



A Brief Look at TULIP Calvinism

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<http://www.jesuswalk.com/grace/tulip-calvinism.htm>

Appendix 2 to *Grace: Favor for the Underserving* (JesusWalk Publications, 2023). References to lessons in this study are indicated below.

One of the most contested topics in evangelical circles related to God's grace centers around the idea of what some call "the eternal security of the believer," the question of whether or not a true Christian can apostatize, that is, turn away and lose his or her salvation.

Arminians say it is possible; Calvinists say it is not. Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch Reformer, was on one side of this. John Calvin (1509-1564), a French Reformer centered in Geneva, was on the other.

You'll see that the question is really about how much is God's part in salvation and how much is man's part.



Ralph F. Wilson, 'Backlit Tulips' (2005), original watercolor, 10 x 10 in.

Developing a 'Working Hypothesis'

I want to begin by saying that theologians can marshal Scripture verses to support both sides of this question. It is also important to realize that we're talking about what scientists might call a "working hypothesis" of how God works with man. Scientists observe various phenomena and then try to construct a hypothesis that explains what they see. As they learn more, the hypothesis often changes or becomes more sophisticated. Now substitute the word "theology" for the word "hypothesis." Since there are many things we either don't know or can only "see through a glass darkly," it is important to be humble.

I don't see the question of whether or not it is possible for a person to lose one's salvation is at the level of a central dogma of the Christian faith. It is not! People on both sides love Jesus equally and serve him faithfully with all their hearts.

Purpose for Study

My purpose in preparing this Appendix is to help you understand the theological issues involved, without having to repeatedly discuss them in the text of my study *Grace: Favor for the*

Underserving (JesusWalk Publications, 2023). That study is designed to focus on the Bible doctrine of grace, not become deeply engaged in a somewhat tangential controversy.

I'll try to represent each view fairly. But I'll also share what my own view is and why I've arrived there. You may disagree with me. That's okay. Just let your responses come from love rather than anger.

Of course, there is no way in this short essay that I can cover the issues in any depth, so don't be surprised if I am not comprehensive or exhaustive. Whole books have been written about these things. Also, I'm not really interested in carrying on this controversy via e-mail with those trying to convince me of their position or ravage my own. Nevertheless, I hope you will find this Appendix helpful.

5-Point or TULIP Calvinism

At the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), Calvinists stated their core beliefs as a five-point acronym that conveniently helps us remember them: TULIP.

1. **T**otal depravity
2. **U**nconditional election
3. **L**imited atonement
4. **I**rresistible grace
5. **P**erseverance of the saints

I am using these five points as a structure to consider the various issues. It is a good starting point.

The TULIP beliefs were formulated more than 50 years after Calvin's death as a reaction to The Five Articles of the Remonstrance developed in 1610 by a group known as the Remonstrant Brotherhood that followed the teachings of Jacobus Arminius.³⁰⁵

1. Conditional election.
2. Unlimited atonement.
3. Total depravity.
4. Prevenient grace.
5. Conditional preservation of the saints.³⁰⁶

The TULIP structure, however, is much better known and quite easy to remember. Not all agree with the 5 points of Calvinism, of course. But we'll use TULIP as a helpful way to structure our discussion since it touches on all the main issues.

1. Total Depravity

The first point of 5-point Calvinism, the T in TULIP, is the Doctrine of Total Depravity. It is an unfortunate choice of words. Wayne Grudem, who comes to theology from a Reformed viewpoint, doesn't like the term. He says:

“This total lack of spiritual good and inability to do good before God has traditionally been called ‘total depravity,’ but I will not use the phrase here because it is easily subject



'Mother's Day Tulips' (2017), an original watercolor by Ralph F. Wilson, 14" x 10".

³⁰⁵Arminius had just died the previous year (1609).

³⁰⁶ More on this in a Wikipedia article, “Five Articles of Remonstrance.”

to misunderstanding. It can give the impression that no good in any sense can be done by unbelievers, a meaning that is certainly not intended by that term or by this doctrine."³⁰⁷

Rather, Grudem states the doctrine in this way:

"Every part of our being is affected by sin – our intellects, our emotions and desires, our hearts (the center of our desires and decision-making processes), our goals and motives, and even our physical bodies."

The Image of God vs. the Flesh

I would agree. Certainly, the image of God remains in man. His image is the source of any goodness we see. But the *imago Dei* in us is flawed, fallen. We are broken.

Paul refers to our unredeemed human nature as "the flesh" (*sarx*). The Greek noun is used in several senses in the New Testament, but especially in Paul's letters it refers to "sinful, fallen human nature."³⁰⁸ This latter use of *sarx* is variously translated as "the flesh" (KJV, NASB), "the sinful nature" (NIV), "self-indulgence" (NRSV, NJB), or "sinful self-interest" (*The Message*).

Thus, by ourselves, we are unable to have a relationship with God. Several verses underlie this doctrine; I'll mention just a few.

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature (*sarx*)." (Romans 7:18)

"To those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted." (Titus 1:15)

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

"They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts." (Ephesians 4:18)

I could multiply verses, but these are sufficient.

Our problem is that we aren't just human and imperfect. There is something twisted about our nature that gives us what John Wesley called "a bent to sinning." For a deeper discussion on Total Depravity or Pervasive Sinfulness see [Lesson 2.3](#) and [Lesson 4.1](#).³⁰⁹

I personally agree with the first point of Calvinism: that man is fallen, broken, unable to save himself. But I would rather not use the term "total depravity" to describe it.

³⁰⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 514, fn. 13.

³⁰⁸ *Sarx*, BDAG 914-916.

³⁰⁹ Church history warns us of a couple of extremes to avoid. Pelagianism, taught by Pelagius (about 355-420 AD), holds that original sin (or the fall of man) did not taint human nature and that humans by divine grace have free will to achieve human perfection. God could not command believers to do the impossible, and therefore it must be possible to satisfy all divine commandments. Pelagianism was strongly opposed by Augustine and condemned as heresy at the Council of Carthage (418 AD). A sort of compromise with orthodoxy known as Semi-Pelagianism teaches that the latter half of faith -- growing in faith -- is the work of God, while the beginning of faith is an act of free will, with grace supervening only later. Both Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism assert that man can in some fashion save himself. It is important that we really understand "total depravity" so we can avoid this error (See Wikipedia articles on "Pelagianism" and "Semi-Pelagianism" to explore this further.)

2. Unconditional Election

The second point of 5-point Calvinism, the “U” in TULIP, is the Doctrine of Unconditional Election. Calvinists assert that God *chooses or elects or predestines* people for salvation apart from any conditions or qualities he foresees in them. Arminians, on the other hand, argue for “conditional election,” that God chooses for eternal salvation those whom he *foreknows* will exercise their free will to respond with faith to the Good News in Christ.

Predestination

The Bible teaches predestination throughout, that is, that God predetermines the affairs of humans. God determines the rise and fall of nations. He raises up leaders and he brings them down. He is the Prime Mover.

“Predestined” (*prohorizō*) means to “decide upon beforehand, predetermine.”³¹⁰ It means the same as the English word “foreordain.” The New Testament also uses the term “chose” (*eklegomai*), “to pick, single out, choose.”³¹¹ God’s divine choice is clearly in the Bible.

Though we’re not certain exactly how predestination works, we do know that it is basic in our salvation. Jesus said that his sheep know his voice and follow him (John 10:14-18, 26-27). He also says:

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me **draws**³¹² him, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:44)

“No one can come to me unless the Father has **enabled**³¹³ him.” (John 6:65)

“No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son **chooses to reveal** him.” (Luke 10:22)

Acts also includes several passages that suggest predestination.

“All who were **appointed**³¹⁴ for eternal life believed.” (Acts 13:48b)

“The Lord **opened** [Lydia’s] heart to respond to Paul’s message” in Philippi (Acts 16:14).

“I **have many people** in this city.” (Acts 18:10b)

Of course, we have lots of questions. Why these people? Why not others? The Scripture gives only vague answers to our questions. We’ll have to ask in heaven.

³¹⁰ *Prohorizō*, BDAG 873).

³¹¹ Ephesians 1:4; Matthew 13:20; John 13:8; 15:6; etc. You also see the adjective *eklektos*, “chosen” (Matthew 24:22, 24, 31; 1 Peter 1:10; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1; etc.) and the noun *eklogē*, “a special choice, selection, election” (2 Peter 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; Romans 11:5, 7; 11:28).

³¹² “Draws” in 6:44 is the verb *helkō*, “to move an object from one area to another in a pulling motion, draw.” It can refer to someone who is dragged into court (James 2:6), drawing a sword (John 18:10), or hauling a net (John 21:6, 11). Here it is used figuratively, “to draw a person in the direction of values for inner life, draw, attract” (BDAG 318, 2). Jesus uses it in this sense when he says, “When I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32).

³¹³ “Enabled” (NIV), “it is granted” (NRSV, ESV), “given” (KJV) is the perfect passive participle of the common verb *didōmi*, “to give,” here, “to grant by formal action, grant, allow” (BDAG 243, 14 or perhaps 17b).

³¹⁴ “Appointed” is *tassō*, generally, “put in place,” but here, of a person put in a specific position, “assign someone to a (certain) classification,” passive, “belong to, be classed among those possessing” (BDAG 991, 1b).

Individual vs. National Predestination

One of the big unknowns for us humans is how *individual* predestination actually works. Many of us are parents. We know how we can sovereignly predetermine swimming lessons for our children. But the truth is, none of us really knows how *divine* predestination works. We can only speculate based on the light we have from the Scriptures and our own experience.

To complicate this, a number of the predestination passages that Calvinists rely on for their understanding in Romans 9, 10, and 11 are in the context of *national predestination* rather than *individual predestination*. The topic of these chapters in Romans is God's choosing of Israel, why Israel as a whole hasn't yet believed in the Messiah, and Israel's eventual salvation. Are we justified in presuming that how God predestines the destiny of nations and peoples operates exactly the same way as individual predestination? I don't think we can be sure enough of this to pin down predestination fully.

Other Pauline passages rejoice in God's predestination in the context of the church's corporate blessing to be "in Christ" – "He chose us in Christ" – rather than a focus on individual predestination (Ephesians 1:3-6, 11). This doesn't take away from the sheer grace of God's blessing and predestination. Praise God for his grace! But it complicates our understanding of the exact mechanics of *individual predestination*.

Foreknowledge

Another piece of the puzzle is foreknowledge, God's ability to know everything ahead of time. How does God use his foreknowledge in predetermining things? All agree that he doesn't choose us on the basis of how good we are (Romans 11:5-7; Ephesians 2:8-9). But does God choose us on the basis of his foreknowledge that we will respond to the Gospel with faith? Arminians think so. Calvinists don't. Rather, Calvinists believe that God chooses arbitrarily based on his own sovereign will. Romans 8:28-30 and 1 Peter 1:1-2 seem to combine both predestination and foreknowledge (which we consider in [Lesson 6.1](#)).

The verb "foreknew" is *proginōsko*, "to know beforehand or in advance, have foreknowledge (of) something." Liddell-Scott gives the basic definition as "know, perceive, learn, or understand beforehand," then, "foreknow."³¹⁵ Some have suggested that the meaning of *proginōsko* (in Romans 11:2 and 1 Peter 1:20) is "choose beforehand,"³¹⁶ a kind of "predeterminative

³¹⁵ Liddell-Scott, *Greek Lexicon*, 1473, 1.

³¹⁶ *Proginōskō*, BDAG 369, 2. Under definition 2, "choose beforehand someone" BDAG cites Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 6.8 – "The war had laid all the signs of beauty quite waste: nor if anyone that had known the place before, had come on a sudden to it now, would he have known it again." However, this has nothing to do with choosing beforehand!

foreknowledge.” I’m not convinced. This seems like reading into the Greek definition what your theology would like it to mean.³¹⁷ Romans 8:29 requires *proginōskō* to mean “foreknew.”³¹⁸

The appeals in the Bible made to people listening to the Gospel are immediate, assuming that their decisions are real, serious, and consequential – relating to “freedom of the will,” which we’ll discuss below in section 4. (For more on foreknowledge see [Lesson 6.1](#)).

I conclude that in some way, “the elect” have been elected or chosen “according to” (*kata*) God’s foreknowledge of us (1 Peter 1:1-2), probably God foreseeing our faith.

3. Limited Atonement

The third point of 5-point Calvinism, the “L” in TULIP, is the Doctrine of the Limited Atonement. This means that Christ died only for the elect, that is, for those whom God had predetermined to save from before all time. This fits nicely with the tightly coordinated doctrinal elements of Calvinism – and Calvinists cite Scriptural support,³¹⁹ but this doctrine is more *deduced* from Calvinists’ understanding of predestination than actually *taught* in Scripture. In fact, I believe that “limited atonement” *contradicts* the clear teaching of Scripture.

“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:2)

The Scriptures seem to teach the “Unlimited Atonement” or “General Redemption,” that Christ died for the sins of all people (John 1:29b; 3:16-17; 1 John 2:2; 1 Timothy 2:1-6; 4:10; Hebrews 2:9; Revelation 22:17).

We also know that God doesn’t fix his love on just the elect, but on all.

“[The Lord] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9b)

“God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:3b-4)

³¹⁷ No examples of this meaning are given from other Greek literature of the time or prior to it (*progignōskō*, Liddell-Scott 1473). But see 1 Peter 1:20, translations of *proginōskō* differ: “foreknown” (ESV), “chosen” (NIV), “destined” (NRSV), “foreordained” (KJV). The derivation of the word *proginōsko* clarifies the knowledge aspect: *pro-*, “before, in advance” + *ginōskō*, “to know.” While you can argue that the verb *ginōskō* (“to know”) is sometimes used in the sense of election in the New Testament, Bultmann says that the usual meaning of *proginōskō* is “to know beforehand,” as human knowledge or cleverness, but in the New Testament, referring to God, “His foreknowledge ... is an election or foreordination of his people” (Rudolf Bultmann, *ginōsko*, *ktl.*, TDNT 1:715-716). He notes that “know” (*yāda*) in the Old Testament is sometimes used in the sense of “to elect,” that is, “to make an object of concern and acknowledgment” (Genesis 18:19; Exodus 33:12; Amos 3:2; Hosea 13:5; Jeremiah 1:5). He cites Numbers 16:5, “In the morning the Lord will show [literally, “make known”] who belongs to him and who is holy, and he will have that person come near him. The man he chooses he will cause to come near him.” He also cites New Testament examples of this kind of knowledge: “The Lord knows those who are his” (2 Timothy 2:19); “If anyone loves God, he is known by God” (1 Corinthians 8:3); “Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12); “Now that you know God -- or rather are known by God...” (Galatians 4:9); “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (Matthew 7:23) (TDNT 1:698, 706). I think Bultmann makes his point that both *yāda* and *ginōsko* can be used in the sense of election, but to take the next step to assert that *proginōskō* / *prognosis* can mean election or foreordination of his people isn’t demonstrated by the usage of either *prognosis* or *proginōskō* in secular or contemporary Greek. To extend that to *proginōskō* is a stretch of logic.

³¹⁸ Otherwise, the clause would read: “For those God chose beforehand, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son” (Romans 8:29a). This would be a tautology (“a needless repetition of an idea, statement, or word”).

³¹⁹ For example, John 10:11, 14-15; Acts 20:28; Romans 8:32-35; Matthew 1:21.

4. Irresistible Grace

Point 4 of 5-point Calvinism, the “I” in TULIP, is the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace, (sometimes called effectual grace, effectual calling, or efficacious grace). In a nutshell, it asserts that when God predestines you to save you, there is nothing you can do to resist it. In other words, your salvation is already determined, not based on any “decision” on your part to follow Christ, but based solely on God’s decree. Nicely put, “irresistible grace” teaches that

“The saving grace of God is effectually applied to those whom he has determined to save (the elect) and, in God’s timing, overcomes their resistance to obeying the call of the gospel, bringing them to faith in Christ.”³²⁰

Free Will

One of the big questions – and a matter of philosophical study – is to what degree humans can exercise free will. Specifically: Does a person’s “free will” enable him or her to freely choose or reject Jesus Christ?

On the surface, the idea of having a free will seems to be pretty clear to us. We make decisions all the time. But let’s go deeper. What do we mean by “free”? Do we mean “without outside influence”? Or do we mean “without outside control,” that is, capable of making a real decision on our own?

The advertising industry spends millions of dollars to influence our decisions to buy certain products or brands. In election season, candidates and special interest groups spend millions of dollars to hype one candidate and discredit another. A lot of it is disinformation, lies, deception, half-truths.

This brings me to what Paul says about how the lost are being duped, lied to, and deceived. (We study this more deeply in [Lesson 2.2](#).)

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.” (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Before Christ, we were pulled by the currents of our age as well as by the currents of Satan – and were not even aware of it! We weren’t compelled against our will, but neither were we exactly free. Rather, we were under the powerful influence of Satan’s lies. Only the truth can set us free (John 8:31-32). Wesleyans believe that God’s Spirit works in unbelieving hearts through “prevenient grace” to prepare them to receive Christ. (More on this in a moment.)

Ability of the Will

It is one thing to have the freedom to choose. But what about the *ability* of the will to act? In Romans 7, Paul writes about a disconnect between a man’s desires and his ability to execute them.

³²⁰ Wikipedia article, “Irresistible Grace,” retrieved 24 Jun 2022.

“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate I do... I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature (*sarx*, “flesh”). For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” (Romans 7:15, 18)

There is lots of controversy about this passage – whether it describes Paul before or after he received the Holy Spirit, etc.³²¹ But scholars pretty much agree that the passage would *at the very least* describe a person’s life before the Spirit filled him or her.

My point here is that our human wills are constrained by both:

1. Lack of truth, and
2. Lack of moral ability

So the term “free will,” at least prior to regeneration by the Spirit, is a bit hollowed out.

Martin Luther wrote a whole book about this entitled *On the Bondage of the Will* (1525), asserting that people can only achieve salvation or redemption through God, and could not choose between good and evil through their own willpower. This is certainly food for thought!

God Holds Us Responsible for Decisions

There is another factor, however, that indicates some degree of free will. As mentioned above, God holds us responsible for our decisions. In many passages of Scripture, people are called on to make a decision and are then held responsible for that decision. For example:

“Repent, then, and turn to God.” (Acts 3:19a)

“Seek the Lord while he may be found....” (Isaiah 55:6a)

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matthew 4:17)

“If you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.” (Deuteronomy 28:15)

“I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

These passages indicate that our will is both capable of and responsible for making important decisions.

Prevenient Grace

Sometimes Calvinists use the phrase “sovereign grace” to describe God’s irresistible decision to save us. I agree that God is sovereign and can do what he wants. People who emphasize sovereign grace cite Paul:

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world.... In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, **in accordance with his pleasure and will** – to the praise of his **glorious grace.**” (Ephesians 1:4–6)

However, there’s another – and I think very helpful – way to look at it. “**Prevenient grace**” is a Wesleyan term describing God’s gracious working through his Holy Spirit to convict people of

³²¹ For my exposition of this passage see *Christ-Powered Life: Romans 5-8* (JesusWalk Publications, 2011), Lesson 5 (www.jesuswalk.com/christ-power/5_flesh.htm).

sin, draw them to Christ, and (hopefully) lead them to receive Christ by their free will.³²² (“Prevenient” is an archaic word meaning “coming before”; here it describes “grace that precedes our coming to faith.”) This concept makes sense to me; Calvinists use the term “regenerate” rather than “prevenient grace,” but I see regeneration as happening at the point of salvation, not prior to salvation.

As we saw in Point 1 above (Total Depravity), we are unable to come to God on our own since our nature is corrupted and distorted by sin and wrong beliefs. We need help. Prevenient grace is where the Holy Spirit *prepares* an individual’s heart to make him or her able to hear and say yes to the gospel.³²³ Contrary to my brothers and sisters who hold to Irresistible Grace, I believe people *can* resist Holy Spirit conviction, but through the Holy Spirit – and only through the Holy Spirit – they are able to make a real decision to come to Christ in faith and repentance, and thus be saved. Paul seems to be urging his readers not to reject this kind of grace that can enable salvation.

“As God’s fellow workers **we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.**” (2 Corinthians 6:1)

Full-blown Calvinism asserts that when God chooses you, there is no way you can resist God. I feel the Scripture indicates that resistance is sadly possible.

Evangelism as a *Means* of Faith

I remember when Billy Graham was in his prime. He would fill stadiums of people and call them to faith in Christ, to “make a decision for Christ.” But he was sometimes attacked by hyper-Calvinists, who saw calling people to faith as an irrelevant task, since they believed that people couldn’t “decide” to follow Christ unless God had already predestined them.

William Carey (1761-1834) was a young shoemaker and preacher with a heart for the lost, who would become known as the first white Protestant missionary and establish a work in Serampore, West Bengal, India. Prior to going to India, he spoke to a gathering of pastors in England to outline his vision for sharing the gospel. One of the pastors, a hyper-Calvinist, interrupted him,

³²² In current English, the phrase *preceding grace* would have a similar meaning, with the doctrine also being called “conviction.” Arminian Free Will Baptist theologian Robert E. Picirilli says that the word “prevenient” comes from an archaic English usage meaning “anticipating”, “coming before”, or “preceding.” Picirilli says that a good synonym for “prevenient grace” is “enabling grace”, as it *enables* sinful mankind to believe (Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism* (Nashville: Randall House Publications 2002), pp. 153, 53). Arminius wrote: “Concerning grace and free will, this is what I teach according to the Scriptures and orthodox consent: Free will is unable to begin or to perfect any true and spiritual good, without grace.... This grace [*prævenit*] goes before, accompanies, and follows; it excites, assists, operates that we will, and co operates lest we will in vain” (Jacob Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius, D.D., Formerly Professor of Divinity in the University of Leyden* (Auburn, NY: Derby & Miller 1853), vol. 2:472). The Holy Spirit brings it. “And when he [the Holy Spirit] is come, he will reprove [or convince] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). What Arminius meant by “prevenient grace” was that grace that precedes actual regeneration and which, except when finally resisted, inevitably leads to regeneration. He was quick to observe that this “assistance of the Holy Spirit” is of such sufficiency “as to keep at the greatest possible distance from Pelagianism” *Quotations from Wikipedia article, “Prevenient Grace,” accessed 24 Jun 2022.)

³²³ “Prevenient grace” is a theological term that refers to God’s grace that works with a person prior to salvation. In John 16:8-11, Jesus refers to the Spirit’s role in terms of conviction. Paul and Peter both see the Holy Spirit’s “sanctification” (KJV, ESV, NRSV), “sanctifying work” (NIV) involved in bringing a person to salvation (1 Peter 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Perhaps this is what Paul means when he says that the unbelieving spouse and children of a believer are “sanctified” through the presence of the Spirit in the believer (1 Corinthians 7:14).

saying, "Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine."

Just because God must work in a person's heart to bring him to faith does not mean that we are not to preach the Gospel. The preaching of the Word is the *means* by which men and women come to faith in Christ. The Apostle Paul writes:

"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:14-17)

Preaching the Word

My conclusion is that, while God prepares hearts, he also calls men and women and young people to speak his Word. God will do his part to prepare the soil, but we must do our part by praying and speaking the Word, being "workers in his harvest." If we don't, the ripe fields will not be harvested (Matthew 9:37-38; John 4:35), men and women and children will not come to salvation. I find no other conclusion except that you and I are responsible to speak the Word and to give testimony to our faith.

Amazingly, the salvation of people depends partly upon us. Paul said to Timothy,

"And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, *in the hope that God will grant them repentance* leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." (2 Timothy 2:23-26)

Again, he says,

"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction." (2 Timothy 4:2)

Jesus' Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23) also instructs us. The seed is the Word, which was sown widely, not just on the fertile soil. Are we to speak only to those whom God has prepared? No, Jesus sent the Seventy to every village expecting some to accept and others to reject the message. They were to declare the Word in every village, but not linger in those where they were rejected. But neither were they to prejudge and assume that some villages would not receive them. They were to speak "Shalom" to households in a village until they either found a receptive family or determined that the town was unreceptive. They were to speak the Word and let God be the determiner of who would receive and who would reject (Luke 10:1-12).

My belief in predestination does not preclude God's plan to use my testimony as the *means* of his bringing faith in the message to someone.

Ultimately, salvation, evangelism, and response to the gospel are a mystery. Evangelists have learned to organize earnest prayer that God might prepare the soil, so that preaching might be effective. Prayer for prevenient grace (even if you don't want to call it that). Prayer for the Holy

Spirit to work in lives and prepare hearts. But then the evangelist preaches to a crowd – or a believer shares the gospel with a friend – and often we see a response of faith. Certainly, this response is a work of grace. A work of the Holy Spirit is a gift.³²⁴

To conclude, the “I” in TULIP is Irresistible Grace. I believe the Holy Spirit works in sinners to prepare their blind and deceived hearts to come to Christ, but that the Spirit can be resisted.

5. Perseverance of the Saints

The fifth point of TULIP Calvinism is “P” for the Perseverance of the Saints. Perseverance of the Saints means that the elect will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives.³²⁵ Thus, one evidence that you are one of the elect is that you will endure in the faith to the end without forsaking Jesus. The English word “persevere” means “to persist in a state, enterprise, or undertaking in spite of counterinfluences, opposition, or discouragement.”³²⁶

Wayne Grudem states the doctrine from a Reformed or Calvinist point of view:

“The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again.”³²⁷

In other words, for those who are “truly born again,” it is impossible for them to lose their salvation through apostasy or falling away.

“Endures” is the Greek verb *hypomenō*, “to maintain a belief or course of action in the face of opposition, stand one’s ground, hold out, endure.”³²⁸ Thus, I would feel on much firmer ground to affirm something like.

“God’s elect will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives.”

Back in the early colonial days in America people would say that they are “hopefully saved,” with the idea that only at the end of one’s life could they know if they were one of the true elect. Fortunately, I believe we can have much stronger assurance of our salvation than that!

Abiding and Continuing

One of the classic passages on perseverance is Jesus’ teaching on the Vine and the Branches (John 15:1-17). Jesus begins by explaining that he is the True Vine, while his Father is the vine-dresser.

“⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must **remain** in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you **remain** in me. ⁵ I am the vine;

³²⁴ For further study see David Basinger and Randall Basinger (eds.), *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (Inter Varsity Press, 1986).

³²⁵ Wayne Grudem states the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints using the idea of “truly born again” rather than of “the elect.” “The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 788). Though Calvinists and Arminians disagree on whether a truly born again person can lose his or her salvation, both agree that the true saints, the elect are those who persevere in their faith.

³²⁶ *Merriam-Webster’s 11th Collegiate Dictionary*.

³²⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 788.

³²⁸ *Hypomenō*, BDAG 1039, 2. Similar verses: Matthew 10:22; 24:13; 2 Timothy 2:12; James 5:11.

you are the branches. If a man **remains** in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not **remain** in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” (John 15:4-6)

A key word in this passage is “remain” (NIV), “abide” (ESV, NRSV, KJV) – Greek *menō*, “remain, stay.” It can be used of staying in a location, often in the special sense of “to live, dwell, lodge.” Here, it is in the transferred sense of someone who does not leave a certain realm or sphere: “remain, continue, abide.”³²⁹ I. Howard Marshall says:

“The element of trust and commitment in faith is particularly emphasized and expressed in John by the use of the verb ‘to abide’ (*menō*), which might almost be said to be the Johannine equivalent for ‘to persevere.’”³³⁰

To “abide” means that we “hold to” (NIV) or “continue in” (NRSV, KJV) Jesus’ teaching (cf. John 8:31; 2 John 9). Those who abide in Jesus’ word don’t give up under persecution or allow their fruitfulness to be choked by the “weeds” of worldly pressures (to use the vocabulary of Jesus’ Parable of the Sower, Matthew 13:1-8, 18-23). Rather they produce a harvest of 30-fold, 60-fold, or 100-fold of the amount of seed originally sown.

Jesus teaches that the elect will continue in the faith: “He who endures (*hypomenō*³³¹) to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13; Mark 13:3; Luke 8:15).

The New Testament teaches that salvation is contingent upon believers continuing or persevering in their faith, often using various forms of the Greek verb *menō*, “remain, continue, abide.” Four of these have “if-clauses” or conditional clauses.

“... If you continue (*epimenō*³³²) in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.” (Colossians 1:23a)

“By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly (*katechō*³³³) to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:2)

“But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are his house, if we hold on (*katechō*) to our courage and the hope of which we boast.” (Hebrews 3:6; cf. 10:39)

“If you continue (*menō*) in my word, you are truly my disciples.” (John 8:31)

Others are expressed as commands.

“Remain true (*prosmenō*³³⁴) to the Lord.” (Acts 11:23)

“Continue (*prosmenō*) in the grace of God.” (Acts 13:43)

“Continue (*epimenō*) in the faith.” (Acts 14:22)

“Continue (*menō*) in him.” (1 John 2:28)

³²⁹ *Menō*, BDAG 631, 1bβ.

³³⁰ I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God* (Bethany Fellowship, 1969), p. 183.

³³¹ *Hypomenō*, “to maintain a belief or course of action in the face of opposition, stand one’s ground, hold out, endure” (BDAG 1039, 2).

³³² *Epimenō*, “to continue in an activity or state, continue, persist (in), persevere” (BDAG 375, 2), from *epi-*, “continuance, rest, influence upon or over” + *menō*, “remain, stay, persist.”

³³³ *Katechō*, “to adhere firmly to traditions, convictions, or beliefs, hold to, hold fast” (BDAG 533, 2a).

³³⁴ *Prosmenō*, “to be steadfast in association, remain/stay with someone or something” (BDAG 883, 1).

Despite this clear teaching of the New Testament on continuing in the faith, some Bible teachers assert that saving faith need not be an enduring faith, one that perseveres. For example, popular television Bible teacher Charles Stanley, pastor emeritus of the First Baptist Church of Atlanta, proclaimed in his book *Eternal Security* (1990),

“The Bible clearly teaches that God’s love for his people is of such magnitude that even those who walk away from the faith have not the slightest chance of slipping from his hand.”³³⁵

Stanley goes substantially beyond the teaching of the Scriptures here!

My own understanding of this has been strongly influenced by the warning passages of Hebrews (especially Hebrews 2:1-4; 6:4-8; 10:26-31). It is clear to me that Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who were considering turning back to Judaism rather than to non-believers. Nowhere does the author suggest they need to be persuaded for the first time of the claims of Christ.³³⁶ If we take the warnings seriously, then Hebrews teaches the *possibility* of apostasy.

Arguments For and Against ‘Eternal Security’

Those who believe that a truly born-again believer cannot lose salvation, generally argue that:

1. Those who fall away from the faith weren’t truly born-again (citing 1 John 2:19).
2. Jesus offers eternal life to believers without qualification (e.g. John 10:27-30).
3. Salvation is by grace, not works (Ephesians 2:8-10).
4. Warnings in Hebrews are directed toward non-believers, not believers.³³⁷
5. Arguments from analogies – (a) If you’re born again, you can’t be “unborn.” Or, if you’ve been given a gift it can’t be “ungiven.”³³⁸
6. It doesn’t make sense that a mere man can frustrate the purpose of the Sovereign God.

Wesleyans typically assert that:

1. While some who fall away from the faith were not truly born again (1 John 2:19), that doesn’t explain all who commit apostasy.
2. God predestines based on his foreknowledge – not of one’s future works, but of one’s future faith (Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:1-2).

³³⁵ Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?* (Oliver Nelson, 1990), p. 74. He supports this from Ephesians 2:8-9, noting that faith itself is a gift, and God has a “strict no-return policy” (p. 81). He says, “You and I are not saved because we have an enduring faith. We are saved because *at a moment in time* we expressed faith in our enduring Lord” (p. 80). I understand (but disagree with) Stanley’s logic. I have serious problems when I compare Stanley’s teaching to New Testament teaching.

³³⁶ Paul Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 21-27; Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 22-25; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Revised edition; New International Commentary on the New Testament; Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 3-9.

³³⁷ So John MacArthur, *Hebrews: Perfect Sacrifice, Perfect Priest* (MacArthur Bible Studies; HarperChristian Resources, 2016). But see the footnote that precedes this. For a deeper study see Herbert W. Bateman IV (ed.), *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (Kregel, 2007).

³³⁸ This type of argument is called *reductio ad absurdum*, demonstrating that a scenario would lead to absurdity or contradiction. But when applied to an *imperfect analogy* of salvation (e.g., birth, gift), it isn’t compelling.

3. Hebrews is written to Jewish believers who are flirting with the temptation to return to Judaism and forsake Christ as the promised Messiah. It contains severe warnings against apostasy that must be taken seriously (Hebrews 2:1-4; 6:4-8; 10:26-31).³³⁹
4. While many verses in the New Testament promise salvation without qualification, others insist that one must continue in the faith. We must take these qualifications seriously. Here is one of these that we saw in the previous section under Abiding and Continuing

“²² He has reconciled you ... to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – ²³ **if you continue**³⁴⁰ **in your faith**, established³⁴¹ and firm,³⁴² not moved³⁴³ from the hope held out in the gospel.” (Colossians 1:23)

You see such verses throughout the New Testament.³⁴⁴

Assurance of Salvation

Just because apostasy is *possible*, however, doesn't mean we have to be afraid of losing our salvation. We have great assurance of salvation as we walk with Christ.

“I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

“... Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6)

“³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:3-5)

For more on God's wonderful promises of perseverance see [Lesson 6.3](#).

Conclusion

We've been discussing the theological issues surrounding 5-Point or TULIP Calvinism:

1. Total depravity

³³⁹ You can explore this more fully in my [Disciple Lessons from Hebrews](#) (JesusWalk Publications, 2011), (www.jesuswalk.com/hebrews/)

³⁴⁰ “Continue” is *epimenō*, “to continue in an activity or state, continue, persist (in), persevere” (BDAG 375, 2), from *epi-*, “continuance, rest, influence upon or over” (*epi* in composition, Thayer, E1) + *menō*, “remain, stay, persist.”

³⁴¹ “Established” (NIV), “securely established” (NRSV), “grounded” (KJV) is *themelioō*, “to provide a base for some material object or structure, lay a foundation,” here used figuratively, “to provide a secure basis for the inner life and its resources, establish, strengthen” (BDAG 449, 2a).

³⁴² “Firm” (NIV), “steadfast” (NRSV), “settled” (KJV) is *hedraios*, “pertaining to being firmly or solidly in place, firm, steadfast,” from *hedra*, “seat, chair” (BDAG 276).

³⁴³ “Not moved” (NIV, KJV), “not shifting” (NRSV) is the negative particle and the word *metakineō*, “shift, remove” (BDAG 639), from *meta-*, “exchange, transfer, transmutation” + *kineō*, “to cause to go, set in motion” (from which we get our English word “kinetics”).

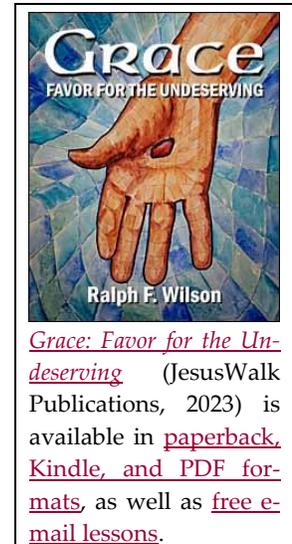
³⁴⁴ Acts 13:43; 11:23; 14:22; 1 John 2:28; John 8:31; Hebrews 3:6b.

2. Unconditional election
3. Limited atonement
4. Irresistible grace
5. Perseverance of the saints

I've only given the bare bones here, but I hope you find it helpful in sorting out the issues. If you don't agree with my interpretations of each of these issues, that's okay. At least you understand the issues. God will sort it out for us in heaven.

In the meantime, we are brothers and sisters in Christ seeking to learn what we are able from Scripture about things that are largely a mystery, except where God has pulled back the curtain by his revelation through Jesus Christ our Lord. To Him be glory forever! Amen!

Ralph F. Wilson
Loomis, California
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