

Various Objections to Efficacious Grace

Even after observing the biblical evidences, there are still some who object to the case for irresistible regenerating grace. The Arminian objects to the doctrine of irresistible grace, questioning why God would ever demand repentance if men are so enslaved to sin that they cannot respond. Arminians do not believe any person is so enslaved to sin that he is insensitive to or cannot respond to the gospel (because prevenient grace mitigates the effects of depravity and the noetic effects of sin on the mind). Thus, they place faith before regeneration and the response to spiritual things prior to any spiritual life which enables one to respond. They fight against not only man's depravity but also God's election and irresistible grace.

Faith Is Involuntary

It is argued that if man is passive in regeneration, and regeneration is the necessary forerunner to conversion—which is composed of repentance and faith—then faith is an involuntary act. It is argued that if regeneration precedes faith then man does not come to Christ in faith. Efficacious grace, therefore, is unbiblical, for the Scriptures clearly call for conversion by means of repentance and faith (cf. Mk 1:15, John 3:16, Acts 3:19, Acts 16:31, 2 Pet 3:9).

The doctrine of efficacious grace does not necessitate that faith is involuntary. The converse is in fact true, for by efficacious grace God regenerates the mind, giving spiritual life and illumination to the mind. The individual understands the call of the gospel and the need for conversion, responding in faith and repentance. Furthermore, the individual's faith is hardly involuntary. It is rather a joyous reflex of the spiritual life given through efficacious grace. The man is still called to respond in repentance and faith, which he does. He is not completely passive in salvation; it is only in regeneration that he is passive. His responsibility is to exercise what is commanded in the Scriptures—repent and believe.

Condemnation Is Unfair

The Arminian may also contend that if it is impossible to resist efficacious grace then God cannot condemn those who are not regenerated, for they had no power to overcome. How can God still find fault since the concept of total depravity makes a response to the gospel apart from the effectual call impossible?

Paul has answered this very contention in Romans 9:19–21. Why does God still find fault, for who resists his will? Paul's answer is that God is completely sovereign and can do as he pleases with his creation. The fact that he does not regenerate all and that the non-elect cannot be converted apart from his regeneration does not remove every man's personal responsibility for sin.

Men are never condemned to hell because they are not God's elect. Men are condemned because of the sin that pervades their being. So called, "non-election" is never given as the reason men are eternally punished. However, election, which brings regeneration and conversion, is the only reason that men can spend eternity in heaven. Furthermore, unsaved man will undergo eternal punishment because he willfully resists the call of God. He wants nothing to do with God and hates him with his entire being (Rom 3:10–18).

God Is Partial

The Arminian may also argue that efficacious grace does not coalesce with Scripture's teaching that God does not show favorites. Romans 2:11 states, "God shows no partiality." However, this contention fails to account for the context of the passage. Paul states this to show that "ethnic background or racial privilege will not deter God from blessing those who do good or from punishing those who do evil.... God will reward each person on the basis of what that person has done" (Mounce, *Romans*, p. 93).

Man Is Coerced

If efficacious grace is irresistible, then every man's will is coerced, for he certainly does not have the power to resist. Man is, therefore, a machine. The argument for efficacious grace contends just the opposite; having made the human spirit voluntary and self-moving, God does not influence the will in a manner that destroys its voluntariness, nor does he coerce it in any way. God does not drag sinners "kicking and screaming" into his kingdom. God knows his creatures and their natures; thus, he changes the very hearts of men to crave him and his Word. He renovates their will and desires by giving them a new heart. God's omnipotent Spirit, powerfully moves on sinners' hearts to make those who were formerly unwilling, willing to come to Christ. There will be no one in heaven who is frustrated because God "forced them to believe." Efficacious grace changes the heart, and man willingly desires salvation.

Conviction Is Resistible

What about the conviction that a man may feel and yet resists (Acts 7:51)? If efficacious grace is irresistible, then why is there ever a struggle that goes on in a person's heart before he is regenerated? This would surely indicate that he is resisting God's regenerating grace, would it not? Many are lost in hell who might have been saved if they had not resisted God's grace.

By efficacious grace we do not mean to deny that men may, in some sense and to some extent, resist the Spirit, the possibility of which is clearly indicated in Scripture. However, when God sets his efficacious grace on someone he will not ultimately be rejected. Man can resist up to a point, but once he has been instantaneously regenerated he finally fully understands his need and is enabled to respond in faith.

However, conviction in an unbeliever's life does not necessitate that efficacious grace is to be extended, for persons who are not elected and who finally perish, "may have some common operations of the Spirit," which they will resist and cast off (Westminster Confession of Faith, 10.3). All men always resist God's general calling, for it is not extended as an effectual call. Not all conviction leads to efficacious grace which actually regenerates.

Evangelism Is Squelched

If efficacious grace is truly irresistible, due to man's total inability, and only regeneration will cause him to exercise faith, then there is no need for evangelism. We cannot rightly exhort one to repent and seek God, for it is impossible. He cannot respond to this appeal. Why evangelize?

Though the statement is correct, that the natural man cannot respond appropriately to the gospel, that does not negate the need to proclaim the gospel openly and freely. Indeed, Paul explains that the Scriptures must be proclaimed, and men everywhere are to be called to repent (Rom 10:14). No one knows who God is working in effectually and who is only receiving the general call. The command is still the same: give the gospel, for we know that God uses his Word to impact the heart and effect change. Rather than being a detriment to evangelism, the doctrine of efficacious grace should be an impetus to spread the gospel zealously. God will always use his Word to accomplish his purpose (Isa 55:11).

Objections Are Answered

Wesley once asked, "How is it more for the glory of God to save man irresistibly, than to save him as a free agent, by such grace as he may either concur with or resist?" (John Wesley, *Works*, Vol 10, p. 231) Though the question is thought provoking, on what basis is it asked? What are the Scriptural grounds for it? As we have seen, the Scriptures show unequivocally that man is desperately sinful, in no way seeking God or able to save himself. He is "free" only to the extent that he sins freely; he is not free (or have liberty; cf. Rom 8:21, 2 Cor 3:17, Gal 2:4, Gal 5:1 & 13, Jam 1:25) to live righteously or to do anything pleasing to God. Indeed, man is completely sinful and in bondage to his total depravity. The only means of experiencing spiritual life is via *God's* action of sovereign grace. God takes the initiative; man is passive in regeneration.

It seems that the Arminian develops his argument based not on Scripture but chiefly upon experience and natural theology, for the Scriptures do teach that efficacious grace is irresistible. Many objections may be raised to the doctrine of irresistible grace, but each one can be answered directly from Scripture.

Conclusion

Our study has shown that all men everywhere are called to repent; however, only God's elect will respond to the efficacious call. The natural man will never heed this call if left to his unaided "free will." He can't! Men are in bondage to sin and thus their will is also in bondage; therefore, when presented with a choice of good or evil, men will always choose evil. A man will never come to salvation apart from the Holy Spirit's work in his heart.

In our examination of the various passages of Scripture it was determined that efficacious grace, which is synonymous with the effectual call and regeneration, is the grace which works in the elect individual inevitably and irresistibly to grant regeneration. Though the message of the gospel is available to all, only those whom the Father sets his love upon and draws will be regenerated.

By the work of the Holy Spirit in a man's heart, efficacious grace renders the person *willing* to believe in Jesus Christ. Though the conviction of the Spirit may be resisted for a time, it will inevitably cause the impartation of spiritual life and renew the mind of those effectually called. The Spirit then creates faith in the heart and causes the man to respond to the call to repent. Yet the individual does not come against his will; rather, his will is changed via regeneration so that he now desires the good news of eternal life. Thus, he freely comes to the decision of faith and repentance. This will inevitably take place in God's elect to produce their salvation. God's efficacious grace is irresistible; it always produces that which it desires to effect.