

Lesson 17

Part Six – Soteriology: The Doctrine of Salvation

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 - i. Definition of Efficacious Grace

In our last study, we looked at the common grace of God. This week, we are looking at the efficacious grace of God. And what is this? Efficacious grace is narrower in scope than common grace and as the name indicates it is efficacious or effective in those to whom it is given. All who are recipients of efficacious grace respond to it and become believers. Efficacious grace is also called special grace in contrast to common grace. A concise definition of efficacious grace is “the work of the Holy Spirit which effectively moves men to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior.” By its very nature it is also irresistible... by changing the heart, this grace makes man perfectly willing to accept Jesus Christ unto salvation and to yield obedience to God.”

Question: Does God “woo” individuals with this grace or does He “draw” them with it? There are some theologians who maintain that God “woos” us or “courts” us, hoping that He will be successful and we will make the right decision. In John 6:44, Jesus says, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...” What’s the difference between “wooing” and “drawing”? The word translated as “draw” is the same word that is used to refer to the drawing of water from a well. As R.C. Sproul once remarked, no one is capable of “wooing” water from a well but he can certainly draw it! Does this mean that God drags us kicking and screaming into salvation against our will? No. Remember, regeneration gives us a new will, new dispositions, new likes and dislikes, a new worldview, etc. Before He draws us, God makes us willing to be drawn.

- ii. Explanation of Efficacious Grace

There are eight observations which can be made about efficacious grace which will help us to understand its precise meaning:

1. Not everyone is called with an “effectual call.”

Efficacious grace is limited to God’s elect. Many are called with a general call but not everyone receives the effectual call of God. If they did, then everyone would be saved.

2. Efficacious grace is effective because it is never rejected; it is irresistible.

Again, God changes our will, giving us the desire to be restored to Him. 1 Corinthians 1:23-24 emphasizes that the gospel is foolishness to unbelievers, but it is the power of God and it is effective in those who believe.

3. Efficacious grace does not operate contrary to man’s will.

This probably goes without saying but there are many who reason that, if man has a free will, then any talk of God’s changing that will without the individual’s permission, would mean that God violates him in some way. Greg Laurie once commented famously that the doctrine of irresistible grace, as taught by Calvinists, makes God a “cosmic rapist” who “drags individuals kicking and screaming into heaven against their will.” This, folks, is heresy.

4. Efficacious grace involves the drawing power of God.

This is what is implied in John 6:44. Who but God can change the stony human heart, transplanting it with a heart of flesh? Also, in Romans 9:16 Paul emphasizes the fact that salvation is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

5. The work of the Holy Spirit is critical to efficacious grace.

The means whereby God provides efficacious grace is through the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit. Efficacious grace cannot be obtained via any other means.

6. Efficacious grace must involve the Word of God.

What does Romans 10:17 say? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. In Hebrews 4:12 we’re told that the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. As such, it is able to save when wielded in the hands of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Peter 1:23, Peter reminds his readers that they were born again “through the living and abiding word of God.”

7. The application of efficacious grace is toward individuals, not to groups, nor to the church as a whole.

No explanation needed.

8. Efficacious grace is from eternity.

While the application of efficacious grace takes place in time, its plan was determined in eternity past. Romans 9:11 tells us that God's plan and resolve (Gk. Prothesis) alone determined the object of His grace in eternity past. Likewise, Romans 8:30 teaches that the application of efficacious grace is as a result of having predestined certain ones to be the objects of that grace.

iii. Four Factors in the Defense of Efficacious Grace

1. It is necessary because of sin.

Ephesians 2:1 tells us that we were dead in trespasses and sin. Dead men can't make the initial move toward God. God must initiate our salvation through the effectual call that comes with regeneration.

2. It is effective because God cannot fail.

Romans 8:29-30 tells us that none can ever be lost because God has infallibly assured every step of our salvation will come to pass. This is why Paul says with such certainty what he does in Romans 8:35-39.

3. Efficacious grace is fair because God is just.

Can anyone legitimately accuse a perfect, holy, and righteous God of being unjust? No. In Romans 9:14 Paul asks, "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there?" And how does he respond? "May it never be!" (aorist subjunctive of prohibition; the strongest possible objection in the Greek language).

4. Efficacious grace is fair because man is still responsible to believe.

This is perhaps the most confusing aspect of efficacious grace. Even though God is sovereign in salvation, His sovereignty does not remove man's responsibility to believe. We may not understand this entirely but no one will ever be in hell who will be able to say, "I am here because God didn't choose me." They will universally acknowledge, "I am here on the basis of my unbelief."

Next up? Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church