

T-U-L-I-P: CALVIN'S WILTED BULB

DON WALKER

A careful study of the Catholic's approach to religion will reveal a "work salvation" approach – from infant baptism to the practice of indulgences and Hail Mary's. An overzealous salesman named Tetzl is said to have promised the potential purchasers of indulgence, "When in the box the penny rings, the soul from purgatory springs."¹ It was a reaction to this approach that brought about the movement known as the Protestant Reformation. Though there were others before him, John Calvin is most often credited with organizing and popularizing the beliefs of this movement.

As time went along, the five main tenets of Calvinism became recognized by the acrostic TULIP. In the box below, you will see what each of the letters in tulip represent. We, in our desire to evangelize a lost world would do well to understand the tenets of this doctrine, because a very large majority of the "Christian" religious world holds to Calvinism. Though there may be some slight variances, for the most part Calvinists are in agreement on these main points.

In the weeks to follow, we will address the tenets separately. In this article we will simply address the doctrine as a whole with the intention of helping us to see how each element fits in context with the others. We will not in this article address what Scripture teaches concerning these matter, but rather will address the contradictions to Scripture in the articles to follow. One thing that we wish to notice is the logical sequence of these points. In the case of Calvin's "TULIP" you start with a false tenet and then build a whole false system around it.

Calvinist believe that a baby is born a sinner, lost and so depraved that as it grows it can never do one good thing in any way to effect salvation. This is because he inherited Adam's sin. We might add here that this false position had a strong influence on those who "translated" the New International Version of the Bible. It is an example where doctrinal bias was a stronger influence than the translator's scholarship. But I digress.

From there, the Calvinist teaches that man has no say in his salvation. God's election is solely God's choice. This election they would say is individually and is strictly unconditional. There is absolutely nothing that a man can do to alter whether or not he is of the elect. If God has not chosen an individual, then it matters not what he does or does not do, it is sealed.

It follows then, if all are not going to be saved, and some are going to be lost, then Christ's sacrifice must be limited. Calvinists believe that Christ died only for the elect. He did not die on the cross for those that God did not choose.

From there, the topic of grace is discussed, and it is taught that the grace is irresistible. That is to say, the elect, those chosen by God, can do nothing to reject the grace of God. It is bestowed and the elect receive it, period. Of course this makes sense. If election is unconditional, and solely based on God's decree, it would not be good to have a system that man could throw a monkey wrench in on God's work. This it only makes sense that the grace bestow, must be bestow without man's being able to deny it.

Finally, the last tenet is perseverance of the saints. It would also come to be know as preservation of the saints. Simply stated, it teaches that man can not fall from grace. There is absolutely nothing that the elect can do to lose their salvation. Once a man is saved, then he is always saved. It may be a comforting doctrine, but it is totally false, and the comfort is counterfeit.

In the following weeks, we will address each of these points of Calvinism and turn our attention to Scripture to see if this is what the Bible teaches. May we all consider these matters as we study our Bibles more and more.

T-otal Depravity

U-nconditional Election

L-imited Atonement

I-rrisitable Grace

P-erseverance of the Saints

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

Don Walker

When considering Calvinistic doctrine, we understand that the main tenets can be remembered by understanding the acrostic T-U-L-I-P. In our last article we identified what each letter in this acrostic represented. As we begin to consider this doctrine we understand that the “T” in tulip represents the doctrine of “total depravity.” That is to say that the Calvinist believes that we enter into this world bearing the sins of our original parents – Adam and Eve. John Calvin defined total depravity in this way. “All men are conceived in sin, and born the children of wrath, indisposed to all saving good, propense to evil, dead in sin, and the slaves of sin; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they neither are willing nor able to return to God, to correct their depraved nature, or to dispose themselves to the correction of it.”¹ One writer, while speaking of the incarnation of Christ made reference to the fact that Christ did not have the original sin. He wrote concerning Christ, “He had all the necessary human qualities, but the similarity stopped short of including participation in the condemnation resulting from the Fall.”² “The fall” of which he speaks is Adam’s sin which Calvinist believe passed to every individual. Simply stated, Calvinists believe that that infant who is born into this world is a sinner through and through. As many have referenced Calvin once said that there are infants not a span long in hell.

The question we address is a simple one. Does the Bible teach such a doctrine? We do not deny that those who believe such will attempt to prove their point by Scripture. But that does not mean that Scripture teaches such. We must be aware that the Bible itself teaches that men will twist the Scriptures to prove their own doctrine. Peter wrote of these men and how they handle Scripture in 2 Peter. Concerning the Scriptures he said, “...they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16).

One such passage is Psalm 51:5. The passage reads, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Calvinists teach from this verse that the “little child is born full of sin, because it says he was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did his mother conceive him.”³ A careful study of this passage in light of all that Scripture teaches will show us that the iniquity that is spoken of is not the child’s, but rather describes the world into which he entered. Also the sin in which he was conceived was not his sin, but rather it was the sin of the mother.

Another passage twisted is Psalm 58:3. “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.” It must be noticed that the passage does not say they are born astray, but rather that “they go astray.” It also states that they go astray “speaking lies.” An infant just born does not have the ability to speak lies. Verse 6 is a call for God to “break their teeth ... in their mouth.” Infants who are born have no teeth in their mouths. What we see in this verse is what is known as hyperbole or exaggerated language, which is employed to emphasize a point. The point is at a very early age, we learn to sin. Yet, even in this, sin is committed and not inherited.

Passages that need to be considered are many. However, let us turn our attention to Jesus’ view of little children. In Matthew 18 Jesus answered the question of the disciples, “Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” by calling a little child unto Himself and saying, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me” (Matt. 18:3-5). Now is Jesus saying that the Kingdom of Heaven is made up of “little sinners?” Is he likening Himself to sinners? Of course, to ask the question is to see the foolishness of the thought. Again Jesus said, “...Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14)

The Bible clearly teaches that sin is something that is committed, not inherited. The very definition of sin brings this point out. John wrote, “...for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 4:3). Children are brought into this world in a state of innocence and purity. They have committed no sin, and stand in full fellowship with the Father. It is only after they grow older and transgress the law of Christ that they separate themselves from their Creator (Isa. 59:1,2).

In the next few weeks we will continue to study Calvinistic doctrine. Until next week we encourage all to study their Bibles more and more.

(Footnotes)

¹Enns, P. P. 1997, c1989. *The Moody handbook of theology*. Moody Press: Chicago, Ill.

²Karleen, P. S. 1987. *The handbook to Bible study: With a guide to the Scofield study system*. Oxford University Press: New York

³Moffitt, Jerry, 1996. *Denominational Doctrines*.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

DON WALKER

The acrostic T-U-L-I-P is often used to highlight the five main tenets of Calvinism. In past articles we have noted what each letter represents in this doctrine. Last week we noticed the false doctrine of Total Depravity – the teaching that children are born in sin. In this week's article, we will address the "U" in Tulip which represents "unconditional election" or "predestination." The fact that Scripture teaches foreordination and election is undeniable. Paul wrote, "For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." (Rom. 8:29, 30). In Ephesians 1 we read, "Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will ...in whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:5-11).

Again, concerning election, both Peter (2 Pet. 1:10) and Paul (1 Thess. 1:4) speak of election. In Romans Paul will address the topic extensively. In Romans 9:11 Paul wrote, "for the children being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." Again we read, "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace What then? that which Israel seeketh for, that he obtained not; but the election obtained it, and the rest were hardened As touching the gospel, they are enemies for your sake: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake" (Rom. 11:5, 7, 28). Yet, does the fact that election and foreordination being mentioned in Scriptures mean that Calvin's view of this doctrine is true? The answer to that question is "NO!"

Paul wrote in Romans 9:15, 16, "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy." The Calvinist will argue from this passage, "It is God that makes the election and man has absolutely nothing to do with it. In addressing this argument, Jerry Moffitt asks the question, "On whom does God choose to have mercy?" Then he turns his attention to Titus 3:4, 5. "But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and his love toward man, appeared, not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." Jerry writes, "God chooses those and has mercy on those who accept regeneration. He chooses to save, as a class, all who have an honest and a good heart."1 Jesus taught clearly that salvation was dependant upon the hearts of men (Luke 8:11-15). The production of fruit was not based on God's arbitrarily choosing individuals, but rather on the kind of heart the individual possessed. God's choice was the kind of heart that would be accepted by him and blessed by him. He can make that determination early because he omniscient. He knows all things and he can see into the hearts of men (Heb. 4:13; Psa. 44:21).

Another passage used by Calvinists is Acts 13:48. "And as the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." The argument used is fairly obvious. See, God ordains individuals to eternal life. Two verses earlier, however, Luke recorded these words. "And Paul and Barnabas spake out boldly, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

In studying this doctrine the most difficult point to understand is how anyone can conclude that all is "unconditional." Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). "If" is a conditional term. Note also it is the man that meets or fails to meet the condition. Passage after passage will indicate that our position is based on what we have done as opposed to unconditional election. Notice the following passages.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven (Matt. 7:21).

He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:36).

Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment (John 5:28, 29).

In our study thus far we have noticed that Scripture teaches that men are born pure and innocent, and that men are the ones who determine their eternal destiny. In our next study we will look at the false doctrine of "Limited Atonement." Until then may we all study our Bibles more and more.

(Footnotes)

1 Moffitt, Jerry, *Denominational Doctrines*, 1996: p. 225.

LIMITED ATONEMENT

DON WALKER

Of the five foundational elements of Calvinistic doctrine I suppose the one that stands most contrary to God's nature and just straight out blasphemous would be that which is represented by "L" in TULIP. This false doctrine teaches that Jesus Christ died only for the elect. The elect, according to Calvin were those that were selected by God with absolutely no regard to their will.

One passage that is twisted to uphold this false doctrine is Ephesians 5:25. It reads, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." The argument goes, "See, Paul taught that Christ died for the church. What is conveniently overlooked is the fact that Paul did not say that Christ died for the church "only!" It is true that Christ died for and shed His blood to purchase the church. That does not mean however, that the sacrifice of Christ was not for everyone that needs redemption. In Romans 5:6 Paul wrote, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."

There are many passages which show the concern God the Father and Christ have for all the lost of the world. Paul wrote to Timothy of God, "Who will have **all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Again to Timothy Paul wrote, "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, **who is the Saviour of all men**, specially of those that believe" (1 Tim. 4:10). Peter said, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance**" (2 Pet. 3:9).

While Jesus was on the earth, he had no idea concerning Calvin's doctrine of limited atonement. Jesus said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which **I will give for the life of the world**" (John 6:51). The life Jesus was providing was for the world. Again Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, **that whosoever believeth** in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). John also wrote concerning the propitiatory work of Christ. "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and **not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world**" (1 John 2:1, 2).

Another interesting section of Scripture that comments on this topic is found in the prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 53. Isaiah wrote, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and **the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all**" (Isa. 53:6).

In closing, we see that there are many passages which contradict the teaching of Calvin concerning "limited atonement." The fact is that God wants all men to be saved and Christ provided the means that all could be saved. That salvation is by the grace of God and it must be received by men. That will be our study next week. Until then, let us all study our Bibles more and more.

Irresistible Grace

Don Walker

Raccoon John Smith was one of the colorful characters of the restoration movement. It is said of John Smith that Alexander Campbell once commented that he was one individual that “higher education” would probably have ruined. His keen wit and straightforward preaching were refreshing and must have been at times quite humorous. John Smith was not raised in the church. In fact, he was raised with a Calvinistic background. It was this very background that perplexed the man to a great degree. Being raised in a family that believed in Calvinism, he was considered to be one of the elect. However, his “sign” never came. He waited and even longed for that “direct operation of the Holy Spirit” which would indicate he had received grace of God which could only come if God provided irresistibly. Yet, it never came. To his credit, even though he longed for that which would never come, he was honest enough to not “fake it.”

Calvin taught that “to the elect, God worked a kind of direct operation which made them suitable, whether they accepted it or not, for Eternal life.”¹ The grace that God offered to the elect could not be received nor could it be rejected. If a man or woman had been unconditionally, then Christ’s atonement was for them and them only, and they could not resist the grace that had been bestowed upon them. Thus the doctrine of “irresistible grace” is understood.

In considering the doctrine from a biblical perspective we would turn the attention of our reader to Titus 2:11. In this passage Paul writes, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.” Now if Calvinistic doctrine is true, then the Bible clearly teaches universal salvation. Yet, we remember the words of our Saviour in Matthew 7:13, 14. Jesus said:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Now Jesus did not know that all men would be saved. In fact he taught quite the opposite when he said that few enter life and many enter destruction. In fact, the Calvinist does not even believe that every man will be saved. Yet, even in contradiction to Titus 2:11 and simple reason, they teach that the grace of God is irresistible.

One passage that is misused to prove such a doctrine is 1 Corinthians 2:14. “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” From this passage they reason that God therefore must help us out with a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. However, this conclusion contradicts the fact that the Bible teaches that Scripture will make us complete. Notice 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be **perfect, thoroughly furnished** unto **all** good works.

The ASV reads, “That the man of God may be **complete, furnished completely** unto **every** good work.” If the Bible teaches that Scripture will make us complete, and really says nothing about a direct operation of the Spirit, then why would I believe that the grace of God is “irresistible”?

Another passage that must be considered is 2 Corinthians 6:1. “And working together with him we entreat also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.” Note that it is “ye” (the Corinthians) that had received the grace, and it could be received in “vain.” Paul does make it sound like there is absolutely nothing we can do to affect the grace of God. In fact, it is apparent that the Corinthians, as well as us today, have much to say concerning whether or not we benefit by the grace of God.

Thirdly, we learn from Scripture, that it is the word of God that pricks the heart. In Acts 2 Luke recorded this very fact for us. He wrote,

Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified. Now **when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart**, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?

We see the same result, with a different response in Acts 7. When Stephen preached the word there, the men were “cut to the heart” (vs. 54). However, instead of responding with obedience, they took the preacher out and stoned him to death. In both cases, it was the same power that touched the heart. It was the word of God.

In continued study of God’s word, learn that it is through the word that the Holy Spirit works on the heart. It is the word of God that is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). It is also by the word of God that God sanctifies. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 we learn that we are sanctified by the Spirit. Yet, in John 17:17 Jesus petitioned God, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”

It is true that salvation is by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8). Yet it is also through our faith. God’s grace is extended to all men (Titus 2:11), yet not all men will receive that grace and benefit by it. However, when men in an humble and contrite heart accept God’s grace they do so to their own benefit. They can choose to accept or reject God’s grace. It is each individual man’s decision. Lord willing, we will bring this series of articles to a close next week when we consider the “P” in “TULIP” – Perseverance of the Saints. Until then may we all study our Bibles more and more.

(Footnotes)

1 Jerry Moffitt, Denominational Doctrines, 1996, p. 229.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Don Walker

If it is true that men are born in sin, and can have absolutely nothing to do to escape that pitiable position, and it is by God's unconditional election that men are brought out of the darkness, then we can see how Christ's atonement was limited. If it is also true that the grace that God provides for man's salvation is irresistible, then it only follows that once a man has had that grace bestowed by God, he would be preserved from destruction. So goes the "P" in the acrostic T-U-L-I-P. It speaks of the perseverance of the saints. The "P" would also be known as the preservation of the saints. The whole point is Calvinist believe that the elect can not fall from grace – Once Saved, Always Saved.

Concerning this false doctrine, Brother Johnny Ramsey once commented, If I were the devil, and I could persuade men of only one false doctrine, this doctrine, once saved, always saved would be that doctrine. It certainly makes sense. If I could persuade men that they could not fall from grace, there would be a very good chance that they would let their guard down. Is this what the Bible teaches? This is the question that we must ask ourselves.

In Galatians 5:4 Paul wrote, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." Paul, in a very clear and succinct way forever proclaimed that it is possible for a child of God to so transgress and lose his or her soul. He understood the very possibility even for himself. He wrote, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). The ASV reads, "...I myself should be rejected." Why would Paul make such a statement if it were impossible for men to fall from grace? In 1 Corinthians 10:12 Paul wrote this short but powerful statement. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

In Revelation 21:27 John recorded concerning entering into heaven, "and there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but **only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life.**" In Revelation 3:1-5 the church in Sardis was warned that they did not stand perfect before the Creator. He that overcame would be arrayed in white garments, and would not have their name blotted out of the book of life." Why would Jesus make such a statement if it did not matter whether or not these whose names were in the book and thus in a position to enter into heaven, overcame or not, if they could not fall from grace.

In Acts 8 Philip went into Samaria, and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, which resulted in the conversion of some that heard. In that chapter Luke recorded, "And Simon also himself believed: and being baptized, he continued with Philip; and beholding signs and great miracles wrought, he was amazed (Acts 8:13). Simon believed, had his sins washed away at baptism, and continued with Philip. He was saved! As we continue reading we read this. "But Peter said unto him, Thy silver perish with thee, because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right before God" (Acts 8:20, 21). Simon had sinned, and stood in a position to perish with his silver. Simon fell from grace and had to repent to be forgiven and thus again in a right standing with God.

In reality, there are a multiplicity of passages which forever prove that the child of God can fall from grace and lose his eternal reward in heaven. Below is a list of some of the passages which indicate that a child of God must so live as to guard himself from apostasy.

Matthew 13: 48-50; John 8:21; Romans 11:22; 1 Corinthians 9:27; 1 Corinthians 10:12; 2 Corinthians 12:21; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 5:4; 1 Timothy 1:19-20; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 1 Timothy 6:10; 2 Timothy 4:10; Hebrews 4:1,2; Hebrews 10:38,39; James 5:19,20; 1 Peter 5:8,9; 2 Peter 1:4-11; 2 Peter 2:21,22; 2 Peter 3:17; 2 John 8; Jude 21; Revelation 2:1-5; Revelation 3:1-5

Please take some time to consider these passages in light of our eternal security. It seems odd that there are so many passages that speak of and warn against the child of God falling from grace, if it is impossible for us to fall from grace.

There is a sense in which we can not fall. Peter wrote, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Pet. 1:10). The "things" of which Peter speaks are those Christian's graces that we can add to our character. However, it must be noted that we are the ones who must add these qualities and it is possible that we would fail to do so. Then, of course, the promise made would be of no effect, because "if" is a conditional phrase. The truth of the matter is the Bible does not teach that a Christian can not fall from grace. In fact, it teaches just the opposite.

Really, as we have studied through this series of studies we have seen every element of Calvin's doctrine which are signified by the acrostic T-U-L-I-P are contrary to Scripture and thus stand as false doctrine. May we all understand the import of sound doctrine, and may we, with pure hearts, study our Bibles more and more.