



Though not existing until (almost) 100 years after the Protestant Reformation began, the theological system established at the Synod of Dort¹ - otherwise known as the Doctrines of Grace, Calvinism, the five points of Calvinism, or the acronym, T.U.L.I.P. (Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace and Perseverance of the saints) serves as an accurate summary of arguably the Reformation's most guarded and novel belief: monergism (God is the only One working/acting in our salvation from its beginning until its end)². The purpose of this study has been to re-consider the 5 Points of Calvinism and the monergistic view of salvation it presents through re-examining those biblical texts used to support it along w/the rest of the biblical witness to determine if this view is indeed the gospel of how God saves sinners³. **Why this study should matter to you:** 1) It demonstrates God's continuing protection of us (the denial of free-will and justice espoused by the determinism of the atheist evolutionists is the theology and resulting consequence of Calvinism also known as theistic determinism = God is the cause of all things as all things [comprehensively/exhaustively] including our actions have been pre-determined by Him. Free-will/self-determinism is an illusion. Human beings are robot-victims that w/punished as though their actions were self-determined [versus pre-determined/pre-programmed]. Theistic determinism [and its monergistic view of salvation] are said to give God the most glory [?] [robot worship versus real worship; e.g. a king whose people praise him b/c they choose to versus a king whose people praise him b/c they are forced to])⁴, 2) It demonstrates growth in our understanding of God's Word and therefore also His continual leading of us as His disciples (Christianity is Judaism 2.0 whereas Calvinism/Protestant Reformation is Roman Catholicism 2.0), 3) It demonstrates our trust/commitment to God's Word as the only sacred cow.

1. TOTAL DEPRAVITY = We are completely unable to repent, believe in Christ and be faithful to God's commands.

What the Bible actually teaches/reveals:

MORAL ABILITY = Though sin has severely affected us, it has not stripped us of our morality – or moral ability before God and others. We can – and therefore are expected to - repent of our sin, respond in faith to the gospel of Christ and live faithfully to God's commands. Countless texts in the Scripture make clear that mankind's will is still free enough to establish both his culpability and God's right to judge him when he fails (we are "w/o excuse" – e.g. Rom 1:18-21 w/2:2, 3:1-8; Joh 9:41). Equally evident from the Bible, is God's genuine displeasure when people continue in their rebellion and His desire to see them turn and follow Him (Eze 18:23, 33:11; Deu 30:19-20; Rom 2:4; 1Pe 3:20; 2Pe 3:9). Both attributes equally imply our ability to repent, believe and be faithful to His commands. Finally, God confirms this ability by explicitly stating that we can obey His commands (Deu 30:11-14). As additional support, the early church rejected the thinking promoted by the doctrine of total depravity (e.g. Justin Martyr, Tatian, Irenaeus, Athenagoras, Melito, Clement, Tertullian, Origen, Methodius, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom - even Augustine, the coveted saint of the Calvinistic Reformers)⁵.

2. UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION = Before God created the universe, He chose/elected specific persons to be the recipients of His salvation based/conditioned upon nothing He saw or knew about those individuals as to their moral value or potential or because He possessed some prior obligation to them, but instead based solely on His free choice and sovereign grace. As part of God's unconditional election of some to salvation, He also determined to provide those individuals with the necessary repentance, faith and faithfulness thus eliminating the obstacle created by the prior doctrine of Total Depravity (inability to repent, believe and faithfully obey) and guaranteeing their future residence into heaven.

What the Bible actually teaches/reveals:

SEEKER SALVATION = Though the Bible does teach election, it does NOT teach that God chose/elected specific persons to be the recipients of His salvation before Creation. Nor do the Scriptures teach that such election is unconditional – or that once saved, they are guaranteed to one day reside in heaven. Rather the Scriptures teach that God's election/choice as to who is worthy to receive salvation is instead always based/conditioned on the past/present actions of people. Furthermore, God has obligated Himself to all who diligently and genuinely seek Him and His righteousness promising that they will not only find Him, but be elected/chosen to receive His offer of salvation thru covenant relationship w/His Son. Those who obey God's gospel call will be identified as His elect/chosen and those inheriting the blessing of salvation. Such designation however requires that such individuals continue in faithful obedience for the rest of their life. Otherwise such prior election – or identity as the elect, will be forfeited. (Gen 6:5-9, 11-13 w/18a; Gen 6:22 w/7:1; Gen 6:18; 1Pe 3:20-21; Gen 15:1-21; Neh 9:8; Gen 17:1-8 w/21 w/22:16-18 w/26:1-5 w/28:10-15 w/Deu 4:31, 7:6-8; Rom 11:28; Eph 1:1-11; Ezr 8:22; Isa 56:1-8; Rom 2:6-8; Act 10:34-35, 13:47-48, 17:25-26; 1Ti 1:12-13; Act 2:39 w/Gen 17:7-13; 1Co 7:14; Act 8:26-36; Act 16:6-10; Joh 4:23; Mat 9:37-38, 10:12-14; Isa 56:1-5; Act 10:34-35, 16:6; Joh 4:23; Rom 2:6-11; Jer 29:13; 2Pe 1:10-11; Mat 24:22, 24, 31; Luk 18:7; Rom 1:6-7, 33, 11:7; 1Co 1:24, 2:7; Col 3:12; 2Ti 2:10; Tit 1:1; 2Jo 1:1, 13; Jud 1:1; Rev 17:14; Isa 43:20-28; Joe 2:32; 1Th 1:4 w/3:5; Mat 22:1-14; Deu 7:9-12; 2Pe 1:8-11 w/3:20-22; Rom 11:20-24, 28-29). As additional support, the early church rejected the thinking promoted by the doctrine of unconditional election (e.g. Justin Martyr, Clement, Irenaeus and Hermas).

3. LIMITED ATONEMENT = Christ's atoning sacrifice or death was not for all people who have or will ever exist, but limited to specific people, those who God has unconditionally guaranteed will end up in heaven (the Calvinist understanding of the elect). Christ's redemptive work is therefore not only perfectly sufficient and effective for those to whom it is applied, but also perfectly efficient (none was wasted) on those to whom it is applied.

What the Bible actually teaches/reveals:

¹ The Synod of Dort held in Dordrecht, Holland from 1618-1619, consisted of 154 meetings and lasted seven months. Theologians and secular authorities from Germany, Switzerland and England were brought together to examine 5 doctrines made popular by the late seminary professor, Jacobus Arminius. The synod - or council, ultimately disagreed with Arminius' position and in response, crafted 5 counter-points or doctrines that later became known as the "five points of Calvinism" in respect to late reformer, John Calvin.

² Monergism is in contrast to what was held in church history prior to that - i.e. synergism, man cooperating w/God (i.e. working/acting together w/God) in the process of his salvation.

³ The reason I use the words "re-consider" and "re-examine" is b/c Calvinism has been - in whole or part, the conviction of myself and the teaching of our church for over 25 years. I have preached through the 5 points of Calvinism numerous times and received my theological training from Calvinist/Reformed seminaries (e.g. Reformed Theological Seminary). My growth in understanding the Scripture during this time has led me to now reject all five points. Theologians/pastors changing their theology as a result of such growth and understanding is not uncommon (e.g. Augustine's *Retractions*). Commenting on Augustine's published changes, John MacArthur writes, "Near the end of his life, Augustine of Hippo meticulously reviewed everything he had ever published. He wrote an entire catalogue of his own works, a painstakingly annotated bibliography with hundreds of revisions and amendments to correct flaws he saw in his own earlier material. The book, titled *Retractiones*, is powerful evidence of Augustine's humility and zeal for truth. Not one of his earlier publications escaped the more mature theologian's scrutiny. And Augustine was as bold in recanting the errors he perceived in his own work as he had been in refuting the heresies of his theological adversaries. Because he reviewed his works in chronological order, *Retractiones* is a wonderful memoir of Augustine's relentless, lifelong pursuit of spiritual maturity and theological precision. His forthrightness in addressing his own shortcomings is a good example of why Augustine is esteemed as a rare model of both godliness and scholarship." In other words, corrections sb expected where there is growth not only in understanding (the virtue in scholarship) but what it truly looks like to say that you care more about God being right – or looking good, than you do yourself (the essence of godliness).

⁴ "The moment we catch sight of the stream of causes that precede their conscious decisions [i.e. criminals], reaching back into their childhood and beyond, their culpability begins to disappear." – Sam Harris (Freewill); "By losing free-will we gain empathy, for we realize that in the end all of us, whether Bernie Madoffs or Nelson Mandelas, are victims of circumstance..." Jerry Coyne (Why We Really Don't Have Free-Will); "When a computer malfunctions, we do not punish it. We track down the problem and fix it, usually by replacing a damaged component, either in hardware or software. Isn't the murderer or the rapist just a machine with a defective component? Why is it that we humans find it almost impossible to accept such conclusions? Why do we vent such visceral hatred on child murderers...when we should simply regard them as faulty units that need fixing or replacing? My dangerous idea is that we shall eventually grow out of all this and even learn to laugh at it, just as we laugh at (a man) when he beats his car." – Richard Dawkins (Let's All Stop Beating Basil's Car).

⁵ "He [God] has revealed to us, through His Holy Scriptures, that there is in man a free choice of will... God's precepts themselves would be of no use to a man unless he had free choice of will, so that by performing them he might obtain the promised rewards." – Augustine

REDEEMED CHURCH = Though the Bible teaches that Christ's atoning sacrifice or death was not for all people who have or will ever exist, but limited to specific people, those people are not determined based on whether they end up in heaven. Rather, Christ's blood (or sacrifice) was for His church - or those people who are part of the redemptive covenant community. As such, it resides in the church. Hence the reason the blood sacraments of baptism and the LT were given exclusively to the church. (Eph 5:25; Act 20:28 w/Joh 10:11, 15 and Mat 1:21 w/Psa 95:7; Regarding the blood sacraments of baptism and the LT – Act 2:41 w/Rom 6:3 and Act 22:16 w/Eph 1:7 and 1Jo 1:7; Joh 13:1-10 w/Mat 26:28). However since people can become members of Christ's church - only later to fall away (in apostasy), removing them both their former redemption or cleansing (as well as the possibility of its re-application in the future), what is also true, is that Christ's blood (or sacrifice) does end up (in those circumstances) being wasted since it ultimately does not result in eternal salvation for those people (Heb 10:26-29).

4. IRRESISTABLE GRACE

4.1. What the doctrine teaches: God causes those He elects/chooses for salvation to be born again/regenerated as the means to providing them w/the necessary repentance and faith for conversion. This spiritual birth cannot be resisted nor the continuing grace that follows unto faithfulness and final salvation (in heaven).

4.2. The problems with this doctrine: Though the Bible teaches regeneration/the new (spiritual) birth, its place in the order of salvation (Ordo Salutis) - as well as what it does - are both very different from the view taught within Calvinism. Likewise, neither it nor God's continuing grace are irresistible to those God elects.

4.2.1. The new birth/regeneration is the result (not the cause) of our free choice and ability to repent and exercise faith.

The order of salvation (Ordo Salutis) presented in Scripture is not regeneration/new birth then repentance/faith but rather repentance/faith, and then regeneration/new birth:

4.2.1.1. (Joh 1:13) = Why were the people in verse 11 not given the right to be adopted? Was it because they had not been regenerated? No, it was because they did not receive Christ. In verse 12 John gives God's condition for adoption: receiving Christ and believing in His name. The obvious flow of the passage is (1) Receiving Christ and believing in His name. (2) God's granting the right to become His children/to be born of God. According to John, the new birth is the result of faith/belief – not its cause.

4.2.1.2. (Eph 2:1-8; Col 2:13-14) = In regard to the phrases “having forgiven” and “by cancelling”, Dr. Paul Rainbow writes, “The past (aorist) participles (which make up these two phrases) indicate that forgiveness and cancellation precede [or come before] the making alive [regeneration/new birth]...”⁶ And since, such forgiveness or cancellation of sin's debt requires repentance and faith, what must then be concluded, is that these acts also precede (or again, come before) the new birth. Paul therefore also believed regeneration to be the result (not the cause) of repentance and faith.

4.2.1.3. (Act 2:38) = Like John and Paul, Peter also taught repentance and faith as coming before regeneration/new birth given: 1) his reference to baptism is a reference to faith (since baptism is the place where we exercise saving faith in God, 1Pe 3:21 = baptism saves b/c it is the God-ordained place to “appeal to God for a good conscience” – i.e. the place where God accepts our faith), 2) his reference to receiving the Holy Spirit is a reference to regeneration/new birth (since these two events happen at the time of baptism – Tit 3:5).

4.2.2. Many of those God calls by His grace - i.e. offers salvation to through the preaching of His gospel message (the biblical understanding of election), resist and continue in their unbelief and rebellion (thus rejecting also the opportunity to be born again/regenerated) .

Jesus teaches that this was the case w/the majority of those that God graciously offers His saving benefits to (Mat 22:1-6) = This portion of the parable is directed at the Jews, who had received the gospel message and God's gracious call/offer of salvation through the exhaustive and comprehensive preaching of Jesus and His disciples in the land of Israel during His earthly ministry. The majority however rejected it. They were “invited to the wedding...but they would not come...they paid no attention” (3, 5). “Many (were) called, but few (were) chosen” (14). Some even killed God's messengers (6). Hence the reason for Jesus' harsh (yet prophetic) words in (7).⁷ Similar words are spoken by Stephen and Paul (Act 7:51-52; Rom 10:18-21). Important in this respect are Luke's words in (Luk 7:28-30) “the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him” = God's intention in sending John the Baptist and Jesus to the Jews was their election to salvation. However, His grace was strongly resisted. Though these examples are all in relation to the Jews, the point (nonetheless) is made. God's grace (or gracious attempts to save people) can be resisted.

4.2.3. Our spiritual birth/regeneration is a great help, but it does not guarantee that we will live for God.

The purpose of the new birth/our regeneration/receiving of the Holy Spirit is to empower God's people in living holy/obedient lives to Him. It is the fulfillment of (Eze 36:25-27). The flesh once weakened by sin, has now been given the aid of God's presence in our hearts motivating us to do those things which are pleasing to Him, to say “no” to those things that don't and to gain the glory of our Savior (Phi 2:12-13; Tit 3:5 w/2:12; 2Th 2:13-14; Rom 8:3-4). Such help however does not guarantee that we will live for God. We can resist the Holy Spirit by disobeying His leadership and suppressing His power (Eph 4:17-30 = The fact that Paul commands us “not to grieve the Holy Spirit” must mean it is something we can do. IOW: Christians can resist God's continuing grace in their lives). Hence the reason Paul can warn Christians “not to receive the grace of God in vain” (2Co 6:1; see also Heb 12:15).

4.2.4. Many of those who receive God's grace or gospel call (by repentance and faith), are regenerated or born again and become identified as “the elect” or Christians, will later resist God's continuing grace – even reject it and permanently fall away.

According to Jesus, many of those who become Christians (and are therefore identified as “the elect” or God's people), will later resist – even reject God's continuing grace and fall away in apostasy (Mat 13:18-23) = Three of the individuals represented in Jesus' kingdom parable receive the gospel and become Christians/followers of God. However only one (the person identified as the “good soil”) produces lasting fruit – or continues to follow God for the rest of their life. Due to the various cares/problems/temptations of this world, the other two fall away or are choked out, meaning they apostasize or have permanently forfeited their birthright/righteous standing w/God and its salvation. From Jesus' perspective then, the majority of those who become Christians (2/3 or 66% based on the parable) will not end up making it to heaven. God's continuing grace to them was resisted. That this indeed Jesus' perspective is confirmed multiple times in His later teaching (Mat 21:42-43, 45 w/Act 4:11 – “the builders” = The Jews, God's elect people, the builders/recipients of His kingdom, those who have rec'd His initial grace and come into covenant relationship w/Him – b/c of their “rejection” of Jesus or resistance to God's grace thru Him was [likewise] rejected and the kingdom given to others. This group represented the majority of the Jews in Jesus' day; Mat 22:8-14 = Even though many others were invited and received into the wedding w/Jesus only a few will remain [or possess the wedding garments – see Rev 19:8 = the wedding garment is our righteous deeds/faithfulness]; Mat 24:3, 9-13; Consider also Deu 31:16-17).

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION/CHALLENGE = God's initial and continuing grace in salvation is RESISTABLE. The responsibility is therefore on us to make sure we are NOT living in such a way that this would happen (i.e. grieving the Holy Spirit). What things are you doing to make sure you are not blocking God's grace from transforming your life and preparing you for heaven? (Heb 3:12-13; 12:1; 1Co 9:23-27; 2Co 10:5; Rom 12:2-3).

⁶ Paul Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation*, p.235

⁷ A reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and many Jews in the Jewish-Roman war of 70 A.D. Jesus expands His teaching on this event – including the killing of God's messengers in His continuing condemnation of the Jewish religious leaders (Mat 23:29 – 24:34).