



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: [1] free-will with the result of no justice [or unjust justice], a theology similar to that espoused by atheist evolutionists [determinism]** = God/universe is the cause of all things as all things [comprehensively/exhaustively] including our actions have been pre-determined by Him/it. Free-will/self-determinism is an illusion. Human beings are robot-victims that are/wb punished as though their actions were self-determined [how is this not unjust since we are now helpless victims? ⁴] **and the removal of God's glory** [robot worship versus real worship – which gives God glory? People praising him b/c they freely choose to or people doing it b/c they are forced/pre-determined/caused to?]; **[2] the denial of apostasy w/the result being God as a manipulative liar and us as bold antinomians⁵**), 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)⁶.

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; Eze 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 2:7; 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:

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).

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 *Retractions*, 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, *Retractions* 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 In his 1521 letter to Philip Melancthon, Martin Luther wrote, "Love God and sin boldly". Luther did not believe apostasy to be a real threat to real Christians.

⁶ "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

4. **IRRESISTIBLE GRACE** = God causes those He elects/chooses for salvation to be born again/regenerated as the means to providing them w/the necessary repentance/faith for conversion. This spiritual birth cannot be resisted nor the continuing grace that follows unto faithfulness/final salvation (in heaven).

What the Bible actually teaches/reveals:

SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT = Though the Bible teaches that those identified as the elect are born again/regenerated, it takes place as the result of a person's ability and choice to repent, exercise faith and vow faithfulness to Christ. The new birth is therefore not the cause of a person's conversion nor irresistible. Like all of God's gracious offers and efforts, we can choose to reject it or the gift of spiritual empowerment given at the same time, the Holy Spirit. A correct understanding of this phenomenon would therefore be: We receive God's gracious gifts of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit at salvation - i.e. when we repent and are baptized/exercising saving faith (Tit 3:5; Eph 2:1-8; Col 2:13-14; Joh 1:13; Act 2:38), as the spiritual empowerment for living faithful Christian lives (Tit 2:12). Such empowerment however does not guarantee faithfulness or continuance in the Christian Faith. As always, we must choose to cooperate w/God's will (Eph 4:30). (4.2.1. - 4.2.4. DISCUSSED)

4.2.5. Historical support

The Reformers believed that Regeneration/New Birth followed after faith⁷:

4.2.5.1. Martin Luther

"Paul as a true apostle of faith always has the word 'faith' on the tip of his tongue. **By faith, says he, we are the children of God.** The best the Law can do for us is to prepare us for a **new birth through faith** in Christ Jesus. **Faith in Christ regenerates us into the children of God.**"⁸

4.2.5.2. Philip Melancthon

"**This special faith**, by which an individual believes that for Christ's sake his sins are remitted him, **regenerates us** and brings the Holy Ghost."⁹

4.2.5.3. John Calvin

Commenting on John 1:13, Calvin writes, "**God regenerates us by faith**.... It may be thought that the Evangelist reverses the natural order by making regeneration to precede faith, whereas, on the contrary, **it is an effect of faith**, and therefore ought to be placed later."¹⁰

5. **PRESERVATION/PERSEVERENCE OF THE SAINTS** = The elect or saints - those genuinely saved, are secure (or will persevere) in their salvation, unable to fall away or become apostate, being preserved (or protected) by God from such loss or the forfeiture of their future in heaven. As such, the two axioms of this view are: "Once saved always saved" and "If you have it, you will never lose it, if you lose it, you never had it."

What the Bible actually teaches/reveals:

MAINTAIN (to) REMAIN = Though the Bible teaches that God protects His saints (i.e. His elect or saved), such security/preservation does not apply - or override, the wills of those who freely choose to practice sin/unrepentance against Him. These individuals will instead become apostate or permanently sealed in their sin and eternally lost as to their former salvation and future hopes of heaven. A Christian must therefore maintain the salvation they gained (through faithful obedience) if they are to remain saved and continue to receive God's protection/preservation unto heaven.

5.2.1. God never promises to eternally secure/preserve the recipients of salvation without the condition of persevering and faithful obedience.

There are three main texts used by Calvinists to support this view. None teach what they presume:

5.2.2.1. (Phi 1:6) = The verses surrounding this stmt are all about Paul's affection and appreciation for the Philippian believers (3-5, 7-8).

Additionally, Paul mentions that he is convinced he will soon be re-united w/them for the purpose of their progress in the faith. As such, it sb obvious that who Paul is referring to as completing the "good work" is not God, but himself. Speaking about oneself in the third person is a literary device used several places in the NT - including by Paul in his other letters (Mat 8:20; 2Co 12:2-7; Col 1:28). Additionally it sb mentioned that verse 7 makes no sense unless it is himself that Paul is referring to in verse 6 (7 - "It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart") = Paul's feelings for the Philippian believers are not a legitimate reason to establish God's obligation to them - only his own.

5.2.2.2. (2Ti 2:10-13) = Paul's conclusion from the previous verses (signaled by the word "Therefore") is that one must "endure" to "obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus". This principle (or "saying") - i.e. we must persevere/endure to be saved, "is trustworthy" (according to Paul) since it agrees with another saying - or set of couplets, that were most likely familiar/common to Christians in his day, those found in verses 11-13. The purpose (then) of these couplets is to reinforce this principle/truth that a Christian must persevere/endure to be saved. The first couplet does so positively ("if we die...if we endure" = "we live...we reign"), the second - negatively (or by way of antithesis) ("if we deny...if we are faithless = "He will deny...He remains faithful"). As such, what is meant by "He remains faithful" is that God will be faithful/true to His promise as to what will happen if we are unfaithful ("he will" - once more, "deny us"). This has been the case w/all of God's saving covenants. They (or God's promises to us) are conditioned upon our faithful obedience (Deu 28:15-68; Neh 1:8, 9:3; 2Chr 15:2; also Mat 24:36-51, 25:1-46; 1Ti 1:12-14).

5.2.2.3. (2Ti 1:12) = What Paul is confident God will "guard" is what has been "entrusted to" him - which is the gospel not his salvation (8-11).

5.2.2. God only promises to protect/preserve and save those who Christians who persevere/endure in faithful obedience until the end.

Consider (Jud 20-21 w/24) = Notice the commitment to faithfulness precedes (or is the prerequisite) to God's help/protection in keeping us from "stumbling"; (1Pe 1:5) = Our protection from God happens "thru faithfulness"; (1Pe 5:6-10 w/Jam 4:5-7) = God opposes those who are disobedient ("the proud")but helps ("gives grace") to the obedient ("the humble"); (Mat 6:13) = His protection only comes after our commitment to obey - v10; (1Ti 6:20) = The "good deposit" to be guarded by Timothy (not God) is his salvation - which includes his calling, confession and vow of obedience to God's command to righteousness (11-14)¹¹.

5.2.3. Christians who choose to continue in the practice of sin (i.e. remain unrepentant) will lose their salvation without the possibility of gaining it - or the promise of heaven, back again (i.e. loss of salvation and apostasy are real things happening to real Christians).

Consider (Heb 10:24-30 = Notice those God is condemning are "His people" [i.e. Christians]¹²; Understanding salvation as marriage to Christ helps us to see that loss of salvation and apostasy are real since to deny this wb like saying that those who get divorced were never married).

5.2.4. The Bible nowhere teaches that those who fall away or go apostate were never real Christians.

There are two main texts used by Calvinists to support this view. Neither teach what they presume:

5.2.4.1. (Mat 7:23) = Jesus' words - "I never knew you" are marital in nature. They refer to the act of intimacy associated w/marriage that consummates the covenant initially established at betrothal (e.g. Gen 4:1 - "Adam knew his wife"). Because these individuals were not faithful during this testing period, Jesus refuses to eternally be associated w/such individuals or consummate the marriage/betrothal covenant established at the time of salvation. Jesus words are essentially His call for (eternal) divorce. Jesus' words are therefore not a reference to them lacking prior salvation, but rather - b/c of their life of unfaithfulness (they were "workers of lawlessness"), their prior betrothal to Him (as saved individuals) was not - nor would be, consummated in the intimate and eternal bliss of heaven.

5.2.4.2. (1Jo 2:19) = The fact that John states "they went out from us" signals that they were (at one time) a part of the covenant community and therefore saved individuals. It is their going - or being put out of the covenant community, that reveals (makes "plain") "they all are" or "were" "not of us" anymore (i.e. no longer - like the rest in the covenant community, willing to "continue" in faithfulness to Christ), but instead choosing to stand against - or in disobedience, to Christ. They had become "antichrists" (18). John's words are therefore referring to the apostasy of real Christians not people falling away who never were (how do you get "out" of something or fall away from something you were never a part of?)

5.2.5. We must therefore maintain our salvation through persevering and faithful obedience if the salvation and hope of heaven we possess is to remain (Mat 10:22, 19:16-17, 24:36-51, 25:1-46; Luk 12:35-46, 13:6-9; Rom 11:22; 1Co 9:23-10:22; Phi 2:12-16, 3:10-14; Col 1:23; Heb 3:6, 14, 5:9, 6:4-12, 10:35-39; 2Jo 1:8).

CONCLUSION = Calvinism/Monergism is not the salvation of the Bible. Salvation is instead, synergistic (us cooperating w/God and choosing to follow God of our own ability and free-wills).

⁷ The shift to regeneration preceding faith did not take place until sometime in the seventeenth century—after the original Reformers were dead. Possibly during the time of the Synod of Dort (1618-19) or the Formula of Helvetica (1675)—or through the writings of Stephen Charnock (1628-80) who made it clear that he believed regeneration was antecedent to faith.

⁸ Luther's Commentary on Galatians.

⁹ Book of Concord, Augsburg Confession, Article IV (II): Of Justification.

¹⁰ Calvin's Commentary on John.

¹¹ Statements like the following are common in many evangelical churches, "the security of our salvation is dependent on God's ability to keep the believer and not the believer's ability to keep himself" (e.g. Keystone Church, Dayton, OH). Not only does it deny the passages discussed, but also any real need to obey.

¹² Some commentators believe that God is only attempting to scare us (into obedience). The danger is not real. If true, then telling your child there is a monster under the bed to keep them from getting up is an appropriate strategy. Put another way, lying and manipulation are appropriate tools for God and man in accomplishing "just" ends. The Bible however does not identify such a person as God, but the devil (Num 23:19; Joh 8:44).