

ALL THAT THE FATHER GIVES

John 6:37

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“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (Jn. 6:37).

In our study of Jesus as the bread of life, we noted that Christians grow strong by feeding on God’s Word. Christians who neglect the Bible will be weak and anemic. This is especially true of John 6:37-40, the verses that follow Jesus’ claim to be the bread of life. James Boice stated, “If [these] verses... are understood and are allowed to penetrate the heart, they will cause the Christian who feeds upon them to be sickly no longer; instead, that person will grow and become strong... They are verses that carry us deep into the mind and heart of God. [They] are given to fix our minds upon the grace and sovereignty of God in all things.”¹

John 6:37-40 is also noteworthy for teaching the “doctrines of grace,” which are foundational to Reformed or Calvinistic theology. These doctrines are prominent in the historic standards of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, the Anglican Church, and the Baptist and Congregational denominations, although many of these neglect them today. The doctrines of grace are summarized by the so-called “five points of Calvinism,” known by the acronym TULIP. The five points are Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and the Perseverance of the saints.

All five of these points can be deduced from Jesus’ teaching in John chapter 6. In our study of John 6:37, we will focus on three of them: unconditional election, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 2:481.

saints. Jesus said, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” This great sentence teaches that, despite universal human failure, God’s sovereign grace provides a people for his Son, who come to him in saving faith.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

It is noteworthy that this great promise of the gospel’s success occurs right after Jesus has reproved a large crowd for their failure to believe. Jesus had miraculously fed the five thousand, and when they followed him seeking more food he challenged them to realize that he is himself the true bread of God: “I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (Jn. 6:35). But then he commented, “I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe” (Jn. 6:36). This is a great example of the Bible’s teaching of total depravity – the reality that men and women are so powerfully under sin’s influence that on their own they neither will nor can accept the things of God.

This paints a very depressing situation for the hopes of individuals and the world. We might think it would be depressing for Jesus as well. Despite his lofty teaching and glorious miracles, and ultimately despite his sacrificial death, the problem of human depravity stands in the way of his saving mission. Looking from the human point of view, John Murray asks: “What hope is there for men? What gospel can there be for man if the message proclaims man’s impotence and helplessness? Why should there be any appeal for faith in Jesus if man of himself cannot exercise that faith?”² These are the implied questions to which Jesus gives an answer, not from the human but from the divine side of gospel message, an answer of sovereign grace from God.

Jesus did not despair in the face of human sin because the Father had given him a people for salvation. He speaks of “all that the Father gives me.” This can only be understood in light of the Bible’s teaching of election, or predestination. *Unconditional election* teaches that apart from anything commendable in themselves, a people has been chosen by God to come to Christ and be saved. This

² John Murray, “The Father’s Donation,” in *Collected Writings*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), 3:205.

“election,” or “choos-ing,” took place in eternity past; in John 6:39, Jesus speaks of this in the past: “all that he has given me.” Paul says that God “chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). Long before we were born or had done anything good or bad (Rom. 9:11), the elect were known to God and were chosen by his free and sovereign grace. This is why Jesus does not despair of his mission, because God has designated a people who will come to him for salvation.

When we think of election, Christians tend to emphasize ourselves as the beneficiaries. But, in John 6:37, the primary recipient is Christ. The elect are “all that the Father gives me.” One of the Bible’s most touching stories is told in Genesis 24, when Abraham sent his servant to his homeland to find a bride for his son, Isaac. This reflects the love of God the Father, who secures out of the world a bride for his beloved Son. Later, in Genesis 30, when Jacob wanted to set up his own home, his uncle Laban gave him sheep as a reward for his service. J. C. Ryle comments, “The Father from all eternity has given to the Son a people to be His own peculiar people. The saints are given to Christ by the Father as a flock, which Christ undertakes to save completely, and to present complete at the last day.”³

The Bible indicates that in eternity past there was a covenant of redemption between the heavenly Father and his Son. The Father promised a people to the Son, upon the condition that he come into the world to save them by his life and death. Isaiah spoke of this in his prophecy of the suffering servant: “When his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring” (Isa. 53:10). Hence, shortly before taking up the cross, Jesus prayed, “I have glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do” (Jn. 17:4).

This helps us to see the glory of what it means to be a Christian. Christianity is not merely a way for us to find ultimate happiness, but it involves a priceless gift from God the Father to his Son. This gives us new eyes to look on the Church. The Church is not just one of many human institutions offering goods and services. It is the gathering of those chosen by God from eternity to be the people and

³ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), I:376.

flock and bride of his glorious Son. George Hutcheson wrote, “It is the great dignity and happiness of the elect that they are from eternity given to Christ in the covenant of redemption, as the reward of his sufferings, to come to him in due time.”⁴ Martin Luther adds, “He to whom God gives grace to come to Christ enjoys a great privilege, which lets him exult: ‘The Father has given me to Christ.’”⁵

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

What was promised in eternity past comes to fulfillment in time. Jesus said that those given to him by the Father “will come to me.” Not only will some believe, but “all” of the elect “will come” to him in saving faith.

This teaches the doctrine known as *irresistible grace*. “It is the teaching that all those whom God has chosen inevitably come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶ Irresistible grace does not mean that no one resists God’s offered grace. Rather, it says that otherwise hopeless sinners will believe and come to Christ because of the irresistible, effectual working of God’s grace that brings them to spiritual life. This is how God’s gift to his Son becomes a reality. John Murray explains, “God the Father draws men, he places holy constraint upon them, he calls them into the fellowship of his Son, and presents them to Christ as trophies of the redemption Christ himself has accomplished.”⁷

If we understand the doctrine of total depravity, we see how necessary this is. People talk about man’s “free will,” not realizing that sin has placed our wills in bondage, so that even when we have opportunities to believe in Christ, our sinful wills are bound to refuse. Or people complain that God should not “violate” our wills in bringing us to faith. But unless God does this very thing – although “violate” is hardly the word to describe God’s gift of the new birth – our hearts will never receive Christ in faith. Leon Morris says, “People do not come to Christ because it seems a good idea to them. It never does seem a good idea to sinful people. Apart from a divine

⁴ George Hutcheson, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001), 115.

⁵ Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 6-8*, Luther’s Works, v. 23 (St. Louis: CPH, 1957), 47.

⁶ Boice, 2:487.

⁷ Murray, 3:205-206.

work in their souls people remain more or less contentedly in their sins.”⁸ Therefore, it is by God’s irresistible grace that Jesus says, “all that the Father gives me will come to me.” In John 6:44, Jesus makes the same point negatively: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” Irresistible grace is the effectual working of God’s Holy Spirit to draw us to Christ, apart from which we cannot come.

Think back to the scene in Capernaum, when the hungry crowd came seeking more bread from Christ but would not believe. What a scene of despair, from the human point of view! But Jesus says that he will have believers. These people may not believe, and people today may refuse to believe. But Christ will have believers! His death will not have been in vain. “All that the Father gives me will come to me,” he exults. Jesus said this to encourage his own ministry, and it should encourage ours as well. Martin Luther, the great Reformer whose preaching faced titanic obstacles, says to us today:

We must take comfort from the fact that we believe in and preach Christ. The world cares nothing about this. It will not dance even though we pay it court, sing or whistle it a tune. It will not mourn even though we wail for it (Matt. 11:17). Neither high promises nor severe threats bears any fruit, although we wear ourselves out in the process. All is futile; the world refuses to believe... [But] Christ Himself declares here that the Word will still find its followers, that some will come daily and accept it. The words of Christ, “All that the Father gives Me,” must be fulfilled.⁹

History is replete with examples of the most unlikely sinners coming to Christ. John Newton, who wrote *Amazing Grace*, was a vile sinner and slave trader. Augustine was so awash in sexual sin that his Christian mother, Monica, cried rivers of tears over him. The greatest example is the apostle Paul, who more than any other man tormented the Christians in Jerusalem. Then he went to take his persecution to Damascus. But he was met by Christ on the road and, by God’s irresistible grace, he fell to his knees in faith. Paul became the greatest missionary apostle. This is why we should not despair of preaching the gospel to the worst sinners. D. A. Carson writes, “Jesus’ confidence does not rest in the potential for positive response

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Revised) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 325.

⁹ Luther, 23:50-51.

amongst well-meaning people. Far from it: his confidence is in his Father to bring to pass the Father's redemptive purposes."¹⁰

We should therefore have confidence even in the face of determined unbelief. Every one of the vast multitude given by the Father will come to the Son. Their own depravity, their hatred of God, their sinful lifestyles, and even the devil himself cannot keep those chosen by God away from salvation. "So take heart fellow worker," A. W. Pink writes. "You may seem to be sowing the Seed at random, but God will see to it that part of it falls onto ground which He has prepared."¹¹ This is why Scripture tells us: "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

This should also humble us. If we are tempted to hold unbelievers in disgust or think we are better than the worst of sinners, we should realize that we ourselves have come to Christ only by God's irresistible grace. Christians are not saved by deciding for Jesus – although we must respond in faith to be saved. We were saved by the sovereign act of God, who chose us not because of anything good in us but by his own grace, and who acted upon our souls to give us to his Son.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

While the doctrines of grace are humbling, they also convey rich comfort to fearful souls. We find this in the second half of John 6:37: "And whoever comes to me I will never cast out."

This brings us to the doctrine of the *perseverance of the saints*. The Bible is clear that we must persevere in faith to be saved. God chose us in the past and has brought us to our present faith. But will we persevere? Jesus says that we will, because of his preserving grace.

This statement is absolutely definitive. Will Jesus ever cast out one who truly has come to him in faith? The Greek text employs a double negative: "Never, no, never!" The great example is Simon Peter, who denied Jesus three times, even cursing his name. Could there be a

¹⁰ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 290.

¹¹ Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 330.

more extreme case of a believer failing Christ? But Peter was not cast out by Christ; he was restored by his grace. Pink writes, “If Peter *was not* ‘cast out,’ *no* Christian ever was, or ever will be.”¹²

When Christians realize that we are the Father’s gift to his Son, we understand why Jesus will never discard us. Our perseverance is the result of the Son’s loving obedience to his Father’s redemptive will. We will see this in the verses that follow: “This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day” (Jn. 6:39).

Therefore, when we come to Jesus in faith, we can know that he is certain to receive us. He will not refuse us because of our sins; he came to save us from them. He will not cast us away because of our weaknesses and failures. He will receive us from the Father and keep us through this life, acknowledging us as his own redeemed people in the final judgment and taking us with him into eternal glory. All who come to Jesus are as safe as Jesus is faithful; our defense against sin, the world, and Satan is as sure as he is strong; and our acceptance into heaven is as certain as Jesus’ dying work on the cross is finished.

This does not mean that no *professing* believers ever fall away. Here, the great example is Judas Iscariot, one of the original twelve disciples. His problem was not that, having come to Jesus in sincere faith, he was later cast out when he failed. Judas’ problem is that he never did come to Christ in saving faith. The apostle John explains such cases, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for it they had been of us, they would continued with us” (1 Jn. 2:19). This urges a vital question upon every professing believer: Is your faith real? Have you truly come to Christ? Have you abandoned your self-righteousness and trusted only in him? Do you love him and want to serve him? Have you come, however imperfectly, in true faith to Jesus? Until you are sure, there is no more urgent matter in your life.

Jesus’ words are meant to comfort weak believers. He says, “I will never cast them out!” Luther felt the burden of being cast out of the official church because he challenged its false gospel, but he took solace that having come to Christ he could never be cast out of God’s true church. As a pastor, he knew how many believers fretted that

¹² Ibid., 331.

Christ would reject them as unworthy or unwanted. But he saw the answer in this verse. Luther wrote, “This offers the greatest comfort and is intended for the weak conscience which is uncertain about its relationship to God and lives in constant dread of having an unmerciful God. Such a turbulent heart can be hushed and stilled by this text; it can repose and base its faith on the Person of Christ.”¹³

Luther took exception to paintings in his day that depicted Christ as harsh and unwilling. He writes against one “shameful and blasphemous picture” showing Mary, the apostles, and saints pleading with Jesus not to reject sinners who come. The people were fasting, performing good works, and bringing alms – desperately seeking some way to persuade Christ to receive them. Luther complains, “Such paintings should be put aside; for they have been used to frighten people’s consciences and to make them think that they must fear and flee from the Savior, as though He wanted to drive us from Him and avenge our sins. This makes us reluctant to go to Him.”¹⁴ Do you have similar thoughts of Christ? Banish them from your mind! Come to Jesus, who says, “Whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

ME, ME, ME!

As we study these great truths, it is essential that we be enthralled not merely with the doctrines, much less with our differences with other Christians who do not accept them. Rather, the obvious point is that our minds and hearts should be directed with renewed fervor to Jesus himself.

This is obvious when we observe a word that occurs in all three portions of this verse. The word is “me”: “All that the Father gives *me*”; “will come to *me*”; “and whoever comes to *me* I will never cast out.” Jesus is not on an ego trip, but a gospel mission! Our salvation is centered on him. God has given him a people, so we must come to him, and with him we will be safe forever.

¹³ Luther, 23:54.

¹⁴ Ibid., 23:57.

This leaves us with two applications. The first is that we must come to Christ to be saved. We must confess our need of his saving work. We must believe in him and in his gospel. We must cling to him as the only Savior of our souls.

The doctrines of grace do not remove our obligation to come to Jesus. The crowd that refused to believe could not offer the excuse of their total depravity. They could not complain that God had not elected them. The gospel was genuinely offered to them. The fact that they would not come to Jesus, caring nothing for the true bread he offered, only sealed their condemnation. We must all come to Christ as we hear the gospel, and the time to come is now. Do not wonder if you are elect or not. Believing in Christ is the sign of God's election and the proof that we were given by the Father to the Son.

Jesus said, "Whoever comes," and that is an invitation to place your name in this verse. The story is told of a German farmer named Klein who lived across the street from a Lutheran church. He never went in because he thought the gospel was for other people. But one day he heard the voices of children singing a hymn. It went: "Saved by grace alone! / This is all my plea / Jesus died for all mankind / And Jesus died for me." When he heard the words, "Jesus died for all mankind," he thought they were singing "Jesus died for old man Klein." Suddenly it sank into his heart that he could be saved. He crossed the street, entered the church, and hearing the gospel he committed his life to the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁵

Jesus' death does not save all mankind, but only "whoever comes to me." But that "whoever" is offered to all mankind, and if you will come, his blood will cleanse your sins and enter you into eternal life.

The second application is for those who have come to Christ. Have you believed? Have you confessed your sin and trusted in his saving blood? Now rest your soul in his hands. Do you believe in Jesus? Then believe his words: "Never, no, never will I cast you away." Having been saved by grace, through faith, let us rely on that grace. We are the Father's gift to the Son. We came to Christ because of irresistible grace. And now Christ will never cast us away, but he will treasure, love, and keep the Father's gift forever.

¹⁵ Cited from Boice, 2:493-494.