

“The Doctrines of Grace: Part II of V”

There are five distinct biblical teachings recovered by Reformers in the seventeenth century that have become known by the acrostic TULIP: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. While TULIP does not summarize all of Reformed theology, it does capture important biblical teachings in a simple way. My intent is to explain each of the five teachings for you to gain familiarity with the doctrines of grace. We come now to the second teaching, unconditional election.

Unconditional simply means that there are no conditions attached. Election means that God chooses His people for salvation. Scripture teaches that the ground of God’s election is not something foreseen but His sovereign will. “For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion. So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy’” (Rom. 9:10-16). Paul makes it clear that it was not the actions of Jacob or Esau that determined God’s sovereign choice of Jacob. Instead, it is the mercy of God. Mercy is not something that is owed, but is something voluntary and free, which is what makes it a gift.

This does not make God capricious or arbitrary. Scripture teaches that God is good and wise. He is never unjust to anyone. We may not completely understand His good and wise counsel. But unconditional election simply affirms that the biblical teaching of God’s sovereign will.

In John 6, Jesus tells us about our moral inability to choose God. “Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day” (vv. 43-44). The key word is “draw”. It means “to compel.” It is used again in Acts 16:19 when Paul and Silas are “compelled” into the marketplace to the authorities.

Suppose you have a well and you need to get water from it. It does no good to stand at the top of the well and yell, “Here water, water, water!” You won’t get the water no matter how hard you yell. You must draw the water from the well. In the same way, God draws His people to Christ.

God fulfills all the necessary conditions for salvation, and he does so without conditions. What about faith? “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). Faith is a gift. The question is whether your trust is in your ability or the mercy of God. In whom do you place your trust?

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