

SOVEREIGNTY OF GRACE—TULIP

Introduction

1. Sovereignty of grace is one aspect of the sovereignty of God expressed in all of creation and providence.
2. Sovereignty expressed in predestination is one aspect of soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). It requires the context of creation, fall and redemption in order to be understood.
3. Disputes about predestination can be traced back to uncritically held assumptions in disputes about freedom and determinism in the history of philosophy.
4. Resolving disputes requires clarifying the compatibility of freedom and causality, the relation between ought, can and want in relation to freedom, and freedom with respect to the use of reason to see what is clear. It also requires special care to distinguish the revealed and the decreed will of God.
5. The Church has upheld the teaching of predestination in contrast to Pelagianism (in its varying degrees) through Augustine, the Council of Orange, Luther, Calvin, The Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession of Faith.

TULIP is an acronym for the five points (addressed in the Canons of Dort) which are listed below and are briefly explained.

1. Total Depravity

- i. Sin affects the whole (total) heart of man so that no one seeks God, no one understands and no one is righteous (Romans 3:10-11).
- ii. Sin (moral evil) has become rooted in self-deception and self-justification so that the curse of toil, strife and old age, sickness and death was imposed by God to restrain, recall from and remove moral evil in man (Genesis 3).
- iii. While sin is total in extent, sin varies in degrees (men are more or less conscious and consistent in their unbelief) and it may increase to ever deeper depravity.
- iv. The sin of not seeking results in culpable ignorance of what is clear about God and the moral law. Inconsistencies within one's understanding result in inconsistencies within one's feelings and within one's actions.
- v. The understanding of fallen man (learned or unlearned) is deficient so that it is knowing the truth that makes one holy and sets one free (John 17:17, 8:32).

2. Unconditional Election

- i. Election unto salvation is not based on any condition (past, present or future) in man but wholly on God's purpose which is, in wisdom to make his glory known.
- ii. Election unto salvation is not apart from or against secondary causes such as seeking and understanding or repentance and faith; predestination is not of ends without means, but of both ends and means.
- iii. Election of men presupposes the fall (infralapsarianism) either to leave one in sin and death or to restore one to life and righteousness.
- iv. Unconditional election is not arbitrary regarding justice; spiritual death is always due to sin and mercy never sets aside justice but satisfies justice through vicarious atonement by Jesus Christ.
- v. God has mercy on whom he chooses. Showing mercy to some is not unfair to others; what is unfair is to deny justice to any.

3. Limited Atonement

- i. The intent and effect of Christ's atonement makes salvation actual for the elect, not merely possible for all but actual for none.
- ii. It is the revealed will of God that no one *should* sin and that all who sin *should* repent of sin and come to salvation. It is the decreed will of God to *permit* sin and the persistence of some in sin against calls to repentance.
- iii. It is the decreed will of God (by promise) that good *will* overcome evil, that all nations *will* be blessed, that all nations *will* be disciplined, that the earth *will* be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9).
- iv. It is by the decree of God that the limit of atonement *does* include the salvation of the whole world as the kingdom of God grows to its fullness.
- v. The decree of God to save the world reveals the length, breadth, depth and height of the love of God for mankind (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:14-21).

4. Irresistible Grace

- i. The grace of salvation is prevenient to the time of one's salvation; it operates to preserve and prepare a person for salvation.
- ii. Salvation begins with effectual calling in which a person is raised from spiritual death to life, which is to be regenerated by spiritual rebirth, or to be recreated as a new creature in Christ.
- iii. Regeneration is wholly of God and not from man, either positively (by man's will cooperating with God's will) or negatively (by man's will not resisting God's will).
- iv. By regeneration a person is made both willing and able to seek and to understand and to do the will of God so that regeneration precedes and *naturally* results in repentance and faith.
- v. The grace of salvation continues after regeneration throughout one's life to make a person willing and able to know and do the will of God.

5. Perseverance of the Saints

- i. Those who are effectually called (regenerated) are kept by the power of God unto salvation.
- ii. A person who is outwardly called (but not effectually called) may fall away from their profession of faith.
- iii. A person who is effectually called may fall away for a time or be left to walk in darkness but is never utterly destitute of the seed of God (WCF 18.4).
- iv. Assurance of salvation is not of the essence of faith; a true believer may lack assurance but may through the right use of ordinary means attain assurance (WCF 18.3). Assurance based on false teaching or practice is presumptuous.
- v. Perseverance of believers is not *regardless* of sin but a *perseverance* and growth in faith and righteousness.