

The text uses the most potent language imaginable when it speaks of the supernatural power exhibited in bringing a person to believe in Jesus. On one side of the word “believe” you read of “the exceeding greatness of His power” and on the other side “according to the working of His mighty power.” The Greek Word for “power” is “dunamis,” from which we get the English word “dynamite.” It is used in Rom 1:20 to speak of the awesome creative power of God.

The second expression means: “The effectual working of the might of His strength” or “the energy of the force of His power.” The Greek word for “working” is “energia,” from which we get the English word “energy.” It is used in Phil 3:21, “according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.” This power is such that it “subdues” or brings into submission all that it desires. Yet one word is not enough to express the power that works so strongly, so Paul doubles it - “might of His strength” - i.e. the utmost power imaginable. Just as the “Holy of Holies” speaks of that which is the most holy possible, so this “might of His strength” speaks of the exercise of omnipotence. Notice the Apostle is not willing to simply say, “You believe through the power of God” or “through the greatness of that power.” He heaps up expression upon expression to convey the enormity and efficaciousness (what is certain to produce the desired effect) of this power.

Yet the Spirit of God directing Paul’s choice of words isn’t finished! He must speak of the “EXCEEDING greatness of His power”! The Greek Word for “exceeding” (huperballon) refers to the super-excellent, sublime, overcoming, or victorious greatness of His power. No amount of twisting of this passage can ever get rid of the grand truth that nothing but the exercise of divine omnipotence produces faith in Christ.

Summary: Paul piles one word upon another to express the greatness of God’s power in working salvation.

II. YOU SHOULD REALIZE THE GREATNESS OF GOD’S POWER IN SALVATION DEMONSTRATES ITS IRRESISTIBILITY

1. IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

The purpose of Paul in using such a mountain of words to describe God’s power is to show its irresistibility. When God reaches out in grace to save a person, His power cannot be thwarted by Satan, demons, or human beings.

“He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and NONE can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35).

When the omnipotent hand of God reaches down to pluck a sinner from eternal destruction who can stop Him? Can Satan and his demons “stay” God’s hand? A legion of evil spirits could not thwart Christ’s saving power in dealing with the satanically controlled maniac of Gadara (Lk 8). Can any human being thwart God’s purpose? When the false prophet and sorcerer, Elymas, attempted to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith he was immediately rendered helpless by God’s power. Sergius “believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord” (Acts 13:12). Can you short-circuit the almighty power of God? Are you stronger than the omnipotent God? It is silly to contemplate such nonsense! “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh”

(Psa 2:4) at any puny individual who dares to challenge His purpose to carry out His sovereign will.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:8-10).

Think about the word “workmanship.” Just as a doll, telephone, or book cannot resist being made, neither can those God determines to regenerate frustrate God’s decision regarding them. The word “created” is also potent in this regard. Nothing that ever was created refused to be created. No creature could say, “I don’t want to be created” to the omnipotent Maker.

“For who hath resisted His Will?” (Rom 9:19). In Romans 9, Paul speaks of salvation in terms of God being a sovereign potter who makes “vessels of mercy” according to His good pleasure. Now a potter takes the moist clay and begins to spin it on the wheel in order to shape and mold it into what he wishes. Can the clay thwart the purpose of the potter? Can the clay decide that it really wants to be a plate rather than a water pot? Doesn’t the potter have the power and ability to create what He desires out of the clay? It is the same with the Lord God in salvation.

So by “irresistible grace” is meant that God’s grace in salvation cannot be effectively resisted. If God has determined to save a person that person will be saved. There may be resistance to the things of Christ prior to God’s time to call the sinner to salvation, but when God reaches out in “grace” to save it cannot be successfully opposed.

Paul, first known as Saul, is a perfect example of the will of God being irresistibly achieved in salvation. Saul, a self-righteous Pharisee, was leading the assault upon the Church. He was sending Christians to imprisonment and death. He hated Christianity and actually held the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death. He was so anti-Gospel that his conversion seemed inconceivable. His life was one of strong-willed rebellion against Jesus Christ. The godly Ananias didn’t even wish to speak to this man when the Lord sent him to Paul, “Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem” (Acts 9:13). Yet the Bible records Paul’s dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. Christ appeared to him and changed him forever. As Ananias relates it, “The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will” (Acts 22:14). As God Himself said, “He is a chosen vessel unto me” (Acts 9:15). He was one of the elect, separated from his mother’s womb and called by God’s grace to salvation and to the preaching of the Gospel (Gal 1:15-16).

2. THE EFFECTUAL DRAWING OF GOD

It is important to realize that God’s exercise of His mighty power in salvation is such that the sinner is effectually drawn to Jesus Christ. It is not as if you are kicking and screaming to avoid coming to Christ and God forcibly drags you by the hair in a strong-armed fashion. God deals with you as a rational human being. He powerfully influences your mind, will, and affections. You are drawn by a divine impulse to Christ just as surely as a net is drawn to a boat or shoreline. “No man can come to me except the Father

which hath sent me DRAW Him” (Jn 6:44). The word “draw” (helkuo) is actually used for the drawing of a net by fishermen in order to capture a school of fish. This provides a perfect illustration of God’s grace in salvation.

At one point the missionary Paul arrived at the city of Philippi and began preaching the Gospel. At a prayer meeting by the riverside, Lydia, a woman from Thyatira, a seller of purple-dyed goods, listened to Paul preach. She was unconverted at the time. Yet Luke tells you this about her, “whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14). No arm-twisting took place. God didn’t have to brow-beat the woman into submission to Jesus. A quiet, inward work of mighty divine power took place. She was effectually “drawn” to Christ so that she willingly and enthusiastically embraced the Gospel. “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power” (Psa 110:3). God’s power working in the heart of a person makes them willing and eager to come to Christ. Without an opening of the heart Lydia could not have believed. This is how the effectual drawing of God works.

Centuries ago an African, Augustine, born of a Christian mother and a pagan father, tried to find peace. He first of all tried to live it up. He lived the most vile life possible, including a great deal of sexual immorality. He did just what he wanted to do, breaking God’s commandments without hesitation. Yet he knew something was missing in his life. So he tried the pagan religion of Manicheanism. He tried philosophy at the university. But it was all to no avail. One day while in his garden, he heard a voice say, “Take, read; Take read.” The voice came from some neighborhood children who were playing a game. Yet he was moved to pick up the Bible by these simple words of a child’s game. He opened it at random and read:

“Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting, and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:13-14).

An immediate change came over Augustine as God powerfully applied the words of this text to his soul. He went and told his friend, Alypsius, “I have been regenerated.”

This is the way God works. In the midst of your selfishness and hardness of heart, He comes with irresistible force and changes your life. Often Christians will testify that in some mysterious manner they were powerfully drawn to God!

“Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee” (Psa 65:4).

Summary: God’s grace is irresistible because His power is mighty and therefore people are effectually drawn to Christ when it is displayed.

III. YOU SHOULD REALIZE THE GREATNESS OF GOD’S POWER IN SALVATION IS COMPARED TO CHRIST’S RESURRECTION (V-20)

God’s power which raises the sinner from spiritual death is the same as that “which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead.” There is a striking analogy between these events. The resurrection of Christ is the

pledge and procuring cause of the spiritual resurrection of His people. A believer, contemplating Christ as risen and seated at the right hand of God, has an illustration of the spiritual change which has taken place in his or her life. Paul emphatically teaches that Christ’s resurrection from the dead is comparable to the granting of spiritual life to a sinner.

“Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened us [made us alive] together with Christ, (by grace are ye saved) And hath raised us up together, and made us to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:5-6).

In the resurrection of Christ (as in salvation) there was put forth DIVINE POWER to accomplish it. It was not some angelic, much less human power, which raised Jesus from the dead. There was a divine energy employed in the resurrection. Thus, never think that conversion is produced by the free will of man. Never think that your salvation can be ascribed to your willingness to accept the Gospel or your own ability to believe.

“For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that WILLETH, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Rom 9:15-16).

Observe the IRRESISTIBILITY of God’s power in Christ’s resurrection. All the soldiers and the high priests could not keep the body of Jesus in the tomb. All their precautions and efforts were futile! Satan and all his hosts were helpless to prevent the resurrection. Death itself could not hold Christ in its chains. He burst forth from the grave and nothing could restrain the power which raised Him. Thus, by comparison, no sin, no corruption, no demonic power, no human being, can ever stay the hand of God’s grace when it intends to save an individual.

Note also the EVERLASTING NATURE of God’s power displayed in Christ’s resurrection. “Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him” (Rom 6:9). All those to whom God’s power grants saving faith are also alive forevermore. You can never lose what God’s power has produced. “Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me [Jesus Christ] shall NEVER DIE” (Jn 11:25).

Summary: Christ’s resurrection is a perfect picture of the power of God in salvation.

MAIN CONCLUSION:

1. SPIRITUAL LIFE INVOLVES A MAGNIFICENT DEMONSTRATION OF GOD’S POWER

Man’s depravity is so entire and his hostility toward God and the Gospel so great, that in every instance he will resist and reject Jesus Christ apart from the working of God’s great power. Man’s spiritual deadness demonstrates the incapability of a person coming on his or her own to embrace Christ by faith.

“The Gospel is too spiritual for a sinner’s carnal mind; too humbling for his pride; too exacting for his rebellious will; too lofty for his darkened understanding; too holy for his earthbound desires” (Arthur W. Pink).

Man doesn't wish to confess that he is lost, undone, and justly condemned before God. With an unchanged mind he will never embrace the Gospel. To talk about man's free will is to ignore the state of the man behind that will. The natural man cannot come to Jesus Christ. This is an impossible task for a depraved sinner!

Just look at the case of a compulsive drinker. An alcoholic is not free. Technically he has the external choice of drinking or not drinking. He could drink a coke or some tea, instead of Jack Daniels. His feet could walk away from the bars and carry him to his wife and family. He may even claim that he doesn't have to drink and could stop at any time. But really there is only one thing he can do. He can no more stop drinking than he can stop breathing. He has to drink. He is a slave to alcohol. He is driven by his addiction to consume his booze. He does exactly what he wants to do. Nobody has to compel him to drink. No one is forcing liquor down his throat against his will. He greatly desires to drink. When he awakens from a drunken stupor he doesn't swear off alcohol. He says, "I will seek it yet again" (Prov 23:35) despite the harm it is doing to him and his family.

This is similar to the problem which every person faces spiritually. Being "dead in trespasses and sins," you have no spiritual life. You have no ability to do what is right, for you are a slave to sin. You can no more believe in Jesus Christ than a cold, hard, stone could do so. You need a spiritual resurrection by the exceeding greatness of God's power! Nothing else will do! Unless you are granted spiritual life through the power of God working within you, you cannot believe the Gospel.

"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in POWER, and in the Holy Ghost" (I Thess 1:5).

Note carefully what Paul says. It is not enough just to hear the Gospel. You can hear the message of the Gospel, but you will respond like that person who said, "What poppycock!" The "power" of God must be present. There must be a mighty work of the Holy Spirit within you (i.e. a spiritual resurrection) for you to repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

What then must the sinner do? Acknowledge your helplessness, and cry out for divine intervention. Plead for salvation to be granted! Ask God to do a powerful work of grace in your soul. Jesus said to the woman at the well:

"If thou knewest the gift of God, and Who it is that saith to thee, Give me drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water...Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (Jn 4:10, 14).

This living water is the pardoning and justifying grace of God. Since all grace is found in Jesus Christ, He is free to grant it to anyone He pleases. It cannot be earned or merited. This grace makes alive dead sinners, thus it is called "living water." This grace grants spiritual life to the sinner. It refreshes and revives like a river of water flowing in a parched, desert land brings life to such a barren place. This grace maintains and supports spiritual life in your soul. The allusion to a spring of water implies that it is constantly available for a believer. Whoever drinks of this grace has "everlasting life." For God's grace in salvation never runs dry before a person is brought to heaven.

Notice, Jesus says to "ask of Him" this "living water." He alone can give you what you desperately need!

2. THE MIGHTY POWER OF GOD CONTINUES TO WORK WITHIN YOU AS A BELIEVER

There are some who would like to argue that the apostle is not speaking of the power of God exercised in bringing a person to Christ, but of the power which shall be exercised on those who already believe. This misses the point.

"But nothing is more evident, than that the apostle speaks not of a power which *shall be* exercised on believers, but of a power which *is* exercised upon them, and is continued to be so; and is the same with that which was put forth when they first trusted in Christ, and must be continued to carry on and perfect the good work. Now, if the exceeding greatness of God's power is necessary to carry on and perfect the work of faith, it must be much more so to produce, plant, and form it at first" (John Gill).

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph 3:20).

The mighty power of God, which produced your salvation, is constantly at work within you as a believer as you go through this life. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). God doesn't just start you out, by giving you spiritual life, and then leave you on your own. No, He never ceases working within you by His power. He affects your will, creates godly desires and longings within you. He moves you to read the Bible, pray, keep God's commandments, go to church, etc. He is constantly stimulating your will, keeping your faith from failing, convicting you of sin, encouraging and prodding you on in your new life. At times God must shake you out of your spiritual lethargy. He turns you back to Him after you have sinned and motivates you to pray for forgiveness and strength to resist temptation. If God has started a "good work" within you, He will never stop. God's divine power cannot be frustrated. God, who is working mightily in you as a believer, will keep you from falling, and make you fit for the indescribable glory of the future.

3. OBJECTION: DOESN'T THE BIBLE SAY PEOPLE CAN RESIST THE HOLY SPIRIT?

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:51-52).

Often this passage of Scripture is presented as positive proof that God's grace in salvation is resistible. In answering this objection it must be emphasized that the Bible does not contain any contradictions. You must always seek to harmonize the teachings of Scripture. If you believe this passage teaches that God's grace is resistible then the Holy Spirit cannot be omnipotent. You must believe that the Holy Spirit tries to convert people yet despite the use of "the exceeding greatness of His power" cannot do so. He fails in His mission. He is thwarted by the stubborn human will. How does this agree with the words of Jesus in John 3:8?

"The wind bloweth where it listeth [wishes], and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

If the wind, directed by God, blows about as it desires, doesn't the Spirit of God do the same when it comes to a person being "born again"? If you argue that God's grace is resistible, then you cannot hold that the Holy Spirit is omnipotent. If you deny the Spirit's omnipotence, then you have cast aside the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

You must seek to reconcile Acts 7:51-52 with passages like "For who hath resisted His will?" (Rom 9:19) and "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand..." (Dan 4:35). You cannot just pick and choose the passages you like and ignore those which do not support your position. It is all the Word of God. A careful consideration of Acts 7:51-52 will demonstrate that it does not teach resistible grace.

It is not denied that the operations of the Spirit upon the heart may be opposed at first. However, God's grace cannot be effectively resisted. For the Holy Spirit opens the heart of the sinner, bestows the graces of faith and repentance, and irresistibly draws the person to Christ. Whatever resistance existed in the heart of the sinner is melted by the Spirit of God so that the person is made willing in the day of God's power (Psa 110:3).

However, Acts 7:51-52 does not speak of the INTERNAL OPERATIONS of the Spirit of God graciously working to bring conversion.

"If the Jews 'resisted' the Holy Spirit, how can we say His power is irresistible? The answer is found in Neh. 9:30 - 'Many years didst Thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by Thy Spirit *in Thy Prophets*: yet would ye not give ear.' It was the Spirit speaking by and through *the prophets* to which they 'would not give ear.' It was not anything which the Holy Spirit wrought *in them* that they 'resisted,' but the motives *presented to them* by the inspired messages of the prophets" (Arthur W. Pink).

"The resistance made by these persons was not to the Spirit of God in them, of which they were destitute, but to the Spirit of God in His ministers, in His apostles, and particularly Stephen; not to any internal operation of His grace, which does not appear to have been in them, but to the external ministry of the word, and to all that objective light, knowledge, evidence, and conviction, that it gave of Jesus being the Messiah...The word $\alpha\nu\tau\iota\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\tau\epsilon$, signifies a rushing against, and falling upon, in a rude and hostile manner; and fitly expresses their ill-treatment of Christ and His ministers, by falling upon them and putting them to death, which is the resistance here particularly designed, as is manifest from the following words, ver. 52" (John Gill).

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IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

The Irresistible Power of God in Working Salvation

BY JACK A. WERTH

"And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead..." - Eph 1:19-20 KJV

Two college students attend a church service because of a friend's invitation. They both hear the Gospel preached. One afterward says, "How guilty I am before God. I need Jesus Christ." He repents and believes. The other says, "What poppycock! I don't need this religious rubbish." Suppose I told you that these two college students were twins, raised in the same home and under the same circumstances. Why such different responses to the Gospel? Why do two people, hearing the very same message, react in very opposite ways? The common response is that God simply leaves it up to the individual to either "accept" or "reject" the Gospel. Some have suggested the idea that God votes for your salvation, the Devil votes against it, and you cast the deciding vote to break the tie. In other words, the individual's choice is ultimately the deciding factor. You have the power or ability (i.e. the free will) to control your eternal destiny. Thus, placing your faith in Christ is a simple matter which any person can exercise and obtain eternal salvation. The Bible, however, teaches just the opposite.

I. YOU SHOULD REALIZE THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S POWER IN SALVATION

In Ephesians believing in Christ is said to be a work of the most astounding divine power. As Jesus Himself taught, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him" (Jn 6:44). No amount of begging, pleading, or coaxing by a minister or evangelist will move a person to come to Christ. Divine power must be exerted or else you will remain in a state of unbelief.

"To crush the pride of man, to subdue his contrary will, and to reclaim a soul captivated by Satan, so that he cheerfully embraces Christ, takes a special work of God" (A.W. Pink).

The omnipotent God is the "Author" of faith (Heb 12:2). Faith is not a human contribution to salvation, but "the gift of God" (Eph 2:8). Thus, you read of "the faith which is by Him [God]" (Acts 3:16) and those who "believed through grace" (Acts 18:27).

"But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (II Thess 2:13).

Note carefully Paul's order of thought. First, there is God's election of an individual to salvation. Second, there is the "sanctification" or setting apart by the Holy Spirit. Finally, there is belief of the truth of the Gospel. The powerful work of the Spirit in granting the new birth (regeneration) precedes the individual's ability to believe the Gospel. Paul is referring to this power in Eph 1:19-20.

