

10. WHAT ARE THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE?

The phrase “doctrines of grace” describes the soteriological doctrines (doctrines of salvation) that are unique to Reformed theology, which is Calvinistic. These doctrines are summarized with the acronym TULIP.

- T** Total Depravity,
- U** Unconditional Election
- L** Limited Atonement
- I** Irresistible Grace
- P** Perseverance of the Saints.

All five of the doctrines of grace are derived directly from the Scripture and the acronym TULIP accurately describes the Bible’s teaching on soteriology.

The following is a brief description of each of the letters in the acronym TULIP.

Total Depravity

Because of the fall, man in his natural condition apart from any work of grace is guilty before God, hostile to God and good, inclined only toward evil continually, spiritually dead and unable to save himself. Sin has so affected every part of man (mind, will, emotions) that he cannot and will not by nature turn from sin and believe in Christ to be saved. Rather, he will exercise his will in rebellion against God and the pursuit of sin.

(Genesis 2:15-17; 6:5; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; John 6:44; Rom 3:10-18; 5:12; 7:18; 8:7-8; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1-10)

Unconditional Election

Election refers to God’s choosing of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world. This choice is unconditional in that it is not based on any merit in the sinner or any foreseen response from the sinner, but rests only in the sovereign wisdom and good pleasure of God. Repentance and faith are the result of election not the cause of election. Apart from the election of grace, none would be saved for none would seek after God.

(John 10:26; Acts 11:18; 13:48; Romans 8:29-30; 9:10-21; Ephesians 1:4-11; 2:4-10)

Limited Atonement (Definite or Particular Redemption)

The doctrine of limited atonement (perhaps better referred to as definite atonement or particular redemption) addresses the extent of Christ's atoning work on the cross. It answers the question, "For whom did Christ die?" More specifically, it grapples with the question of what Christ's death actually accomplished: did it merely make salvation possible for those who might believe or did His death actually accomplish and secure the salvation of His elect?

The Scriptures teach that Christ's death actually achieved the salvation of those for whom He died. Christ's death was not general, but particular and definite in its aim. Christ died for the elect. He died for His bride, the Church. And His death actually accomplished all that was necessary to secure the everlasting salvation of His people. Christ's death on the cross cancels the debt of their sin, satisfies the holy wrath of God, and wins for His people all the benefits of salvation, including the gifts of repentance, faith and new life by the Spirit.

While Scripture references will be listed below to support this understanding of Christ's death on the cross, it should be noted that limited atonement is best understood by a careful study of the meaning of union with Christ by faith as well as the great terms used in the New Testament to describe Christ's cross-work, such as: redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, substitution, satisfaction.

(Isaiah 53:11-12; Matthew 1:21; 26:28; Mark 10:45; John 10:11-30; 17:6-12; Acts 20:28; Romans 3:21-16; 8:28-30, 32; Ephesians 2:8-10; 5:25; Titus 2:14; 3:5-6; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24; Revelation 5:9)

Irresistible Grace

Because man is spiritually dead in sin, only a sovereign work of God can overcome man's rebellion against God and bring him to faith in Christ. Irresistible grace refers to that special inward work of God the Holy Spirit whereby a sinner is made spiritually alive and given the gifts of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. God's sovereign work of grace can and will overcome all resistance when He wills to draw His elect to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

(John 1:12-13; 3:1-8; 6:37, 44, 64-65; 10:27; Acts 16:14; Romans 8:28-30; 1 Corinthians 1:23-24; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6; Ephesians 2:8-10; 2 Timothy 2:24-25)

Perseverance of the Saints

All those so chosen by God before time, redeemed by Christ, effectually called by God to faith in Christ and given new life in the Spirit, will be finally saved. This is not simply a matter of eternal security, though it includes that. Scripture teaches that the saints will be kept in persevering faith and the obedience of faith by the power of God to the end. The fruits of conversion will be evident in their lives, though not without remaining sin.

(Mark 13:13; John 8:31; 10:26-30; Romans 8:13, 28-30, 35-39; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2; Ephesians 1:13-14; Philippians 1:6; 2:13-14; Colossians 1:21-23; 2 Timothy 2:11-12; Hebrews 12:14; 2 Peter 1:10; 1 John 2:3-6; Jude 24-25; Revelation 2:7, 10, 11, 17, 25, 26; 3:5, 11,12, 21)

These five doctrines together form the doctrines of grace, so called because they summarize the salvation experience as the result of the grace of God, who acts independently of man's will. No effort or act of man can add to the grace of God to bring about the redemption of the soul. For truly it is "by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).