

In conversion, does the Holy Spirit operate upon men separately and apart from the written scriptures?

(by George Battey)

Many people believe the Calvinistic doctrine of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon men. This doctrine is called “*irresistible grace.*” It is believed that, if a person is fortunate enough to be one of the “*elect*” (one “*chosen*” for salvation) God sends forth the Holy Spirit upon that person. The Spirit then works a miracle upon the heart of the “*chosen*” one and brings about conversion. It is believed this miracle of the Holy Spirit is not performed thru an instrument, like the written scriptures. Rather, this miracle is performed directly and miraculously by the Holy Spirit operating upon the sinner’s heart.

Such a miracle is needed, supposedly, because the sinner’s heart is so depraved, so hard and stubborn, that only a miracle from the Holy Spirit could penetrate into the hardened heart and bring about conversion.

So, until the Holy Spirit works directly – separately and apart from the written scriptures – all the Bible reading in the world, all the sermons preached, all the persuasion offered from the scriptures – none of this will convert the sinner until the Spirit performs a miracle.

QUESTION: Does the Bible actually teach this? Does the Holy Spirit truly operate upon sinners, separately and apart from the written scriptures, in order to convert the sinner and save him?

That’s what this study is about.

WHY THIS DOCTRINE IS FALSE

The quick and simple answer to this week’s question is simply: *NO!* The Holy Spirit does not operate directly upon a sinner’s heart in order to convert him from his sins and save him.

I’m going to list four reasons why this Calvinistic doctrine of “*irresistible grace*” is false doctrine:

1) **No scripture teaches a direct operation of the Spirit in conversion.**

Those who believe the Spirit operates directly upon sinners believe they have scripture to prove their case. However, when those scriptures are examined carefully, it is discovered they do not prove the point. No scripture teaches a direct operation of the Spirit in order to convert sinners.

This fact alone should concern everyone. We are instructed to “*Test all things; hold fast what is good*” (1 Th 5:21). We are instructed, “*If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God*” (1 Pet 4:11). If there is no scriptural proof for a doctrine, that doctrine is false. Doctrine with no scripture indicates the doctrine did not originate from heaven. If a doctrine did not originate from heaven, there’s only one other source for the doctrine: In Mt 21:25 Jesus asked, “*The baptism of John — where was it from? From heaven or from men?*” False doctrine originates from men. Calvinism and the direct operation of the Spirit originates, not from God, but from men. It is false doctrine.

2) All cases of conversion demonstrate the Spirit operates thru an instrument.

Observe the Book of Acts very carefully. In every instance where men and women were converted, there was never a direct operation of the Spirit upon the sinner. Rather, the Spirit used an instrument. He operated indirectly thru the instrument of the scriptures.

I have time for only one example:

Acts 8:26-29 (NKJV)

26 *Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert.*

27 *So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship,*

28 *was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.*

29 *Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."*

This is the story of the Ethiopian eunuch being converted. You will notice an angel was employed in the conversion of the eunuch, but you will also notice the angel did not appear to the sinner. No, the angel appeared to the preacher and gave him instructions which resulted in the preacher meeting the sinner.

Next, you see the Spirit is involved in the conversion process, but the Spirit did not speak to the sinner. He did not operate directly upon the sinner. Rather, the Spirit gave instructions to the preacher to join himself to the chariot which was passing by.

Now, if the work of the angel and Spirit accomplish anything, it will only be thru the words spoken by the preacher. As the story unfolds, the preacher uses the scriptures, preaches about Jesus and the sinner is converted when he believes the story and is baptized.

QUESTION: What caused the sinner to believe in Jesus enough to be baptized for the remission of sins? (Acts 2:38)

The cause was *the message preached*. The preacher used the scriptures and persuaded the sinner to believe. Since the Spirit is the author of the holy scriptures, the scriptures function as the Spirit's instrument. Thru the instrumentality of the scriptures, the Spirit persuades men to submit to God. Thru the instrument of the word, the Spirit converts men to God. For this reason the word of God is called the "*sword of the Spirit*" (Eph 6:17).

3) If the Spirit operates directly, God becomes guilty of partiality.

Think about this carefully. If men cannot be converted without a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, then God is guilty of partiality unless He gives this miracle to every single person on earth. A direct operation of the Spirit is irresistible. That's why this doctrine is called "*irresistible grace*." No mortal man is powerful enough to resist the supreme power of the Holy Spirit.

If this irresistible, direct operation of the Spirit is not given to everyone, then God is showing partiality, but the Bible says plainly, "*God shows no partiality*" (Acts 10:34). Since not every man will be saved (Mt 7:13), and since God shows no partiality, we know an irresistible operation of the Spirit to save man does not ever occur.

The conclusion is: *The Spirit does not operate directly upon sinners.*

4) Man's free-will is destroyed by such a direct operation of the Spirit.

God created man with a free-will (Lev 1:3). This means man has the ability to make choices, even choices contrary to the desires and wishes of God Himself (Josh 24:15). God did not create men as robots who have no choice. He made mankind with a free-will. He wants service and loyalty from men because they freely choose to give Him their service, love and loyalty (2 Cor 9:7).

However, a direct operation of the Holy Spirit is irresistible. A direct operation destroys man's free-will. The false prophet Balaam is a case in point (Num 24:1-2). He tried to curse Israel, but every time he tried to curse, the Spirit operated directly upon him, not to convert him, but to force him to bless Israel. Balaam was incapable of resisting the power of the Spirit. He could "*of his own will*" (Num 24:13) do nothing contrary to what the Spirit was forcing him to do. Eventually, when the Spirit left Balaam alone, no

change is detected in Balaam's character. The direct operation of the Spirit did not change his moral or spiritual character (See Rev 2:14).

So a direct operation of the Spirit destroys the free-will of man and God would not destroy the very part of man which He Himself created. Instead of a direct operation, God uses an indirect operation. He uses His divine word in an effort to persuade men (Acts 26:28).

In conversion, the Holy Spirit never operates upon man separately and apart from the written word. He always uses His word as an instrument to persuade the sinner and Christian alike. (See 2 Cor 5:20).

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

Five steps in God's plan of salvation:

- 1) **Hear** the word of God (Rom 10:17).
- 2) **Believe** Jesus is the Son of God (Mk 16:16).
- 3) **Repent** of sins (change from living a sinful life) (Acts 2:38).
- 4) **Confess** your faith verbally before men (Rom 10:10).
- 5) **Be baptized** (immersed) in water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Mark 16:16 (NKJV)

*16 He who **believes** and is **baptized** will be saved; ...*

Acts 2:38 (NKJV)

*38 Then Peter said to them, "**Repent, and** let every one of you **be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**; ...*

After being baptized, one must continue to be faithful (Acts 2:42; Mt 28:20; Rev 2:10).