

Dear Phil



believed in Him: *the reason the Jews did not believe Him is because the Father had not granted it to them.* This is precisely where Jesus may sound Calvinistic to some. But listen more closely. Jesus did not say that there never was a time when God granted them grace to believe and, therefore, they never could have believed. Rather, He said that they were not believing at that time because the Father had not granted “it” to them at that time. In other words, because the Jews had resisted God’s grace—what I’m calling the “first overtures” of prevenient grace—they were not receiving the further overtures of prevenient grace necessary to believe in Christ and come to Him.

This raises what I believe is a popular misconception about grace. Many seem to think that God will always give them more grace—that God will always continue to enable them to want to come to Him. That simply is not true. God has not promised to give more grace to those who resist His grace. What is so amazing about God is that He often does give grace heaped upon grace to those who steadfastly resist Him. But God’s mercy is no guarantee that He will continue giving grace. In fact, we all know of stories where God’s grace ceased to be extended and His judgment fell. That is why Paul says, “Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4).

No, God does not indiscriminately pick whom He will save. *But He does “pick” those who respond to His grace and gives them further grace.* Thank God for His amazing grace which enables our wills to do His will!

PHILIP ■

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AMAZING GRACE

**Your article entitled “Free Will” (Revivalist, December 2005) made it sound like God picks out the people he wants to be saved and “grants them the further ability to believe unto salvation.” Sounds like Calvinism to me. Did I misunderstand something? —Nathan**

Dear Nathan,

Thanks for the question. I’m glad for an opportunity to clarify what I meant. In that article I wrote, “Beyond the enabling of sinners’ wills granted by the first overtures of prevenient grace, God must continue to draw them to Christ and grant them the further ability to believe unto salvation.”

First, let’s make sure we’re clear on our terminology. In Wesleyan-Arminian theology, *prevenient grace* includes all the grace a person receives prior to salvation.

So any grace received before salvation is prevenient grace.

Second, please notice that I used the phrase “first overtures” of prevenient grace. I deliberately used that phrase to imply that there are further overtures of prevenient grace. How much grace comes in the “first overtures” of prevenient grace we don’t know. But Romans 1:18-21 tells us that it is enough grace for all men to be without excuse before God.

Third, there are at least two issues involved in answering your question. One issue is whether the “first overtures” of prevenient grace are sufficient for all men to come to Christ, or

if there are further overtures of prevenient grace that are necessary. Jesus’ teaching in John 6 and Luke’s account of Lydia’s conversion in Acts 16 imply that in order to come to Christ we need more prevenient grace than we received in the “first overtures” God granted us. If that is what Scripture teaches, then the next question is, “Who gets that further prevenient grace?” Does it come to all men automatically, or is it conditioned upon their response to the “first overtures” of prevenient grace they received?

*I believe the Bible’s answer is that God grants further prevenient grace to those who respond to the first overtures of grace they receive.* To put it as plainly as I can—God gives all men sufficient grace to respond to whatever amount of light they first receive. However, God does not obligate Himself to give more grace to those who resist the first grace they receive. Thus there is a sense in which God does make a choice about who receives more grace and who doesn’t. “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6).

As I read John 6:64-65, it seems quite clear to me that Jesus is telling the Jews why they have not