

UNDERSTANDING THE “I” IN TULIP

Selected passages

I. INTRODUCTION:

- A. **Total depravity:** Man is helpless to accomplish his own salvation. Man is dead within his trespasses and sin.
- B. **Unconditional election:** God does not choose you based on any conditions. God would elect some for eternal life and condemn others to eternal death.
- C. **Limited Atonement:** Jesus only died for those whom He knew were chosen by God the Father.
- D. **Irresistible grace:** If God wants to save someone, that person will not be able to “resist” or “reject” the grace of God. They will be saved no matter what.
- E. **Perseverance of the saints:** If you’re truly born again, you will persevere and not permanently turn away from the faith. You cannot lose your salvation.

II. THE UNDERSTANDING OF “IRRESTIBALE GRACE” WITHIN A BIBLICAL RESPONSE:

- A. The Synod of Dort (1618-1619) defines irresistible grace-the “I” in TULIP- as the sovereign, efficacious work of the Holy Spirit that infallibly brings the elect to salvation. It teaches that God regenerates a sinner’s dead heart, enabling them to willingly repent and believe, effectively overcoming all resistance.

Key aspects of their definition:

Other names: Irresistible grace has also been named “effectual calling”, and also “efficacious grace”. Yet all three names really are defined the same way within Calvinism.

Context: The doctrine was a direct response to the Arminian view that saving grace could be resisted and rejected.

Their view of the nature of grace: The Synod defined it not as a force that violates human will, but as a spiritual quickening that “sweetly and powerfully bends” the heart towards God.

Their view on regeneration preceding faith: They believe that regeneration is an act of God alone, which then enables a person to respond in faith. They would cite Titus 3:5 for this view.

Their idea of grace: They would believe that that grace is applied specifically to those whom God has chosen for salvation (the elect).

How they connect this to depravity: Because they see humanity as dead in sin (Total Depravity), they are unable to come to God on their own; therefore, this grace is necessary to make them willing.

III. BIBLICAL PROBLEMS CONCERNING THIS DOCTRINAL POINT OF CALVINISM:

- A. **Scripture indicates the Holy Spirit can be resisted:** When we look at Acts 7:51 we see that Stephen tells the Sanhedrin, "You always resist the Holy Spirit," which indicates that God's grace is not always irresistible and it can be refused or resisted.
- B. **Irresistible grace contradicts free will:** Though some Calvinists say that this is not true, the concept of somebody not being able to refuse the gospel would consider a forced conversion, so the idea of us coming to him is not even optional. In 1 John 4:19 we see that we love Him because he first loved us, which implies our response to His love is love towards him.
- C. **With irresistible grace the gospel invitation is insincere:** With only a few enabled to respond there would be inconsistency regarding why God would call all people everywhere to repent if it is impossible for all to repent due to some irresistible impulse. In Acts 17:30 we see God asking all to repentance.
- D. **Irresistible grace redefines Biblical Love, justice, and mercy:** In looking at 1 Corinthians 13:4 we see that love is kind and patient, and yet this idea of love can't be true from God to humanity with the concept of "irresistible grace. His fair justice is also in question because how could he judge somebody that had no choice but to reject him. He would only be performing the acts that he was predestined to do. It would be like faulting a paraplegic for not winning an Olympic gold medal as a gymnast.

IV. Application:

- A. In seeing this doctrine populate throughout the world we see it attacks the true nature of who God is and presents everything that he is not. This teaching will push more people away from God than bringing them to Him. We must remember that all are called to the Lord which fits the narrative produced by scripture. Our free will to accept or reject Him is all part of His extension of love.