

Preamble

In recent years, we have experienced both friends and family being caught in the snare of Calvinism. We live in a day when apathy flows deeply in the hearts of most professing Christians, and even within those who are involved in “ministry.” Despite being raised in a family where Calvinism was at least given the nod of acceptance, it was never discussed, and, unlike my older siblings, I did not go through a Reformed catechism that teaches the principles of this theology to the naive.

My wife and I experienced full-blown Calvinism when a young family moved into our town after we had left the Evangelical movement behind. When the man attended a local Baptist church and chided the pastor for not adhering exclusively to the King James Bible, he was told that he might find a better fit with us (I’m not sure why the pastor thought that, since we had never discussed the subject while attending his church). We got to know the family, and had a few Bible studies together before it became very obvious that we could not continue – there was no fellowship, and it was clear that only stress and conflict lay ahead. He emphasized *sola Scriptura* (the Scriptures alone), which was fine, but then he also needed to have the writings of his favored Reformed theologians so that he would know how to interpret the Scriptures (which were no longer *alone*). He became angry when we would not accept his Calvinism that *fit together so perfectly*, and we broke friendship (the fellowship was never really there) with his expressed desire to have nothing more to do with us. His vehemence and closed-mindedness surprised us, and yet we have come to recognize that this is not unheard of among Calvinists toward “outsiders.”

Our next experience came through friends whom we got to know at the time when we were leaving the local Evangelical Free church, where they continued to attend. They were unhappy with much of what was taking place and understood why we left, but seemed very hesitant to follow suit. When they finally left, they went to California so that he could attend Master’s Seminary (it appears that he stayed in the church in order to obtain a pastor’s letter of commendation to the Seminary). Before he left for California with his family, and while he was there, I cautioned him not to blindly accept what the professors taught as being Biblically accurate – you still must consider everything against the light of God’s Word.¹ When they came back to Canada after graduating, we visited a few times but it was not long before it became evident that he was starry-eyed about MacArthur and had been indoctrinated into the theology of Calvinism – and the friendship ended. We were quite taken aback at the vehemence of his last words to us (by email) because it seemed to be out of character for him (at least from what we had known), and we were left with additional evidence of the aggression of a Calvinist.

Most recently, we have felt the influence of the theology of Calvinism within our own family. I have studied bits and pieces of the TULIP of Calvinism from time-to-time while preparing for the teaching that I have done over the past 16 years and have recognized some of its failure to measure up to the standard of God’s Word, but I have never taken the time to systematically go

¹ During this time I completed my studies at Briercrest Biblical Seminary and learned, first hand, that not everything that a professor says can be accepted as being the truth – everything needs to be weighed carefully against Scripture (1 John 4:1).

through the TULIP so that I could come away with a better understanding of where they err. I have been told how perfectly Reformed theology fits together, and I have frustrated a Calvinist for not bowing before it, but the time has come to carry out a Biblical examination of this increasingly popular theology.

My intent is to examine the doctrines of Calvinism that make up the TULIP and to expose the error of its teachings through the use of the text of Scripture. Calvinism seems to be everywhere today, and is becoming increasingly accepted because of its appeal to the historical teachings of the Reformation. The result is that many who have very little first-hand knowledge of the Scriptures parrot what they have heard with no understanding of what it really means or that it might actually contradict what God has given us in His Word. Unfortunately, the Reformation was nothing more than a separation (or eviction, really) from the Roman Catholic Church, and it doesn't take much research to realize that Martin Luther and John Calvin, who were the primary leaders during "the Reformation," did not depart far from the Catholic Church. Indeed, Martin Luther's intent was to seek reformation within the Catholic Church, but he was excommunicated for his efforts and so the apostate Church began to split. The Reformation was **not** a return to a Biblical faith, but merely a reformatting of Catholic doctrine – each leader taking their own stance on what was acceptable and what was not. Out of this very quickly came the Lutherans (following the lead of Martin Luther), the Reformed (John Calvin), and Presbyterians (John Knox, influenced by John Calvin); Anglicanism also came during this time, but it was more a result of the English king's rebellion against the pope of Rome for not giving him what he wanted (a marriage annulment) than a separation because of theology.

Among those who hold to the Reformed doctrines (Calvinism), there is a strong sense of being right on all matters of Scripture; it is this feeling of rightness (or is it self-righteousness?) that leads to their vehemence and arrogance toward those who do not accept their theology. It is one thing to consider what you believe to be correct (otherwise, why would you believe it?) and quite another to close your ears to everything that doesn't agree with your understanding. Yes, we are to avoid all that disagrees with God's Word (Romans 16:17), and a *theology* is man's interpretation of what God has said and, consequently, bears the marks of human bias. Consider these words that are used to introduce a Puritan website: "There are **only** two views concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ. First, there is what the church calls *Calvinism*, or more precisely speaking, the doctrines of grace. Then, the second, we find varying degrees of unbelief. These are your two choice [sic] for or against the Gospel found in Scripture" (all emphasis in the original).² Do you hear the arrogance? The *choice*, in their minds, is between salvation through faith in Calvinism or being destined for hell; yet even this shows their duplicity, for within the confines of Calvinism, there is no *choice* – God has predetermined who will be saved and who is lost. Calvinism is a theological structure that has been put together by men – the theology of Calvinism is not inerrant!

A product of the Synod of Dort held in 1618-1619 are the Canons of Dort, in which the doctrines of Calvinism were organized; although the acronym TULIP doesn't seem to have come into use until the early 1900s, its substance was present from the beginning.³ The purpose of the Synod was

² <https://www.apuritansmind.com/tulip/>.

³ <https://www.theopedia.com/tulip>.

to present an organized stance against Arminianism – the Arminians had prepared *Five Articles of Remonstrance* in 1610 as a protest against the Reformed doctrine of predestination as set forth in the Belgic Confession.⁴ The Belgic Confession, in turn, had been compiled by Guido de Bras in hopes of getting the Roman Catholic Church to reduce its harsh attacks against its Reformed citizens; he set forth their understanding of the Scriptures, which, along with a commitment to remain as lawful citizens, he hoped would see their persecution diminish – it did not.⁵ The Belgic Confession, although largely a new document, was guided by the writings of John Calvin, and at the Synod of Dort it was revised and adopted as the established doctrinal standard that was imposed upon all Reformed churches.⁶ The Canons of Dort was the Reformed response to the document prepared by those of a more Arminian persuasion, and does not, therefore, expound all of the doctrines of Reformed theology; however, what is contained therein does represent some of their central theology. The primary difference between the Arminian and Reformed theologies revolves around the Reformed concept of the “absolute divine sovereignty” of God, commonly called predestination.⁷

Let’s consider the acronym TULIP as it was presented in the Canons of Dort:

T – Total depravity of man

THIRD AND FOURTH HEADS OF DOCTRINE, Article 3: “Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are **neither able nor willing** to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation” (emphasis added).⁸

U – Unconditional election by God

FIRST HEAD OF DOCTRINE, Article 6: “That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it proceeds from God’s eternal decree ... He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy.”⁹

L – Limited atonement of Christ

SECOND HEAD OF DOCTRINE, Article 8: “For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them **alone** the gift of

⁴ <https://www.theopedia.com/five-articles-of-remonstrance>.

⁵ <https://www.theopedia.com/belgic-confession-of-faith>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross ... should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and **those only**, who were from eternity **chosen to salvation** and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever (emphasis added).¹⁰

I – Irresistible grace of God

THIRD AND FOURTH HEADS OF DOCTRINE, Article 10: “... others who are called by the gospel obey the call and are **converted is ... wholly ascribed to God**, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so He confers upon them faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of His own Son, that they may show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light; and may glory not in themselves, but in the Lord according to the testimony of the apostles in various places” (emphasis added).¹¹

P – Perseverance of the saints

FIFTH HEAD OF DOCTRINE, Article 3: “By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and the temptations of sin and of the world, those who are converted could not persevere in a state of grace if left to their own strength. But **God** is faithful, who having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and **powerfully preserves them** therein, even to the end” (emphasis added).¹²

Clearly, the Canons were not developed with TULIP in mind, nevertheless the accepted standard of Reformed doctrine was laid down with the essence of this acronym evident. With the upsurge of the popularity in the teachings of Calvinism in recent years, it is wise to take the time to consider them, however briefly, in order to provide us with the understanding necessary to avoid them. Let’s consider each of these in the light of what God has given to us in His Word.

¹⁰ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.