

Sermon 1: The Doctrines of Grace: Total Depravity

OUTLINE

Two types of religion
The history of TULIP
The fourfold state of man

INTRODUCTION

Imagine with me two different religions, but both are called Christianity. One flows from man's reason, not that Spirit illuminated Bible taught reason but reason driven by man's sinful self-confident ability to rationalize everything out to the nth degree. The other religion is based upon God's revelation recognizing that our sinful minds need to be taught truth because it is our natural tendency to suppress it. At the centre of the first religion is man, we will call this anthropocentric religion. At the centre of the second religion is God, this we call theocentric religion. In the middle of the first we have man's free will as the central tenet around which everything is arranged; and in the second God's free grace. These are two different views of the universe that affect everything.

Imagine radiating from these centres various lines pointing the doctrines that are impacted by this central truth. Both these systems will have all the same doctrines, but they will be different because of the relationship they bear to the central concern. So some of the doctrines are election; salvation; sanctification; prayer; perseverance; good works; rewards. The truth is every doctrine is impacted by every other doctrine, it is the job of systematic theology to show the relationship of doctrines to each other and how changes in certain truths will impact the whole system of truth.

So think about how these will look in their various systems. In the anthropocentric religion we have prayer. Prayer with man at the centre is something with which man gives God power and permission to work in the world, if we don't pray things can't happen. Prayer is the thing by which we change the eternal mind of God, even the eternal plan. If we pray hard enough, believe well enough, persist long enough, our prayers will be rewarded with answers. In the God centred view prayer is not a right but a privilege; it is by grace that a sinner gets a hearing by a holy God, we cannot change the eternal plan or mind of God, or twist His arm by our efforts which are all tainted by sin, we have no access but by a mediator, we need the name and righteousness of Christ to enter and be heard, prayer is mysteriously employed by God as a God appointed means to meet His appointed ends, and all part of His unchanging plan. All answers are by grace not effort.

This difference is seen in every teaching. So in God-centred thinking we see that God by His free grace decides who He will elect; and by grace act to regenerate His elect; the parts of conversion, faith and repentance, are grace enabled acts; sanctification is the work of God working and willing in us by His grace; prayer does not change God's eternal decree but is a privilege of participating in God's bringing His perfect will to pass; perseverance is not left to us, but depends on God's enabling grace and power, and our final rewards will be given on the basis of God rewarding our puny efforts in Christ and not for their real worth. It is a system of grace from beginning to end, that starts with God, however man is no robot but is included, however, always as dependent and as a response to God's initiative.

In the man centred religion we see the unbiblical, idolatrous system that has man at the centre and God is not allowed to act apart from constantly accommodating man's so called

free will. God cannot elect without first consulting the future and arranging his election around what man will one day decide. Since the fall it is claimed has not affected the will of man, regeneration is not necessary before faith, but is given in response to it, faith and repentance are acts that are still natural to fallen man, sanctification is seen as man growing the fruits of the Spirit by the efforts of his own will and spiritual exercises, spiritual growth is depersonalised from the person of God to the use of mechanical means. Prayer actually changes the mind of God. Perseverance depends on your own determination and effort, and rewards are measured according to your efforts. In this system God is the enemy if He does not love all in an equal fashion, even though they are guilty sinners in His sight; if He does not arrange His saving purposes around man's 'free' choice; and any talk of God being the necessary enabler, acting apart from our working and willing, or necessary to any working or willing, destroys the freedom of the will and will cause many to become lazy and have a false assurance of their salvation, or be caught in terrible doubts not knowing whether they are elected.

We believe that the Bible teaches a certain view of God, man and salvation which is summarised by the God-centred approach. This summary has been called many things, Calvinism; Augustinianism; Reformed Theology. We at Covenant Grace Baptist Church hold to these beliefs and are doing a short series to explore them. To varying degrees the man-centred approach has been represented by Pelagianism; Semi-Pelagianism; Arminianism; Amyraldianism, Molinism, etc. Now let us clear because sometimes cage-stage Calvinists have accused their fellow Christians of being heretics and idolaters because of this differing view of things. When someone is on the extreme end we would agree, but large swathes of the Evangelical Church hold differences on some of these beliefs and they are fellow brethren with us. We are saved by grace not by orthodoxy. Not all Christians are equally accommodating towards Reformed Christians, and some Reformed Christians have arrogantly spoken of the 'Reformed Faith' as if Christians of different beliefs belong to another faith. This is not helpful. Instead of seeing those of Reformed convictions as on another set of tracks or moving in an opposite direction to the rest of the Church, we prefer to see ourselves as a smaller pool inside the larger pool of Christianity.

The history of TULIP

Today we are starting a short series looking at what we call the doctrines of grace. They are more popularly known as TULIP. There are many places that discuss these things online but few of them are informed, so it is better that you get it straight from the horse's mouth. The acronym TULIP is speaking about five distinctive doctrines. These are not the only things that Calvinists believe but due to some of the historical background, these have come front and centre. Here is a little history. The Reformation was one of the greatest moments in Church history. The Church which had been held captive to the Sacramental theology of the Roman Catholic Church was finally freed with a return to Biblical teaching through Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and others. The truth of many doctrines was rediscovered and put forth strongly by the various Reformers. However, it was not long before an attack from another side came up, an attack not against the doctrine of Justification by Faith, but rather several doctrines surrounding God's sovereignty and man's free will. In 1610 a document was published by the followers of a man called Jacob Arminius, the document was called *The Remonstrance of 1610*. The Remonstrance was a protest against certain doctrines regarding God's election and man's choosing. They taught election on the basis of foreseen faith, a universal atonement, resistible grace, and the possibility of lapse from grace. This upset the various Churches which had sprung up after the Reformation and was in contradiction of the Belgic Confession of Faith, a confession putting forward the rediscovered doctrines of the Reformation. A synod was called in the

town of Dordrecht in 1618-19, and it better known as the Synod of Dort. Those defending the teaching of the Remonstrance became known as Arminians, following the teachings of Arminius who put forward these doctrines. And those who opposed are known as Calvinists, as Calvin systematised the various teachings of Scripture on these points better than anyone else before him. Here is an account of what happened at the Synod. "[Simon Episcopius](#) (1583–1643) was spokesman of the 13 representatives of the Remonstrants who were summoned before the Synod in 1618.

"Episcopius was their chief speaker; and with great art and address did he manage their cause. He insisted on being permitted to begin with a refutation of the Calvinistic doctrines, especially that of reprobation, hoping that, by placing his objections to this doctrine in front of all the rest, he might excite such prejudice against the other articles of the system, as to secure the popular voice in his favor. The Synod, however, very properly, reminded him, that they had not convened for the purpose of trying the Confession of Faith of the Belgic Churches, which had been long established and well known; but that, as the Remonstrants were accused of departing from the Reformed faith, they were bound first to justify themselves, by giving Scriptural proof in support of their opinions. The Arminians would not submit to this plan of procedure because it destroyed their whole scheme of argument. However, the Synod firmly refused to make any concessions on this point of order. Day after day they were reasoned with and urged to come and scripturally defend their published doctrines. The Arminians would not submit to this course and were thus compelled to withdraw. Upon their departure, the Synod proceeded without them." (Wikipedia, Synod of Dort, 2009). The Synod then went on to restate and defend the various teachings of the Bible on these issues. These have been put into the Acronym TULIP, each letter standing for a different doctrine. T is for Total depravity, U for Unconditional election, L is for Limited Atonement, I is for Irresistible Grace, and P for Perseverance of the Saints.

Total Depravity: The bondage of our sin in Adam is complete in its extensiveness, though not in its intensity. We are not as bad as we can be, but we have been affected by sin all over.

Unconditional election: Election from eternity is based on grace and is not based on anything foreseen in the believer. A people from all nations were chosen to be united to Christ in salvation.

Limited atonement/Particular redemption: Christ's death is sufficient for the whole world but secured the redemption of the elect.

Irresistible grace/Effectual grace: The Spirit unites the sinner to Christ in faith, faith being the effect not the cause of the new birth.

Perseverance of the saints: all those called and justified will also be given the gift of perseverance that not one will be lost.

The acronym TULIP was developed because of the doctrines attacked by those of the Remonstrance. We will be looking at each of these 5 points of Calvinism in our series of messages. We should state that there are many other things that make up Reformed thinking but we recognize that many things central to the doctrine of salvation are found in this discussion.

The fourfold state of man

Today we begin looking at the T of TULIP, this stands for total depravity. What is under consideration here is what the bible actually teaches about fallen man's condition in sin. Historically there have been different answers to this question. How you answer this question will determine how you understand all the other teachings. To start off with let us highlight that the name total depravity can be misleading. Some have taken it to mean that we are utterly depraved, that is as bad as we can be, but this has never been its intended meaning. Rather total means every part. When Adam sinned, the consequences of his

actions impacted our humanity so that sin has impacted every part of who we are. Our minds, emotions, will, bodies, desires, etc. Here is a spectrum of views. It deals with the problem of can we believe and obey the commands of God.

Pelagianism: Pelagius was a British monk who is famous for the debate he had with Augustine on the issue of grace. 'Pelagianism is the unbiblical teaching that Adam's sin did not affect future generations of humanity. According to Pelagianism, Adam's sin was solely his own, and Adam's descendants did not inherit a sinful nature passed down to them. God creates every human soul directly, and therefore every human soul starts out in innocence, free from sin. We are not basically bad, says the Pelagian heresy; we are basically good.

Pelagianism is named after Pelagius, a monk who lived in the late 300s and early 400s AD. Pelagius began teaching the doctrine associated with his name in an effort to promote holy living among Christians. When people sinned, Pelagius grew weary of hearing the excuse of "I can't help it. It's in my nature to do wrong." To counter that excuse, Pelagius stressed the freedom of the human will, essentially teaching that all sin is the result of a conscious choice of evil over good; everyone has the ability to freely choose to do good all the time. And, since there is no such thing as original sin or an inherited sin nature, then we cannot blame Adam. God created us good, so no one ever has an excuse for sinning. If you're not living a holy life, it's because you're not trying hard enough.'¹

Semi-Pelagianism: Semi-Pelagianism grew out of a group of monks who were struggling with the Bible's teaching on predestination being plunged into despair and doubt; others taking occasion by a false understanding of security were given to licentiousness; and a third group saw a place for human efforts in the work of regeneration. The teaching that sprung up from this was formally spoken against at the council of Orange in the 6th century. Where Pelagianism saw human nature as well and unaffected by sin; Semi-Pelagianism saw human nature as sick and not fully disabled by sin. There are different twists on a theme here where some might feel that the will is not affected but everything else is, or that the mind is clear enough to believe, etc.

Arminianism: Arminianism has the same view of human nature as Augustinianism, the view that we will elaborate on shortly, that human nature is dead in sin and has no native and natural ability to believe. Arminianism generally believes that no one can believe apart from God's working, but Arminianism believes in a universal working of grace to put all sinners on a footing where the effects of original sin have been removed, and all are now free to believe.

We hold to the traditional Augustinian view of human nature, not because Augustine taught it but because he saw it clearly from the word and articulated it for us. We do not see the Bible teaching that sin has not affected our natures (Pelagianism); nor that we are merely sick or hampered by sin (Semi-Pelagianism); nor that all are universally half regenerated from the effects of sin (Arminianism), but as the Bible teaches that we are dead in sin and in need of God sovereign grace if we are to be saved.

A good way to approach the biblical teaching on human nature and sin's effects upon it is to look at the fourfold state of man. Human nature goes through four different stages in its relationship to sin. First there is created man; second, fallen man; third, saved man; fourth, glorified man. 'These four states, which are derived from the Scripture, correspond to the four states of man in relation to sin enumerated by Augustine of Hippo: (a) able to sin, able

1 <https://www.gotquestions.org/Pelagianism.html>

not to sin (posse peccare, posse non peccare); (b) not able not to sin (non posse non peccare); (c) able not to sin (posse non peccare); and (d) unable to sin (non posse peccare).²

Firstly, man in his innocency, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Original humanity was created 'very good.' Adam and Eve had all that they needed to obey God, they had no natural disadvantages. Contrary to Medieval beliefs about the humanity of Adam, Adam did not have an inbuilt animal aspect/concupiscence that without the Spirit would tend towards sin. This would mean that Adam was made deficient in some way, this view was rejected by the Reformers. Adam had a mind, heart and will all inclined towards the good, with all the knowledge and ability to perform it. Adam was able to sin, but also able not to sin having no inward bias nor any disability.

Secondly, we come to fallen man. Here we want to see how the Bible indicates the effects of sin upon human nature. We will see that every part of our humanity is affected and turns towards sin though every part remains. In other words, the ability to will is not lost because of sin, but because we will out of what we are, and after what we want, we can no longer will well. The mind is still able to think and reason, but because we believe what we want to believe and our hearts are deceitful above all things, neutral reasoning is no longer possible. Although man is still made in the image of God and we have consciences, we are able to ignore, sear and retrain our consciences contrary to the good God wrote on our hearts. This is described for us in Ephesians 2:1-3, 'And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.' The key question is what does dead mean? It does not mean cessation of physical life, though our slow death towards full cessation of life is an aspect of it. Deadness here indicates our living death in the thrall and enslavement of satan who is able to manipulate us according to our sinful desires. Luther called this the bondage of the will, we willingly pursue the sins we know are wrong.

Some other verses which show this to be the case are, Rom. 8:7-8, 'For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.' What is important to note in this verse is 'does not' flows from the 'cannot.' Sinful man does not submit to God's law because he cannot. There is an inability to obey. Pelagius said that this cannot be possible for if God gives a command that we cannot keep then it would be sinful for God to demand what we cannot perform and hold us accountable and punish us for it. But here is the truth, God has not changed since He gave His law to Adam, nor has He changed the law He wrote in our hearts when He made us in His image. We have changed God has not, God cannot change. In the Garden God did not require what was impossible, but only that which was possible, it is we who have changed not God. If we ignore the fall and its consequences we will reason incorrectly.

1 Cor. 2:14, 'The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.' Once again we see that the 'does not' of the unsaved/natural person flows from the 'not able' because of a lack of the Spirit. As Jesus puts it in John 6:44, 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.' And

2 <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/four-fold.html>

again in Matt. 11:25-27, 'At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' Acts 6:14, 'One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.'

Lion and Donkey illustration:

Then there is saved man who has his will to pursue the desires of a new heart, and is now able not to sin. But this statement needs clarification. Every deed performed by a saint is not perfect, it cannot merit eternal life, but in Christ and for God's glory God can now be pleased with our efforts, and since we are not offering them to earn life, they are not filthy rags in His sight.

And then we have glorified man. The question we have to ask is this one, can he sin? The answer is no, then we follow up with another question, does he have free will? The answer is more free than any of the other states of humanity. Now finally he is most like God's own divine nature and incapable of sinning. Free will must not be defined as equal opportunity to sin, but free to obey God and walk in holiness, this is the purpose of free will.

What application can we make from this:

Firstly, man cannot save Himself, God must intervene by sovereign grace and save us. The picture of man drowning and simply reaching out and taking the life ring is wrong, we are dead and drowned and God gets into the water and drags us onto shore and breathes life into us. The only one who can take credit for our salvation is God not us, He must get the glory.

Secondly, we see our desperate need for a mediator. Many think that if a bushman or someone from another religion is sincere enough. If they think hard enough and reason well enough they will reason or feel their way to God. But they are sinful, they will not and if they were to come before God, they could only come in their sin and be judged. We must come through Christ and not on our own.

Thirdly, this understanding of human nature damns all works righteousness. We are never saved by what we offer to God or even by our efforts to find God. God comes to us while we are enemies, while we are dead and He causes us to come.

There is technically a part 2 to this message in the I of TULIP but I will leave it there, any questions?