again in the Gospels, Jesus by His actions and His words declared His love to the whole world. He, the great friend of sinners, did not constrain His love only to his disciples, or even to those He knew would be His disciples. **Matthew 9:36** says “When he saw the crowds, he had *compassion* for them.” When the rich young ruler came to Him, who, in the end, walked away in unbelief, **Mark 10:21** says “And Jesus, looking at him, *loved* him,” Jesus lamented with broken heart over Jerusalem “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (**Luke 13:34**) And finally the most famous verse in the Bible “*For God so loved the world*, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Therefore it's false to say that if we believe in limited atonement that we can't declare God's love to the world.²¹ Jesus did. Of course He has a special and particular love for His people. Only believers can say, as Paul did, “the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, *who loved me and gave himself for me*” (**Galatians 2:20**). But we *can* share the gospel like Spurgeon and Whitefield did declaring God's love in Christ to lost sinners.

Limited atonement is the best news!

How is this doctrine of limited atonement the best news? Because it means that legalism has been dealt the death blow. When Jesus said “It is

²⁰ I received immense help in this section from Iain Murray's *The Old Evangelicalism*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), ch. 4: The Cross—The Pulpit of God's Love

²¹ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:43-48

finished” on the cross (**John 19:30**), everything necessary for your salvation was accomplished. He is your righteousness. There is nothing more that you need to add. He’s everything you need. There is nothing that can happen in your life that can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord (**Romans 8:39**). Your atonement is definite.

IV. Irresistible Grace

Summary

Irresistible grace means when the Holy Spirit’s decides to give the new birth, this grace is irresistible and effectual so those whom God elected, and those whom Jesus died for will come alive and believe the gospel.

On the other hand, Arminianism teaches that this grace is always resistible and must be cooperated with by faith. In Calvinism, the new birth *causes* saving faith. In Arminianism, faith causes of the new birth.

The Spirit gives life; the flesh is no help at all

In John 3, after Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again, Nicodemus responded in v.4 “Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” Nicodemus is perplexed. His response on one level is totally right. How is this possible? If you have not ever asked that about the new birth before, it might be because you don’t understand it. Jesus is teaching Nicodemus that no one can believe the gospel, no one can repent of their sins, no one can see the true beauty of God until they are born again. So Nicodemus recognizes that he had nothing to do with his first birth, he’s basically asking “Does that mean I have nothing to do with this second birth as well.” Jesus responds by using a different analogy. v.8 “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” What’s He saying? Just as you don’t have any say in where the wind blows, so you don’t have in say in the

Holy Spirit causing the new birth. It is not your faith that causes the new birth. It's the new birth that causes your faith. John made this clear at the opening of his gospel. He said in **John 1:12-13** "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Or as Jesus said it in **John 6:63** "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all."

Listen to what B.B. Warfield says here "If the gospel is to be committed to the dead wills of sinful men and there is nothing above and beyond, who can be saved?...I am told to repent if I would be forgiven; but how can I repent? I only do what is wrong because I like it and I can't stop liking it or like something else better simply because I am told to do so, nor even because it is proved that it would be better for me. If I am to be changed, something must lay hold of me and change me."²²

Objection: But we must *receive* the gift

But I imagine here, someone might say "Yes the Holy Spirit must lay hold of you, but you have to receive the gift. And that is something you can resist. God's grace is resistible." How do we answer that? First by saying that when we talk about irresistible grace, we don't mean that God's grace can never be resisted. Of course it can. That's why there is still sin in the world. Stephen told the Jewish leaders in **Acts 7:51** "You always resist the Holy Spirit." Irresistible grace means there comes a time when God the Holy Spirit says "Enough!" and He overcomes that resistance by the new birth. Jesus wasn't hanging outside Lazarus' tomb saying "Lazarus will you receive this gift of life?" No. He commanded him "Lazarus come forth." Lazarus received it, because He came to life. That is the picture of the new birth. As one author said "The purpose of God's irresistible grace is not to violate the human will but to liberate it from it's bondage to sin. The sinner is not saved *against* his will. Indeed, no

²² John Benton, *Evangelistic Calvinism: Why the Doctrines of Grace Are Good News*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 13

violence is done to the will at all. Rather, the moral direction of the sinner's will is changed as the result of the new birth."²³

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation

Think of that. Believer, why do you now desire to love and follow Christ? Because the Holy Spirit has brought you back from the dead. Regeneration, or the new birth is the greatest miracle that happens today on planet earth. Now you can see the kingdom of God, whereas before you were blind to it (**John 3:3**). Now you can hear the Shepherd's voice, whereas before you were deaf to it (**John 8:47**). Now you love Christ whereas before you hated Him (**John 14:15**). Now you are willing to hate your life in this world for His sake (**John 12:25**). Now you can love fellow Christians (**John 13:34**). Rebirth is not the product of human invention. Rebirth is not making a decision for Christ. Rebirth is not something that happens in other religions or philosophies. It cannot be experienced through drugs or alcohol. It can only be experienced through the Spirit of the Living God. That's the doctrine of irresistible grace.

V. Perseverance of the Saints

Summary

Perseverance of the saints means that those whom the Father has elected, and the Son died for, and the Spirit gave new birth to will persevere in the faith all the way to death and will never go to hell. The other view teaches that some truly born again, saved persons call fall away from God and therefore be eternally lost.

The promise of perseverance

[Let's look at John 10] Here Jesus is going to unfold the two parts of this point, perseverance and preservation. First **perseverance**—**John 10:27** Jesus says "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Jesus

²³ *ibid*, pg. 24

makes two explicit promises here. If you are one of His sheep you persevere in the faith. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and *they follow me.*” They follow me. This isn’t a command, it’s a declaration. Jesus is declaring it as a fact. Believe, you cannot fail. Take hold of that promise dear congregation. You may feel like you aren’t improving at all. You may feel like you are a worse sinner now than you were a year ago. But Christ is saying “You will follow me, you won’t ultimately fail. That’s why I went to that cross. I’ve already bore your failures on my body, look to Me. Look to Me!”

The promise of preservation

Secondly Jesus promises that if you are one of His sheep you will be **preserved** all the way to glory. Look at **v.28-29** “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.” Jesus’ sheep can never be lost. Your making it to heaven does not depend in any way on your successes or failures in this life.²⁴ As You are not the one who holds on to Jesus He holds on to you. R.C. Sproul once commented on this verse. Imagine a big stout father walking his three year old on the sidewalk during rush hour traffic. What is the best way this father would protect his son? Would he say “Son, grab ahold of my finger and don’t let go otherwise you could be killed by the cars?” Or would this father take his son’s his little fist and engulf it in His massive grip and say “Don’t worry son, I won’t let go of you?” We are secure, not because we hold tightly to Jesus, but because He holds tightly to us.”²⁵ That’s the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

²⁴ Martin Luther—“It is the sweetest mercy of God that it is not imaginary sinners he saves but real sinners. He upholds us in our sins and accepts our work and life, worth as these are of total rejection. he goes on point it until he perfects and consummates us...We escape his condemnation because of his mercy, not because of our righteousness...Grace is given to heal the sick not to decorate spiritual heroes.” John Benton, *Evangelistic Calvinism: Why the Doctrines of Grace Are Good News*, (Carlisle, PA,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 28

²⁵ R.C. Sproul, *St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary: John*, (Orlando, FL,: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), pg. 196

Final summary

So those are the five points. John Piper helpfully boils it down to essentially one question “What was the decisive cause of your faith in Christ?” ...Was it God or yourself? And the Calvinist says, “The decisive cause of my faith was God” and the Arminian says, “The decisive cause of my faith in Christ is myself.”²⁶

Application

Implication 1: When there is a wrong conversion model a sense of sin and the fear of God disappear.²⁷

I imagine someone listening to this message and saying: ‘so what?—Why does *this* even matter? There are all sorts of evangelicals having all sorts of success—one view is no better than the other.’ I guess it matters how we define success. What is success? Charles Spurgeon helps put it in perspective “Too many think lightly of sin, and therefore think lightly of the Savior. He who has stood before God, convicted and condemned, with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he be pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, and to live to the honor of the Redeem by whose blood he has been cleansed.” Back to thinking about Larry Nassar. His sentence is 175 years, and that communicates the seriousness of his crime. Much of evangelicalism today does not carry with it a messages that makes sense considering that God is threatening humanity with everlasting punishment.

²⁶ <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/watershed-differences-between-calvinists-and-arminians> accessed June 30, 2017

²⁷ Iain Murray, *The Old Evangelicalism*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), pg. 65

There's a unhealthy spiritual schizophrenia when it comes to modern theology, and a large part of it is due to how we view conversion.²⁸

Implication 2: Because Calvinism is true, all Christians feel its influence in their prayers and theology.

This theology is inescapable even for those who reject it, because all evangelicals pray like a Calvinist. MLJ said this about his pulpit partner leading up to the war "If one of us was a little bit Calvinistic in his preaching, the other was always Calvinistic in his praying!"²⁹ How do all evangelicals pray about their lost friends and family members? "Lord please change their heart. Cause them to believe. Save them." We don't pray silly things like "Lord be a gentlemen, honor their free will, let them do it on their own."³⁰

Implication 3: Calvinists are just as guilty and vile and full of sin as everyone else, and there are non-Calvinists who are more loving and generous than Calvinists

Calvinism is not an inoculation from selfishness and self-righteousness. It shows how depraved we can be to take these truths and use them to puff ourselves up over those who do not believe them. Think of the irony of that. "I'm better than you because I believe I'm more evil than you believe.?" Sadly it's easy to become like that. I've been like that. It's our our very nature to take something and use it in such a fashion as to look down our theological noses at someone else. The truth is, is that some of the most loving evangelicals that I know haven't held these truths. I want them to. Someday they will. But shame on me, and shame on any of us, if we are not known for our large heartedness.

²⁸ "The reason why grace is so little appreciated in our days is that the transcendent majesty and sovereignty and holiness of God are so little appreciated, and we do not see more than a half step between God and our sinful selves." Albert Martin, *The Practical Implications of Calvinism*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), pg. 8

²⁹ Iain Murray, *D.M. Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 133

³⁰ cf Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield, Vol. 5: Calvin and Calvinism*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, Reprinted 2003), pg. 356

These doctrines were designed to create humility, and gratitude and love. May we seek those things as much or more as we seek doctrinal precision.

Implication 4: God is aiming at a transformed heart not merely a changed mind

The Christian life is to be a life of examination. **2 Corinthians 13:5** “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”³¹ What does this look like? Albert Martin says “the question I must ask is, ‘Have I been the subject of God’s workmanship?’³² the question is is not the sincerity of my decision, or my resolve, or my whatever-I-want-to-call-it. The question is not, ‘What have I *done* with reference to Christ and his salvation?’ The essential question is this: ‘Has God done something in me?’ Not, ‘Have I accept Christ?’ but, ‘Has Christ accept me?’ The issues is not ‘Have I found the Lord?’ but, ‘Has he found me?’³³ Dear congregation, have you been brought to see the great corruption of sin that is festering like gangrene in your heart? Are you as Heidelberg 89 says “genuinely sorry for sin, [do you] hate it more and more, [do you] run away from it?” Do not think that Calvinism is merely about having your theological itch scratched. The question is “Have you seen God? Have you been brought near to him?³⁴ Did he shatter you? And then have you felt the kiss of forgiveness fresh upon your cheek?³⁵ Have you tasted and seen how great Jesus is in forgiving someone like you? Does He possess you and you Him?

³¹ 1 Peter 1:10 “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.”

³² Ephesians 2:10 “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

³³ Albert Martin, *The Practical Implications of Calvinism*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), pg. 14

³⁴ *ibid*, pg. 9

³⁵ *ibid*, pg. 22

Implication 5: “The doctrines of grace make evangelism among spiritually dead sinners possible.”³⁶

I was asked once how come that when many people come to believe in the doctrines of grace, they stop evangelizing? Good question. Four answers. **1)** This is not the case in John’s gospel. After Jesus taught on election in John 6, He immediately evangelized the lost crowd. **2)** The greatest evangelists and missionaries in history—George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, Andoniram Judson all believed in the doctrines of grace. **3)** Often when a person first comes to the doctrines of grace, they don’t know how to articulate the gospel with all this new information. It often takes a season to get their theological feet under them. **4)** Often those who believe in the doctrines of grace stop evangelizing because a man-centered view of evangelism is still pervasive. Why should we evangelize *ultimately*? How do you answer that? Why should you share the gospel with others? Because you can guarantee the outcome? No because “the supreme object of this work is to glorify God.”³⁷ Too show the world that Jesus Christ is too precious to be ignored. The ultimate aim of evangelism is worship of the risen Son of God not conversion. We evangelize so that we can help other lost souls see a vision of God that will captivate them for eternity. That’s why Jesus came into the world—to glorify His Father. He overcame all impossibilities to save us demonstrate the worth of who He is. “these are 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.” (**John 20:31**)

³⁶ John Piper, *Five Points: Towards a Deeper Experience of God’s Grace*, (Scotland, Great Britain,; Christian Focus Publications, 2013), pg. 83

³⁷ Iain Murray, *D.M. Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, (Carlisle, PA.,; The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 90