



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“The Doctrine of Efficacious and Irresistible Grace”

TRANSCRIPT

Time to begin our class. And what we're going to do on these Monday nights from now on, if this works, is we're going to try and begin at 7:30 and close some time between 8:20 and 8:30. And then we're going to go in the next room and have a cup of coffee or a coca cola or something like that. And then after you've had a chance to relax a little bit and stretch we're going to ask you just to sit down in there and those of you that have to go, of course, are free to go but those of you who would like to stay and ask some questions, I will stick around and we can sit around and just have a good discussion of the things that we have talked about or any other thing that has to do with our theology that we have been studying. And we will close that sharp every night at 9:00, the discussion. It will not go on interminably. So you can count on being out at 9:00 and you do not have to stay for the discussion, of course, that is optional. Let's begin with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the privilege for the study of the word of God again. And we ask Thy blessing now upon us as we consider again one of the great subjects of its wonderful pages, the grace of our God and our salvation. And we commit each one to Thee and pray Thy blessing upon each.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] For our Scripture reading tonight we’re going to turn to a passage in Luke and also one in Acts. And the first is in Luke chapter 14 verses 16 through 23 and it is our Lord’s parable of the great supper. Our subject for tonight is “Call to glory” or “The Doctrine of Efficacious and Irresistible Grace.” And beginning at the sixteenth verse of the fourteenth chapter of Luke we read,

“Then said he unto him, a certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were invited or bidden shall taste of my supper.”

Now, let’s turn over to Acts chapter 16 and read a passage that we have referred to once, at least, in our series already. Acts chapter 16 and we’re going to begin reading at verse 11. The context is the context of Paul’s missionary journey into Macedonia and at Troas he had the vision of the man of Macedonia and heard him say come over and help us. And so the apostle, as he reflected upon what had happened to him over the past

months, decided it was the will of God and begin to make his way to Philippi. And we read in verse 11,

“Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”

Our subject, as we said, is tonight the subject of efficacious grace. Remember in our last study last week, we discussed the question why are many non-Christians good men? And we gave as the reason common grace from God. Grace through the light of creation, grace through the light of conscience, which has God has implanted in each one of us, grace through the light of human government, a divine institution designed by God to restrain sin, and we also suggested that some theologians have said that perhaps that common grace of public opinion is responsible for restraint of sin. And then we added to that conviction of divine punishments and rewards. And we said that this common grace is responsible for the fact that sin is restrained and, therefore, in human experience it is possible for us to have many good men who nevertheless are not Christian men. We are not to think, thereby, that their goodness is really a product of human nature. It is really the product of ultimately of God’s provision of common grace.

I think I also added that there were influences from the gospel itself from the word of God which also had an affect upon those who were not Christians. These influences from the gospel were influences that are short of their own salvation, but it is true to say that the gospel does have an affect even in the hearts and lives of men who do not know Jesus Christ. And so when we as Christians look around us and see a good man according to human standards we should not be surprised. We should remember that we are judging men by human standards to start with. By divine standards, even the best of human men fall short for his standard is the standard of perfection. And consequently, all human beings manifest ultimately the sign of their depravity but outwardly judged by human standards some men appear to be good men. That goodness itself is a goodness that is ultimately to be traced to God to this common grace to the grace, as I say the grace of the light of God in nature the light of God in the word of God.

Now, in this study we wish to go beyond the external calling of common grace to the internal calling of efficacious grace or infallible grace. I think the term infallible grace is really a little better term than irresistible grace for irresistible grace connotes the impression of someone who is actually opposing that which God does. And we will point out the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man is not to overrule his will but to so work within his will that he spontaneously desires to do the will of God. So the question we are addressing ourselves to tonight is how and why do we come to Christ, we Christians? How do we come to Christ? Why do we come to Christ? This is the divine side of our salvation. If you talk to the average man who sits in the pews of evangelical churches and if you were to say to him how do we come to Christ almost inevitably he would answer we come to Christ by faith.

Now, that is only the human side. Ultimately, we shall talk about that and we should talk about the terms of salvation which men have suggested we come by faith in baptism, we come by doing good works, we come through the ordinances, we come by faith only. We'll talk about that but we're interested tonight in the divine side of the

answer to that question how do we come to Christ and why do we come to Christ.

Humanly, I say you would answer it, how? We come by faith. Why? Well because we want to be saved. That’s the human side. So let’s stop thinking about the human side for a while and let’s think about the divine side. Why do you come to Christ? How do you come to Christ? The answer to this is not easy in the sense that is easy for us to understand the moment that we think about it because most of us have not really thought about it very much. It is easy in the sense that the Bible is very plain about these things, but in spite of the fact that the Bible is relatively plain different answers have been given. I’m going to suggest some to you now.

I’m still in my introduction, by the way. Let’s just give some of the answers that have been given theologically and remember we said last week that Pelagius was a British monk who did not believe in total depravity. He believed that essentially that man could come to God on the basis of a decision of his own will. Now, he believed also some other false doctrines, but he believed that man essentially could gain access to God on the basis of his works. And so theologians throw the word Pelagianism around in order to describe anything that suggests a delusion of the pure grace of God in our salvation. Who was the first Pelagian? Well, the first Pelagian was Adam in the Garden of Eden. After he fell, the first thing that he did was to construct a garment out of fig leaves. This was, at least, an outward expression on a desire of his part to cover his nakedness and to make himself acceptable by his own deeds. So he was the first Pelagian, Adam in the Garden of Eden.

Now, Pelagianism has been common in Christianity down through the centuries and it will remain within the confines of the general expression of Christianity because it is a satanic method of deluding the pure grace of God. For example, when a man stands in the pulpit and says now God has done everything for your salvation that he could possibly do now it is your responsibility by a decision of the will receive Jesus Christ as your savior and does not explain that that decision is ultimately a decision produced by

God but says that salvation is on the basis of human volition that man is a Pelagian. He has deluded the gospel of the pure grace of God attributing our salvation in part to human will. And ultimately the reason one man believes and another man does not believe is because one man has one type of will and another has another type of will. In other words, we don’t really start at the same place. Some of us have something others do not have, ultimately.

All right now we’re going to talk a lot about Pelagianism as we get into the things that have to do with our salvation. What was the answer of Pelagius to the question of how do we come to Christ? Well it was essentially this; since Pelagians deny grace altogether they say or said I came by myself. Now, you don’t have to read much in the Bible to know that is wrong. So other answers have been given. And another answer is the answer of the semi-Pelagian. The semi-Pelagian has given this answer “I wanted to come and God helped me.” He denies any grace exercised by God on us before we come to Christ we call that prevenient grace, grace before we come, but admits cooperative grace if man first chooses to come. In other words, if I choose to come God will help me. So he says “I wanted to come and God helped me.” That is the answer of the semi-Pelagian.

Arminius was a theologian, who at one time was a Calvinist, left his Calvinism for what has now come to be called Arminianism. Jacob Arminius, the Dutch theologian, has influenced quite a bit of professing Christianity. For example, this is meant to be no offense, the Methodist church has been largely Arminian in its theology. And let me at this point say it is entirely possible for a man to be a Christian man and be touched by Pelagianism and touched by Arminianism. Now, what you have is a man who has genuinely believed in Jesus Christ and has received salvation as a free gift but his thinking is not sound in the word of God in some of its features. And so we must not be interpreted, and I do not wish to be interpreted as suggesting that the man who holds Arminianism or Arminian theology is, therefore, not a Christian. As a matter of fact, it is

entirely possible that he might be a better Christian than ninety percent of the Calvinists if he is true to what he knows from the word of God and a Calvinist who holds right views is untrue to what he holds. And I told you the story that is supposed to have been told about the Mr. Spurgeon who was one of the strongest of the Calvinists. When one came to him who was a rather sour Calvinist and doubted that any Arminian would ever be in heaven, he asked Mr. Spurgeon if he thought he might see John Wesley in heaven. Mr. Spurgeon said no, he didn't think he would see John Wesley in heaven. And his friend who asked the question seemed rather pleased with his answer because he interpreted it as meaning that since Wesley was an Arminian that he probably would not be in heaven. And as he was turning to leave Mr. Spurgeon continued he said no I don't think we'll see Mr. John Wesley in heaven. He said because John Wesley will be so close to the Lord in heaven that he'll be lost in the brightness of his glory whereas you and I are going to be on the fringes of our Lord. So do not let me offend any of who might be Arminian in your theology tonight by allowing you to think that what I'm saying is you're not saved if you're not a Calvinist. That is not true. These are different views that could be given to this question.

Now, Arminian's believe that men were depraved. They believe that ,but they believe that Jesus Christ died for men and because Jesus Christ died for men he provided sufficient grace for men so that if men cooperate with the sufficient grace that God has provided through the sacrifice of Christ they will come to Jesus Christ. Sufficient grace provided by the sacrifice of our Lord becomes efficient grace when we cooperate with it. So the Arminian says God gave me sufficient grace to come because Christ died and I cooperated that's how I came to Jesus Christ.

The Lutherans have a slightly different view. The Lutherans refused to admit that the reason unbelievers are not quickened is due to a sovereign of withholding of efficacious grace. They believe like the Calvinists that men are totally depraved. They believe that if God does not bring a man to Jesus Christ, he will not come but they

believe that when a man comes to Christ he comes by virtue of God’s grace but if he does not come it is because he resists the grace of God. So the Lutherans believed God brought me and I did not resist. So here we have the Pelagian who says how do we come to Christ? We come by ourselves. The semi-Pelagian say we want to come and God helps us. The Arminian says God gives me sufficient grace to come because Christ died and I cooperate. The Lutheran says God brought me and I did not resist. The Calvinistic view is God brought me to Christ. He believes that men are totally depraved. He believes that they will not be saved if God does not exercise grace. And he believes that God exercises grace in the hearts of the elect and that they are infallibly brought to God. And he also believes that God does not give enabling grace to others. So God brought me to Christ. God sovereignly chose and God sovereignly brings.

Now, we’re going to look tonight at what the Bible has to say with regard to these things. It’s rather surprising I think that in spite of our differences in theology in a practical way most genuine Christians respond the same to the life of God. For example, when we come to the question of God’s sovereignty in the world, the Calvinist and the Arminian unite in believing that God is sovereign in the world. If we wish that something happened in the world we pray to God believing that he is able to do and he alone. Furthermore, in our own salvation we believe that God has saved us and when it comes to prayer for someone else’s salvation, we believe that it is God alone who accomplishes salvation and the Arminian and the Lutheran and the Calvinists each gets down upon his knees and prays that God will save so. So when it comes to the practical outworking often those who, when they sit around and discuss theologically, disagree in the practical outworking they agree.

I read the little pamphlet some time ago written by a man who was trying to set forth the Calvinistic view. And he was trying to explain what he believed and in order to illustrate the fact that men really do believe that God alone saves he told what happened to him in an evangelistic meeting. He said at the conclusion of the meeting the evangelist

concluded with words something like this, “I have presented the gospel to you tonight as you can see God has done everything for your salvation that it is possible for him to do in the gift of his son Jesus Christ. Now, it is your responsibility to believe in the Lord Jesus.” And with that he said the evangelists turned to him and he was sitting on the front row and he said, “Now will Mr. So and so close our meeting in prayer.” And he said “I was presented with an enigma. I was in a quandary. I was now asked by the evangelists to pray to a God who had already exhausted his resources for he had done everything that it was possible for him to do for them to be saved.” But he said “The decision now rested with those who were in the audience. He said my reaction was to pray to them [laughter] not to God.” But he said “Actually I did precisely what that evangelist expected me to do, what I wanted to do, and what those people wanted me to do to, I prayed that God would do something else a little extra and bring some to faith in Jesus Christ.” Now, really what he prayed for was efficacious grace. He prayed that God would so work in the hearts of those who were there, according to his will, that some would respond and believe in Jesus Christ.

So the Arminian and the Calvinist unite in the practical in a common recognition of the fact that salvation is of the Lord. One of the interesting conversations, I think, is the conversation that Charles Simeon had with John Wesley. Simeon was a noted Calvinist, a wonderful godly preacher, very effective. And Wesley, we all know Wesley.

Now, this is Simeon’s account of his conversation with Wesley, December the twentieth 1784. “Sir I understand that you are called an Arminian and I have been sometimes called a Calvinist and, therefore, I suppose we are to draw daggers. But before I consent to begin the combat with your position I will ask you a few questions. Pray sir do you feel yourself a depraved creature so depraved that would never have thought of turning to God if God had not first put it into your heart? Yes says the veteran I do indeed. And do you utterly despair of recommending yourself to God by anything you can do and look for salvation solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ?

Yes solely through Christ. But sir, supposing you were at first saved by Christ, are you not somehow or other to save yourself afterwards by your own works? No I must be saved by Christ from first to last. Allowing then that you were first turned by the grace of God are you not in some way or other to keep yourself by your own power? No. What then are you to be then upheld every hour and every moment by God as much as an infant in his mother’s arms? Yes, altogether Mr. Wesley said. And is all your hope in the grace and mercy of God preserve you into his heavenly kingdom? Yes I have no hope but in him. Then sir with your leave I will put up my dagger again for this is all my Calvinism. This is my election, my justification by faith, my final perseverance. It is in substance all that I hold and as I hold then. And, therefore, if you please instead of searching out terms and phrases to be a ground of contention between us we will cordially unite in those things wherein we agree.” As far as it goes, that’s a good statement.

But now let’s turn to our outline tonight. And first of all, we want to make a distinction between common grace and efficacious grace. Now, remember common grace restrains sin through reason, conscience, government, and heightens our religious sensibilities through the truth of nature and the truth of the word. In other words, common grace is all that God has done to make us religious. When you see a man who is religious but not a Christian, he has been the recipient of common grace not special grace but common grace. When you see a man who has some respect for the Bible, you see a man who has been the recipient of common grace. When you see a man who looks off at nature and says there must be a God you cannot explain creation without a god, that man has been the recipient of common grace. He’s not a Christian but he has been the recipient of common grace.

Now, it differs from efficacious grace in these ways. First in their subjects, capital A in the outline. All are the subjects of common grace. Every man has some measure of the ministry of common grace in his life. The very fact that you are a human being living

under the heavens is evidence of the fact that you have been influenced by God. All are the subjects of common grace. The elect alone are the subject of efficacious grace.

Capital B - In their nature common grace is grace that is mediated through truth whether the truth of creation or the truth of the word of God. It is mediated through truth. It comes second hand to us. Efficacious grace is immediate, directly the gift of the Holy Spirit in the heart or the inner man of the believer. So common grace comes to us through the creation through the word, efficacious grace comes to us by the Spirit who uses the truth directly within us.

By the way, will you turn with me to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 in verse 13? And I wish I had time to prove all of these points but if I did we’d have to spend three weeks on this topic. If you have any question about any of them, scripturally, come and ask me in our discussion. I’ll give you some passages to support the statements. But in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 in verse 13 remember this is the great passage 13 and 14 which James Denney called a system of theology in miniature. And in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 in verse 13 we read these words,

“But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation (there is election) through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth”

Now, remember the word sanctification is a word that means to set apart. *Hagiadzo* is the Greek word. That word means to set apart, to sanctify. A saint is one who has been set apart. If I were to take my Bible, well I’m taking this Hebrew Old Testament and this Greek New testament, and I am putting it over here on the platform, I can say that I have sanctified that book. That is I have set it apart. I have not made it holy. I have set it apart. So *bagiadzo* or sanctification or to sanctify means to set apart.

Now, notice he says we are chosen through sanctification of the Spirit. That is the

work of the Holy Spirit in setting us apart to believe in the Lord Jesus. It is a work that precedes our salvation. Notice the order of the words here, “Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” So the sanctification of the Spirit precedes our belief, precedes our salvation. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in preparing us for salvation. And so it represents the grace of the Holy Spirit which he exercises immediately in our heart preparing us to receive Jesus Christ as our savior. That’s not the only passage in which we find this. Let’s turn over to 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 1 and verse 2. And you will notice the same thing. Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ and Pope in the church at Rome.

My wife jumped on me one night for not smiling when I said that. She said why do you know that there are some people in our audience that might really believe you? How many of you do? [Laughter] Thank you I’ll go home and tell her no one did.

Now, have you found it?

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

And here again we have sanctification of the Spirit before faith and the application of the benefits of the blood of Jesus Christ. And so when we talk about the doctrine of sanctification, we should include the work of the Holy Spirit before we are saved. It is called sanctification. It is his work in setting us apart to faith. And that is a work that extends to the elect. Both of these passages link it up with the elect. Did you notice that? The elect not the Presbyterians, the elect not the Lutherans, the elect not the members of Believers Chapel, the elect. They are not necessarily the same, you know. So, one is mediate common grace through the truth whether natural revelation or the

word of God. Efficacious grace is wrought by the Holy Spirit directly in the inner man of the elect.

Capital C – “In Their Effects.” The effect of common grace is to give us superficial knowledge of God. We know he exists. It is to give us superficial senses which are religious in nature. There is a superficial restraint of sin. It is only restraint is not removal. So the work of common grace is superficial and it is transient, but the work of efficacious grace which the Holy Spirit works in the heart of the elect is deep and permanent. It brings us to the possession of life and we have that life forever. So the man who has received efficacious grace is the man who has had a work in his heart that is deep and permanent and lasting.

Roman II in our outline, “The Distinction Between External Calling and Internal Calling. Now, these terms external calling and internal calling are very similar to the terms common grace and efficacious grace and if you’re a good theologian now, as you think about this, you will see that really one of them is the cause of the other. For example, the external calling is the calling that comes to men through the preaching of the gospel. The common grace is that which instigates and produces the general calling. So in the case of internal calling, that is when we are called to faith in Jesus Christ internally by the Holy Spirit, it is the result of the working of efficacious grace. So we’re really talking about two things that are really very much the same when we talk about external calling and common grace and internal calling and special grace. Now, we could call external calling and internal calling general calling and special calling. But what we mean then by these two terms is general calling is the calling to men that goes forth when the gospel is preached and also through the testimony of God and nature. Special calling is the work of the Holy Spirit in efficacious grace by which he addresses himself to those who are the elect and brings them to Christ.

Now, the distinction between them Capital A – “The New Testament Usage of Terms.” You will discover that the word translated “calling” in the New testament which

comes from the Greek word *kaleo*. If you were transliterating that you could put K-A-L-E-O and put over that O a long mark like that. The word *kaleo* is the word that means to call. Now, that word is used in the New Testament in two senses. It is used in the New Testament in the sense of a general call that is issued to all men in some places. For example, who doesn’t know the text “Many are called but few are chosen.” Sometimes rendered “Many are called but few are frozen.” Some of our churches do have those who are frozen. “Many are called but few are chosen.” That is there is an invitation that goes out to all but few are chosen. In that sense, the call is a universal call addressed to all men. But now you will discover that while that is the usage of the term in the gospels, in the epistles of the Apostle Paul he always uses the term call in the sense of an effectual call. Nobody in Paul’s writings is ever called who does not come to Christ. So in the New Testament the term is used in two senses. It’s used in the general call issued to all. It’s used of the special call that comes to the elect. So that’s the New Testament usage.

Capital B – “The Nature of the External Call.” Now, the external call that goes forth to men through the preaching of the gospel is a call that includes the declaration of the plan of salvation. Men stand in the pulpit, men stand on the street corners, women stand outside of their homes, women stand in the alleys, men stand in the alleys, in other words, all over the gospel is proclaimed by men to all. And we state the plan of salvation. It includes a declaration of the plan of salvation. It includes a command to repent. It includes an appeal to the motivation, a motivation such as fear, hope, gratitude all of these are part of the external call. Finally, in the preaching of the gospel there is contained a promise of acceptance by God if we respond in faith to the message. That is the external general call that goes forth to all men. It is addressed to all men in the Bible. Even the Calvinist, who believes that Christ died for a particular group that he accomplished particular redemption, even the Calvinist believes that the gospel is addressed to all. Now, that is the general calling or external call.

Now, "The Nature of the Internal Call" - capital C. This call is from the Spirit. And it is proved by this. The Spirit's influence is distinguished from the influence of the word. Let's turn back to John chapter 6 for a moment. When a man is saved there is something more involved than just hearing the word? Listen, John chapter 6 in verse 44 Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." In other words, it is not sufficient for a man just to hear the gospel. There must be an activity of God in drawing them. If men came because the gospel was preached, all men who heard the gospel would come. There is something more than just the word that is required. Listen to verse 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." Notice, "Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." It isn't enough just to hear. There must go on in the heart of the individual a working of the Holy Spirit. And this is the nature of the internal call. It is proved by the Spirit's influence which is distinguished from the word's influence. And it is proved by this that the Bible teaches two calls. Our subjects of call number one, general call, it says "Many are called and few are chosen," but of the subjects of those who have been called by efficacious grace it says whom he called them he also justified.

Now, let's take a look at those two statements now and think about them for a moment. Listen many are called but few are chosen. Many are called but few are chosen. Are the called equal to the chosen. No. The chosen are a few of the many. But now listen to the statement of Paul "Whom he called them he also justified." Now, whom he called represents a certain number. Justified is, of course, the work of salvation declaring us righteous? Does the them equal the whom? "Whom he called them he also justified." Does it? Come on. Of course, it does. Therefore, of everyone who is called it is said he has justified. That is an effectual calling. So there are two kinds of call in the Bible: One general external through the preaching of the word, the other special internal by the operation of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of some.

Roman III, this is good. I like this. You know why? Because I’ve been called. Roman III – “The Description of Efficacious Grace. It is a divine influence. It is immediate. It is supernatural. Now, let’s take a look at these three things. “The Description of Efficacious grace.” What have we learned so far? Well, we’ve learned that efficacious grace is an influence that comes from God. We have learned that it has to do with our inner man. It is immediate. It is not contrary to the word. It is the word plus. And it is supernatural. Let’s try to support these statements.

Capital A - “It is a Divine Influence.” And let’s turn just for the sake of, well we don’t have to 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 2. There we read of the sanctification of the Spirit setting us apart unto faith. That is the divine influence in our calling. Second, it is immediate. That is it is something that takes place in our hearts through the operation of the Holy Spirit not just through the word. 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verses 12 through 15. Put that down in your notes and take a look at the passage. You will discover that in that passage the Spirit’s influence is distinguished from the gift of the word of God or distinguished from the word’s influence. Remember in 1 Corinthians 2:14 it says, “For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.” And so there we have a distinction made between the influence of the Bible, which for some men is foolishness, and the operation of the Holy Spirit which enables certain others to understand. And did we not have the operation of the Spirit we shall think that the truth of God was stupidity. That’s really the meaning of that word *moria*, foolishness, stupidity. And it is supernatural, this activity is supernatural.

Now, if you’ll just think what the Bible says about a man outside of Christ, you’ll realize how supernatural the work of the Holy Spirit is in efficacious grace. What is man naturally? Well, we read in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians that man is dead, dead in trespasses and sins. Jesus said “Ye must born again.” We are dead not only are we dead Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 3 and 4 that we are blind, blind. And Paul

has told us in the passage I just quoted 1 Corinthians 2:14 that we are deaf. So we are deaf. We are blind. We are dead. What does that mean? Well that means that if something is going to happen to us it must be supernatural. It must give us new life when there is death. It must give us a new hearing when we are deaf. It must give us new sight when we are blind. If you have ever had any experience at all in the work of evangelism you know how true this is. Men are blind. Men are deaf. Men are dead. It’s the only way you can explain too the response of some and the rejection of others.

I can remember one young man and over against him another young man. One of the young men had a chance to hear the gospel constantly. He listened to the gospel. He heard it as purely as you can possibly hear it. I was the preacher. [Laughter] And he did not respond. My friends know I’m kidding. I hope you visitors know too. He did not respond month after month he heard the gospel, he did not respond. When I got a call one time from another young man, he said I’d like to come over and talk to you. I’ve heard you preach once. I have something I’d like to talk to you about. He came over to my house.

He sat down on the sofa in my living room and I sat down by the side of it and he said “You know you said something about receiving Jesus Christ as savior. I’d like to know something about it.” I explained the gospel to him. He said “Why I believed that all of my life.” I said “Have you ever really personally received Jesus Christ as your savior?” He said “No, I never have received Jesus Christ personally as my savior.” And I said “Well, you know, if you’re accept Jesus Christ as your savior you will become a Christian.” And I didn’t want to put any pressure on him but I did just finally say to him. “When you get home, you might get down by your bedside and make that decision if the Holy Spirit’s leading you.” He said “Why not now?” I said “Are you sure you understand what I’m talking about?” He said “Absolutely, that’s why I came over here.” He said “What do I have to do?” I said “Well all you have to do is really just offer a prayer to God in your heart and receive him as your Savior.” He was born again just like that, prepared

by the Holy Spirit. I didn’t do anything. All I did was just, well really, I got in the way a little bit. [Laughter]

Now, that man was the recipient of efficacious grace. The other was not. One heard a lot more of the word than the other but one was prepared by God. It wasn’t because this man was better man than that man. The Bible says we’re all depraved and dead and blind and deaf but one responded.

“The Objects of Efficacious Grace - Roman IV. Now, I think I can answer this just in a word. The objects of efficacious grace, of course, are the elect. And it is limited to the elect. The Bible speaks of the elect as the called and the called as the elect. Romans chapter 8 verse 28 through verse 30. We’ve already seen how are calling is based upon our election. And so the objects of our efficacious grace are the elect.

Roman V – “The Infallibility of Efficacious Grace.” Now, the elect are subject to influences of a moral and mediate character just like the non-elect. Before the elect come to faith in Christ many of them hear the gospel not only once sometimes many times. So he is the recipient of common grace just as the non-elect are. He is the recipient of general calling just as the non-elect is. But he is subject to an additional influence. He is subject to the influence of the Spirit within the will. He has influences upon his will just as the non elect but in the case of the elect he has an influence that penetrates within his will and transforms him in such a way that he responds spontaneously to the will of God. And he is made spontaneously willing to respond.

Now, in the case of the elect that operation is infallible. Theologians have called it irresistible, by that they mean that there is no objection that the elect may have that shall prevail when God deals with them. Through efficacious grace he will bring them to himself. It is infallible. It secures it the salvation of all God has chosen without the loss of a single one. As Paul says in Romans chapter 8 verse 29 and verse 30, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them

he also called.” Was one lost? Whom? Them. “And whom he called, them he also justified.” Was one lost? And amazingly Paul says, “And whom he justified, them he also glorified.” So it is just as certain that if you have believed in Jesus Christ, it is just as certain that you shall be in the presence of the Lord as it is that you are justified now. Whom? Them. Whom? Them. Whom? Them. It is infallible. It is efficacious grace. I’m happy over it.

Roman VI – “The Practical Effects of the Doctrine of Efficacious or Infallible Grace. Now, I don’t have time to do anything but mention a couple of practical effects. People often think that if you believe in this doctrine of election, Dr Johnson, that you are talking about then the natural response and is to just go home and sit down and read the newspaper and do nothing just the opposite, just the opposite. A man who says something like that shows that there is never really been any experience in his heart of this wonderful truth, just the opposite. But here are a couple of practical effects. First, the magnification of the divine purpose. Salvation is a work of God. It, therefore, is not hurried along. It’s not effectuated by stronger appeals. Evangelists vie with each other in new devices to influence the human mind but God works according to his program and to his purposes in spite of the evangelists. I’m not against evangelists. I’m for biblical evangelism. It means that our salvation is not hurried along by mightier arguments, by more sparkling personalities, by more telling illustrations, by longer invitations, by keener psychological insight. Salvation is accomplished by work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a man. Now, when a man comes to believe what is the essence of God’s work of salvation he will dispense with all of these fleshly human devices to influence the mind of men and he’ll spend a little time on his knees asking God to do his work according to the internal work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart.

The second thing that is a practical effect is the senselessness of discouragement. Every preacher has discouragement. I can remember when I was not as founded in the doctrines of grace as I am now. I used to come home from Sunday, one Sunday I would

be as high as a kite because somebody had responded, the next Sunday I would be lower than six feet below the surface of the ground because no one had responded. And I would be ultimately encouraged and discouraged and up and down. And all preachers know what I’m talking about because we especially are subject to it, teachers of the word. But listen, that was really in the final analysis a kind of selfishness. It was kind of an expectation that I should see because of my labors certain results and I was not really willing in faith to leave it with God. Now, when the gospel goes forth and no one responds I am not discouraged if I have been faithful in presenting the word. And also when some do respond it doesn’t turn my head quite as easily as it used to. I’m able to look at what God is doing with a much stabler foundation.

Now, I said I was going to give you a couple of illustrations. One of the illustrations was from Luke chapter 14 verses 16 through 23, but I’m going to just ask you if you will to turn to that passage in Acts chapter 16 the second illustration, you can figure out the first one for yourself. And I’m going to try to show you in a quick reading of Acts 16:14 and 15 the steps in Lydia’s salvation for they beautifully unfold what I have been trying to tell you tonight.

Now, remember when Paul and Silas came to Philippi, they came to a situation which is undoubtedly the greatest anticlimax in all the Bible. A supernatural vision in Troas a male from Macedonia saying come over and help us and they arrive in Philippi with the blessing of God upon them making a journey in three days which they later take five it’s almost as if the forces of grace help the forces of nature. He arrives and on the Saturday morning he goes out to the little place where prayer was wont to be made and what does he discover? A typical Wednesday evening prayer meeting in our churches a few women. Now, what an anticlimax what an anticlimax and mind you as far as we can tell two of those women were Euodius and Syntyche who are going to give the church a little trouble in Philippi after they got saved. So they must have been real nasty before

they were saved. So there they were that little company but one was there whom God had already made ready for the gospel.

Listen, the first thing that happened is that we can tell here is that Lydia had been the recipient of common grace. We read, “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God.” You see, she had been exposed to the monotheistic Hebrew faith and probably apostolate to it and by that we know that she had received common grace. She had a sense of God. We read, “Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.” The second thing in her salvation was the preaching of the word things spoken. What Paul spoke we do not know. Think I do. I could take another hour and tell you what he did. Really what he did was to go back in the Old Testament and take the great passages of the Old Testament and relate them to the events in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that from Paul’s other preaching. So he preached Christ from the Old Testament.

The third step in her salvation is general calling. Verse 14, “Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.” By the way, I quoted wrong word “Which worshipped God heard us.” That’s the third step. “Heard us,” that’s general calling. That is God speaking through the word and the word went into Lydia’s head. She heard us. She heard the word. Fourth stage, “Whose heart the Lord opened.” Ah there it is. Look at it. “Whose heart the Lord opened.” Do you see it? It’s in your Bible. “Whose heart the Lord opened.” Now, it doesn’t say Lydia opened her heart, the Lord opened her heart. It doesn’t say Lydia prayers opened her heart. It says the Lord opened her heart. It doesn’t say Paul opened her heart. It says the Lord opened her heart. Furthermore, it implies the removal of prejudices too. She had to have her heart opened in order to see. You know what she was thinking. I cannot be blessed by one of these Christians. How can I be blessed by this man who is a follower of the one of whom our leaders said his blood be upon us and be upon our children.

It’s like we say today. How can I be blessed through a gospel that’s speaks about the atonement of Jesus Christ. I know when I first listened to Dr Donald Grey Barnhouse I said how can I be blessed through a gospel that goes all the way back to a preaching of the men in the first century. How irrelevant can you get go back two thousand years? How can I be blessed in a church that doesn’t even have a membership and so on? All of the prejudices that we have there it is, “Whose heart the Lord opened.” That’s special calling.

Fifth, faith that she attended, that’s faith, attended as a result of the special calling as a result of efficacious grace she exercised faith. And in the sixth step, by the way she’s saved there. But her salvation does not stop at that point it continues. She attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul and when she was baptized, that’s the sixth step, that’s the testimony to our salvation. I say this and I say it again for those of you who are not in our Sunday meetings, the one way that the Bible says that we are to express our faith in is the way of water Baptism. It says absolutely nothing about coming down to the front in an altar call. It says nothing whatsoever about raising your hand in a meeting. It says nothing about giving a public testimony at that time. It says that those who have believed in Christ will give their testimony that’s the natural outgrowth of it. The one way we are to express our faith according to the Scripture is to be baptized in token of our faith. Baptism does not save us. It is the response of faith.

And finally, verse 7 good works verse 15 Lydia said, “If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.” In other words, her good deed did not end in the water. And the love that she had for the apostle distinguished her as one of the elect. What a wonderful thing it is to know that God efficaciously seeks his own and brings them to himself.

Now, I kept you too long tonight. I’m sorry we’ll try to keep from doing this in the future. Let’s bow in prayer.

“The Doctrine of Efficacious and Irresistible Grace” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for Thy Word. We ask Thy blessing upon us may
it sink deep down in our hearts and that Lord which is not in accordance with the truth
remove from our minds that Jesus Christ may be glorified.

We ask in his name. Amen.