

The Truth About Predestination 1

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I want to talk to you about T-U-L-I-P. Not tulips, the flowers. But T-U-L-I-P. That is the acronym for the beliefs of predestinarians.

You must not think that the word “predestinarians” is a swear word. Many of the greatest Christians who have ever lived or who are alive today are predestinarians.

T-U-L-I-P

What does predestination mean?

It means T-U-L-I-P.

T stands for “Total depravity.”

U stands for “Unconditional election.”

L stands for “Limited atonement.”

I stands for “Irresistible grace.”

P stands for “Perseverance of the saints.”

Total depravity

Total depravity doesn’t mean as bad as bad can be. It simply means that we are weak in every part.

And total depravity is a biblical doctrine. Isaiah says:

From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and bruises and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. (Isaiah 1:6 NIV)

Jesus said about us:

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:11)

So the Bible does teach total depravity, though that doesn’t mean as bad as bad can be. If I have a glass of water and I put in a spoonful of salt and stir it up, it’s totally salty. But not as salty as if I had put in half a cup of salt.

Humans still reflect the image of God. By nature, we are inclined toward many good things, because we are made in God’s likeness. But because we lost the Holy Spirit at the

The doctrine of predestination is summarized by the acronym T-U-L-I-P. While “T” is correct, “U-L-I-P” must come under close biblical scrutiny.

Fall in Eden, we are born selfish and self-centered, with lust and wrong desires prevailing.

Sadly, even after conversion, when the Holy Spirit has come into our lives, the old nature remains and must be fought every conscious hour of our lives.

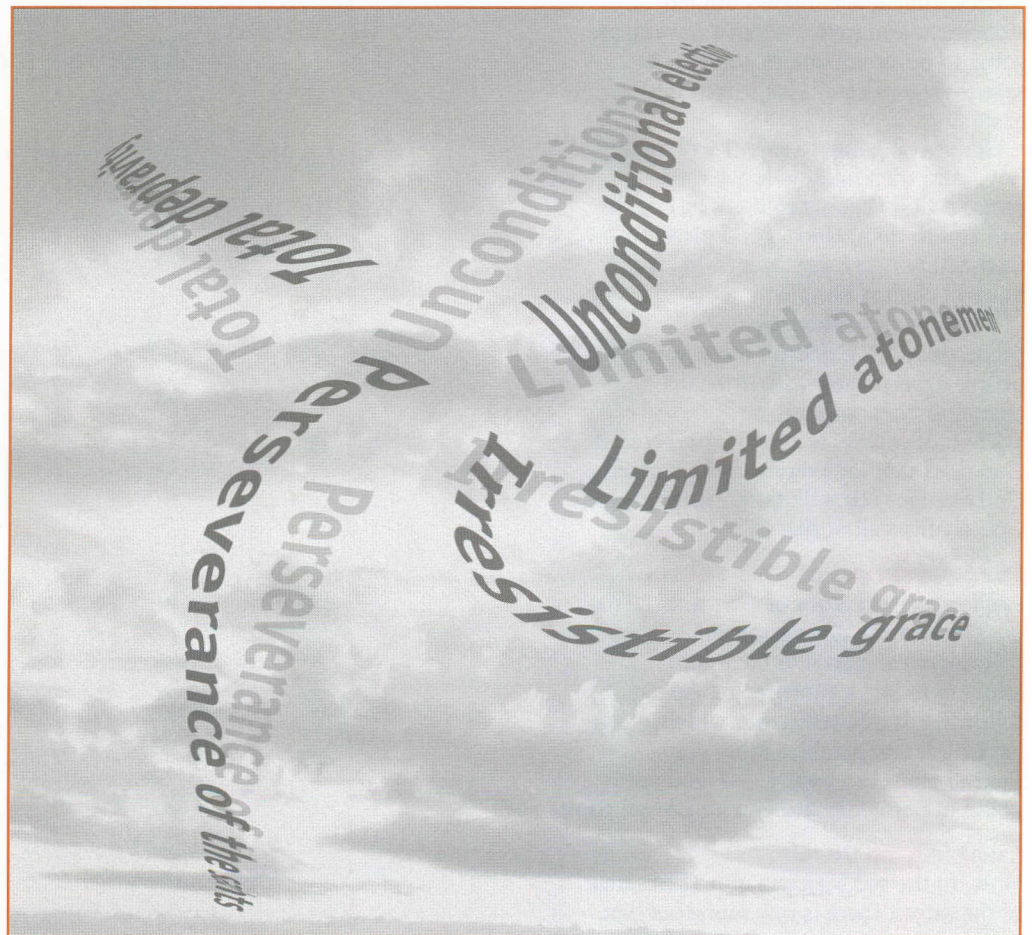
Unconditional election

The “T” in T-U-L-I-P is totally correct and biblical. But it seems to me that the others in the acronym are not so biblical.

That may strike you as a very vainglorious statement, because scholars who are a thousand times better than I would disagree.

The “U” of unconditional election—what does that mean?

It means this: That God, from eternity, looked down and said, “Well, I’ll save Roy but not Des.” But it’s worse than that. “Well, out of that group there at Auburn, we’ll save Roy but none of the rest.”



Unconditional election says that, from eternity, God arbitrarily decided (without any consideration as to how people actually behave), “Well, we’re not going to crowd heaven with all of them, but we’ll take some of them.”

I must not be unfair. Too often evangelical doctrine is not accompanied by an evangelical spirit. I have often failed in that, becoming too tied up in argumentation. That is a mistake.

Let me repeat: Predestinarians, by and large, have been a wonderful group of people. I’m just giving you one man’s opinion why I think that four-fifths of T-U-L-I-P is mistaken. I think that the U of “Unconditional election” is not biblical. It is the belief that God said, “I’ll save some and damn the rest.”

Limited atonement

Limited atonement grows out of “unconditional election.”

If God is only going to save some, he is not going to die for all.

So, if you are a predestinarian, you cannot come to me and say, “Des, Christ died for you.” You don’t know that for sure. I don’t know, either.

If you are a predestinarian, you cannot say to anybody, “Christ died for you.” You just don’t know. Unconditional election and limited atonement are linked. If you believe in unconditional election, you have to believe in limited atonement.

Irresistible grace

You must also believe in the others in T-U-L-I-P.

Irresistible grace follows limited atonement and says, “When I say you are going to be saved, you’re going to be saved—regardless.” That’s irresistible grace.

God is not going to say, “I will take Roy,” and then let Roy do what he pleases. God is going to work in Roy, to will and to do of God’s good pleasure. God will not save Roy against his will but will change Roy’s will.

We must not caricature predestination. It doesn’t mean saving people against their will. It means changing their will.

That, of course, is a half-truth because God does that for everybody he converts. God changes our will, then our wants. God changes all of that.

Perseverance of the saints

P is for “perseverance of the saints.” That is, “Once saved, always saved.”

It doesn’t matter if you commit adultery today, tomorrow, or the day following. It doesn’t matter whether you get drunk and gamble, shoot your mother and bury your wife—you are going to persevere and you will be saved.

Looking to Jesus

Now, in the sad scenario of perseverance of the saints, there is one morsel of bait.

(Again, I must beware of the danger of speaking about evangelical doctrine or evangelicals in an unevangelical spirit.)

Perseverance of the saints is a very appealing doctrine. In my opinion, it is very close to the truth, because looking to Jesus, you cannot be lost.

However, God doesn’t make us automatons, he doesn’t make us puppets. God never takes away our freedom at any point. God is a gentleman, and never coerces.

The Bible does teach that looking to Jesus you cannot be lost. Jesus always has the door open for us in welcome. Nonetheless, in theory, the Bible says it is possible for us to shut that door in Christ’s face. It is possible for those who have been purchased by the blood of Christ to fall away. The Bible says so in Hebrews 10:26–31, 38–39; and throughout John 15 and elsewhere.

But, looking to Jesus, ever trusting solely in his merits, you cannot but be saved and for all eternity.



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