

TULIP
Romans Chapter 3

TULIP

Toward the end of the movie “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade” Indiana Jones is asked, “It's time to ask yourself what you believe.” This is a question that Christians are often challenged to do. What do you believe? In particular, “What do you believe about salvation?”

Within the Protestant community, there are two major theological systems, Reformed Theology and Dispensational Theology. They both accept that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ. But there are profound differences. Some of those differences are encapsulated in the acronym “TULIP.”

I thought that this lesson would be easy. Define TULIP and then explain why Dispensationalists don't believe that. I even have a Systematic Theology by a Reformed theologian. Reading that and other sources convinced me that Reformed theology and what is called Free Grace theology live in very different worlds. Looking at the attacks on each from the other side convinces me that each side has a narrow view of what the other side believes. This is compounded by the fact that there are various denominations and branches of each theology. In the end, we have to answer the question that was asked of Indiana Jones: "It's time to ask yourself what you believe.”

Before I elaborate on “TULIP” let us ask ourselves what we believe, at least what has been taught at Spring Valley Bible Church.

Mankind is corrupt since the fall of Adam. We have Adam's sin imputed to us; we have a sin nature passed down to us from our fathers; we commit personal sins from that sin nature. But we have free will. We can choose to accept the gospel and believe in Jesus Christ or not.

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As Herman has said, election is like a father saying that whoever his daughter marries will be in the family, is elected. God is outside of time. He is omniscient. Once we believe, we are placed in the body of Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. So anyone in Christ is elect because Christ was elected.

We understand that Christ died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). He didn't die for just the people who eventually believe and leave the sins of the unbelievers unjudged.

We understand that it is by grace that we are saved. Some accept that grace, and believe in Jesus Christ. But there are some who choose not to believe and accept God's gracious gift. They are condemned to the Lake of Fire. They have free will.

We understand that once a person believes in Jesus Christ as savior, he has eternal security. Once saved, always saved.

Remember the phases of salvation¹

Phase	Justification	<u>Sanctification</u>	Glorification
Tense	Past	<u>Present</u>	Future
Saved from sin's:	Penalty	<u>Power</u>	Presence
Scripture	Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5	<u>Philip 2:12</u>	Rom 5:10

We have seen in previous lessons that some theologies combine what we call Justification and Sanctification. For them, salvation is not complete

¹ https://cdn.slbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/13092856/SLBC-001_Soteriology-01_06_2016.pptx

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until their life has produced good works which are evidence of a saved life.

My understanding is, that is generally what Free Grace theologians believe. I am using “Free Grace” instead of Dispensational theology since the issue here is not specifically dispensations but a whole host of other issues related to salvation.

Reformed theologians would disagree on the points above. That disagreement is affirmed in the acronym “TULIP.” That is what Reformed theologians generally believe. Just as there are many Christian denominations, there are also differences within those denominations. That is why some denominations split. For instance, recently, the United Methodist Church had some who disagreed on doctrine. They split off and became the Global Methodist Church. If you are interested in how split Christians are, look at the Wikipedia page:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominations

There are a surprising number of denominations and then the divisions within those denominations. So in my discussion below, I am using the generally accepted definitions. In particular, Reformed theologians generally use the acronym TULIP to explain what they believe about salvation. It is different than what we believe. I will explain using other pastors’ notes as help. Specifically Robby Dean and Andy Woods.

Let me tell you what I understand the Reformed theology believes using the TULIP acronym as a guide. Then, let’s look at the beliefs of a Baptist Church to determine if it is “Free Grace” or “Reformed.” After that, we will go on a journey through the TULIP acronym using quotes from both sides of the argument.

TULIP is an Acronym for **T**otal depravity, **U**nlimited election, **L**imited Atonement, **I**rresistible grace and **P**erseverance of the saints.

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Total Depravity is understood as total inability. The unsaved man cannot understand spiritual information and is unable to express faith toward God. God has to regenerate a man in order for him or her to understand the gospel. God provides the faith. Man is unable to generate this faith. That is the Reformed position as I understand it. The Free Grace position is that man has free will and can respond to the gospel in faith. Regeneration is a salvation ministry of God the Holy Spirit after a person believes in Jesus Christ. It is one of the 33+ things that the believer receives at salvation.

Unlimited Election. God from His sovereignty determines who will believe. Some outside of the Reformed tradition call this predestination. God predestines those who will believe. It is unlimited in that it does not depend on anything the believer is or has done.

Limited Atonement says that Jesus Christ did not bear the sins of the whole world. He only bore the sins of those who would eventually believe. The argument from the Reformed position is that people go to the Lake of Fire to bear the eternal penalty of sin.

Irresistible Grace from God is irresistible. Those who are elected will respond to irresistible grace. That is the Reformed position.

Perseverance of the Saints requires proof of salvation. That is provided by good works accomplished by the believer after salvation. If a person says they have believed but they don't have a changed life style, then likely they really didn't believe. Some use the phrase "they had a head belief and not a heart belief." The Free Grace position is that once saved always saved. There is the doctrine of eternal security.

So what is the importance of knowing this? If there are two kinds of theology that dominate Protestant churches how do I find out if the church I want to attend agrees with my beliefs? You can compare these

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doctrines of the Reformed theology and Free Grace theology to the “statement of faith.” Let us do that with a church here in Rockwall, First Baptist. TULIP is focused on salvation. So, we will look at what the First Baptist of Rockwall believes <https://firstrockwall.org/>

As you can see, they fall under the Reformed umbrella. There are some other topics besides salvation that I mentioned: Israel (no mention in the statement of faith); dispensations and the Tribulation (not mentioned); tithing (mentioned elsewhere on the website)

Now let us dive into some of the details

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TULIP = Total Depravity (Inability), Unlimited Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints. I have used quotes from Wayne Gruden’s Systematic Theology. He is a “Reformed” theologian. “Reformed” refers to theology initially developed by Calvin. I also use quotes from Robby Dean pastor of West Houston Bible Church and Andy Woods of Sugarland Bible Church. He is also president of Chafer Theological Seminary.

“T”

From Wayne Gruden (Reformed)²

“Not only do we as sinners lack any spiritual good in ourselves, but we also lack the ability to do anything that will in itself please God and the ability to come to God in our own strength.”

“Nor can we come to God in our own power, for Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44).”

² Grudem, W.A. (2020). *SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, SECOND EDITION: an introduction to biblical doctrine*. S.L.: Zondervan. Page 627

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“This ability to repent and desire to trust in God is not naturally ours but is given by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and it will not last forever.”

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

From Robby Dean (Free Grace)³

“The “T” stands for total inability. Now sometimes it stands for “total depravity.” But there is a difference. In total depravity it just means all that we are is corrupted by sin. Total inability means that man cannot do anything like exercise positive volition toward God. Everything is on God’s initiative. So that is total inability. No human being can do anything or desire anything good.”

From Andy Woods (Free Grace):

It’s the acronym tulip in the Calvinistic system and the T stands for total depravity and what they mean by it is man is like a rock, he’s so far dead in his trespasses and sins, he’s like a rock and he has absolutely no ability to believe on his own and even when the Holy Spirit convicts people of sin, it really has not much effect because of this over emphasis that they have on total depravity. I believe in total depravity obviously, but not the way it’s being defined by the neo-Calvinist Movement. So, you’re like a rock, you’re sort of in an insensate state. John McArthur uses the word “cadaver,” you’re totally dead and the only reason anybody gets saved is God on the front end imparts the gift of faith to some and if God didn’t do that, no one could get saved, neo-Calvinism. God, actually in their way of thinking, regenerates people so that they can believe. Now, who

³ <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/philippians/message/051-confusion-over-salvation-phil2-12-18/listen>

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gets the gift of faith? Who gets regenerated so they can believe? It's the fraction of the human race that happens to be the elect. They are the fortunate ones. If they are chosen by God, then they get the gift of faith, they get regenerated so that they can believe and the rest of the human race is basically predestined to go into hell. So there will be people showing up in hell, in their system, that had absolutely no choice in the matter, okay? neo-Calvinism.⁴”

“U”

From Robby Dean. I included him first since he has a definition of the “U.”

“The “U” stands for unconditional election. That means in eternity past, God chooses who will be saved and who will not be saved and it is not related to His foreknowledge. The way they define foreknowledge is God cannot know something will happen unless He has already determined that it will happen. It's determinism.⁵”

From Grudem/Reformed:

Therefore, it seems intuitively appropriate to us to say that if God is going to save *some* sinners, he ought to save *all* sinners. But in answer to this objection it must be said that we really have no right to impose on God our intuitive sense of what is appropriate among human beings. Whenever Scripture begins to treat this area, it goes back to God's sovereignty as Creator and says he has a right do with his creation as he wills (see Rom. 9:19-29, quoted above). If God ultimately decided to create some creatures to be saved and others not to be saved, then that

4 <https://slbc.org/sermon/zechariah-016-discipline-and-restoration/>

5 <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/philippians/message/051-confusion-over-salvation-phil2-12-18/listen>

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was his sovereign choice, and we have no moral or scriptural basis on which we can insist that it was not fair.⁶”

“L”

From Robby Dean:

“The “L” stands for limited atonement. Christ died only for the elect. So, logically the system is consistent.⁷”

From Wayne Grudem⁸:

“One of the differences between Reformed theologians and other Catholic and Protestant theologians has been the question of the extent of the atonement. The question may be put this way: when Christ died on the cross, did he pay for the sins of the entire human race or only for the sins of those who he knew would ultimately be saved?”

“Non-Reformed people argue that the gospel offer in Scripture is repeatedly made to all people, and for this offer to be genuine, the payment for sins must have already been made and must be actually available for all people. They also say that if the people whose sins Christ paid for are limited, then the free offer of the gospel also is limited, and the offer of the gospel cannot be made to all mankind without exception.”

“On the other hand, Reformed people argue that if Christ’s death actually paid for the sins of every person who ever lived, then there is no penalty left for anyone to pay, and it necessarily follows that all people will be saved, without exception. For God could not condemn to eternal

6 Grudem, W.A. (2020). *SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, SECOND EDITION : an introduction to biblical doctrine*. S.L.: Zondervan. Page 832

7 <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/philippians/message/051-confusion-over-salvation-phil2-12-18/listen>

8 Grudem, W.A. (2020). *SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, SECOND EDITION : an introduction to biblical doctrine*. S.L.: Zondervan. Page 736

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punishment anyone whose sins are already paid for: that would be demanding double payment, and it would therefore be unjust.”

From Robby Dean/Andy Woods and others: There is a barrier between man and God. That has been presented by Herman and myself. Sin is not the only issue that must be dealt with. In the end, the reason that people go to the Lake of Fire is because they rejected Jesus Christ as savior. Also, God is not required to provide the gospel to unbelievers who have rejected God. Yet, they often do receive it.

“I”

The “I.” “Irresistible grace means God the Holy Spirit will irresistibly draw the elect to the cross and they cannot say no. It is irresistible. And He only draws the elect.”⁹”

“Sometimes the term *irresistible grace* is used in this connection. It refers to the fact that God effectively calls people and also gives them regeneration, and both actions guarantee that we will respond in saving faith. The term Irresistible grace is subject to misunderstanding, however, since it seems to imply that people do not make a voluntary willing choice in responding to the gospel—a wrong idea, and a wrong understanding of the term *irresistible grace*. The term does preserve something valuable, however, because it indicates that God’s work reaches into our hearts to bring about a response that is absolutely certain—even though we respond voluntarily.”¹⁰”

9 <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/philippians/message/051-confusion-over-salvation-phil2-12-18/listen>

10 Grudem, W.A. (2020). *SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, SECOND EDITION : an introduction to biblical doctrine*. S.L.: Zondervan. Page 851

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“P”

“And the “P” stands for the perseverance of the saints that those who are truly elect and receive the gift of faith will evidence that through their works.^{11”}

“So that is the system. And that is how you end up with Lordship Salvation.^{12”}

“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.^{13”}

“On the other hand, this doctrine of perseverance of the saints, if rightly understood, should cause genuine worry, and even fear, in the hearts of any who are “backsliding” or straying from Christ. Such persons must clearly be warned that only those who persevere to the end have been truly born again. If they fall away from their profession of faith in Christ and life of obedience to him, they may not really be saved—in fact, the *evidence* that they are giving *is that they are not saved*, and they never really were saved. Once they stop trusting in Christ and obeying him (I am speaking in terms of outward evidence), they have no genuine assurance of salvation, and they should consider themselves unsaved, and turn to Christ in repentance and ask him for forgiveness of their sins.^{14”}

11 <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/philippians/message/051-confusion-over-salvation-phil2-12-18/listen>

12 <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/philippians/message/051-confusion-over-salvation-phil2-12-18/listen>

13 Grudem, W.A. (2020). *SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, SECOND EDITION : an introduction to biblical doctrine*. S.L.: Zondervan. Page 970

14 Grudem, W.A. (2020). *SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, SECOND EDITION : an introduction to biblical doctrine*. S.L.: Zondervan. Page 989

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There are some posts at Crosspoint Church that may also answer questions you have on Reformed Theology at:

<https://www.cp-church.org/blog>

I teach what I believe. I disagree with Reformed theology. But, they believe salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ. It is instructive to understand what they believe and how that differs with what we believe. They are fellow believers.

This lesson should also provide a tool to look at a church's statement of faith to see where they stand: Reformed or Free Grace/Dispensational.