

## GOD'S OVERWHELMING GRACE

### *Salvation, Divine Sovereignty & Human Responsibility*

Christianity is the largest world religion with over 2.4 billion people. Christians make up 31% of the world's population, and this figure consists of the various denominations within Roman Catholicism (the largest constituency of Christendom, 1.3 billion), Protestantism (slightly less than one billion), Orthodox, and many other smaller groupings.

Christianity, as we know though, is dependent upon a personal and living relationship with God through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to Timothy, **1 Tim. 2:3** *For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; 4 Who will have all men to be saved ...* Does this mean *everyone* (πάντας ἀνθρώπους), every person who claims to be a Christian is saved and going to Heaven? Furthermore, does this statement even mean every human being, - male and female, - will ultimately be saved? Surely, as many say, eventually, since God is all-powerful and can achieve whatever He desires, - ... since He is *not willing that any should perish*, therefore, *all should come to repentance* (II Peter 3:9) ... Does that mean all will be saved, without exception ... regardless if they are religious or having no religion?

The doctrine which teaches all will be saved is known as 'universalism'. They teach there is no such thing as a literal hell and an eternal punishment. Some who espouse this doctrine also believe even Satan will be saved. Universalists teach all mankind will ultimately be saved through Christ whether or not faith is professed in Him in this life because God's qualities of love and goodness would not permit such an abhorrent concept as everlasting judgment ... and they quote such verses as **1 Tim. 2:5** *there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; 6 Who gave himself a ransom for all* and **1 Jn. 2:2** *he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.* ... Therefore, since God will save all, there is no need for a Hell and, consequently, there is no such place.

What kind of a person is a 'universalist'? Where would you find someone who would teach and preach such a false doctrine? ... How many times have you been to a funeral where the minister buries/cremates the deceased in 'the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ' and the person being buried or cremated had no knowledge of saving grace? ... Such a celebrant is a universalist who is deceiving the people with the false doctrine that everyone will be saved, there is no hell, and there is no requirement to be saved by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

Recently we have been reading through and considering Spurgeon's chapter in his autobiography, the chapter entitled "A Defence of Calvinism". In it he teaches God chose from before the foundation of the world to save you and He put together all the steps whereby you would come to a personal knowledge of salvation through His Son. He arranged your life for that purpose.

Now, part of that doctrine teaches when God sets His mind to save you, there is *nothing* can thwart His plan ... How could it, for He is the omnipotent God, as Job declared, **Job 42:2** *I know that thou canst do every thing.* ... There is no barrier to your salvation He cannot tear down! In eternity He *decreed* and planned your salvation, and in time, - to save you, - He effectually and effectively applies His grace. He overcame your resistance to the Gospel and He brought you through to the saving knowledge of His Son ... **Jn. 6:37** *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out ...* **39** *And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing [none], but should raise it [them] up again at the last day ...* **44** *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him ...* **45** *It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me ... no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father ...* And the response of many of His hearers was incredulity, - they would not believe for they considered they needed to contribute in some way to their salvation, and so they deserted Jesus with the words, **60** *This is an hard saying; who can hear it?*

His true followers accepted it though, for example, Paul, **Rom. 8:28** *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* And he went on to explain, **30** *Moreover whom he did predestinate [predetermined, foreordained, decided beforehand], them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. ...* He is the God of order and He is the *Author* of our salvation. Every intricate piece of His salvation plan was meticulously arranged before a single blade of grass appeared on this earth! ... And before creation was created God had already loved you and determined to save you. ... If it had not been for God's effectual calling, you would never have been saved! ... You might have heard the Gospel, and you might even have seriously considered it, but unless the Holy Spirit of God awakened you to receive it, you would never have claimed it as your own.

To receive it you had to be 'quicken'd' spiritually. In order to respond you first of all had to be made alive spiritually ... to be 'born again'. Just as a dead person

is non-responsive to earthly matters, so also a spiritually dead person is non-responsive to Heavenly issues. It means nothing to them, even though they might try to understand. For salvation to be achieved requires spiritual regeneration ... and that is something we cannot do for ourselves for a dead person cannot make themselves alive, therefore, as Paul explains, **Eph. 2:1** *you hath he [God] quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins ...* We were by nature *dead* to God and under the influence of *the prince of the power of the air (v.2)*, we were *children of disobedience*. By such behaviour we contradicted the perfect law of God, and were by nature *the children of wrath, even as others*.

Consequently, there was no difference in us and anyone else for *all* have sinned (Rom. 3:23) and *all*, - because of the sinful nature, - were travelling towards a lost eternity in the everlasting punishment of Hell. ... **Eph. 2:4** *But God*, wrote Paul, in order to effectuate our salvation ... God interrupted and entered where He was not invited, "He called me long before I heard, Before my sinful heart was stirred, But when I took Him at His Word, Forgiven, He lifted me" ... **4** *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,* **5** *Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)*

God made you alive in the Lord Jesus Christ. He saved you by drawing you to Himself. You did not begin the process ... but He did ... and He saw it through! You may have 'kicked and screamed' against Him. You may have put up every obstacle to His grace ... but inevitably, - because God is infinitely stronger and mightier than you and I, - *He won* and through His sovereign grace, **Eph. 1:11** *we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:* **12** *That we should be to the praise of his glory.*

If I would boast in anything of me contributing to my salvation, I am withholding from Him *the praise of his glory*. ... If I consider myself to have contributed one single speck towards my salvation, then I am denying Him and contradicting His word when it clearly states, **Jonah 2:9** *Salvation is of the LORD.*

And for me to say, - as some would erroneously claim to say, - God, You can do so much, but *You* have to wait until my will allows *You* entrance into *my* heart ... for me to believe such a thing is tantamount to saying to God I have the power to keep *You* out! I have the power to *deny* *You*! ... Such a declaration comes from the rebellious heart of Hell, from Satan himself!

God *is* sovereign. No truly born-again believer can deny He is not! God *is* sovereign ... *but also*, every human being is unique and when we come to believe in Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord it is a personal and intimate decision. ... We are not robots for God to 'flick a switch' and we automatically and mechanically believe and 'made into' Christians. No, we are real individuals with whom the Holy Spirit of God is working to bring us to receive saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we do so with every cell of our being!

This process is known in theological terms as 'irresistible grace', and at the heart of God's irresistible grace is the transforming power of the Holy Spirit whereby He takes a person and He shapes and forms within them the means by which they will come to recognise and acknowledge what Jesus Christ has done for them. And yes, they might 'wriggle and squirm', but such is the arresting power of God He overcomes all their opposition and they will confidently receive the claims of the Gospel by accepting Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

Such true conversion is not an artificial, or a contrived, or a fabricated acceptance ... neither is it having your name on a church roll ... but it comes with an overwhelming knowledge that Jesus died for me on the cross of Calvary and through the precious blood He shed I am saved. He opened my eyes to see, He opened my mind to understand, and He opened my heart to receive ... *and I believed*. God overcame every resistance I put before Him to save me.

At first, I understood it only from my perception for I believed God had to wait for me to respond ... but when I became a Christian I gradually began to understand my salvation was all of Him for He loved me long before I loved Him. He had already set in place all the steps for me to follow ... and I didn't even know ... but He was drawing me to Himself so that ultimately, I would put my faith in Him for salvation. ... He saved me, and I believed in Him for my salvation. He convinced me, and I trusted. ... Without Him, though, I never would have received His saving grace for I never would have believed ... I never would have called out to Him to be saved so, therefore, that is how I am convinced salvation is all of His grace for if He had not pursued me, I would never have believed.

Grace first contrived the way  
 To save rebellious man ...  
 Grace first inscribed my name  
 In God's eternal book ...  
 Grace taught my wandering feet  
 To tread the heavenly road ...

Grace taught my soul to pray  
 And made mine eyes o'erflow;  
 'Twas grace which kept me to this  
 day,  
 And will not let me go.