

Let us 'Tip Toe' through the TULIP

Biblical Compatibilism defines the great mystery within the Bible behind the realities of God's complete sovereignty and genuine human free will; both clearly affirmed in Scripture (**Acts 2:23; 4:28**). Contemplating this mystery as it is articulated biblically, not only informs our theodicy (understanding evil and human suffering under the providence of the good and just God) along with prayer (we pray for God's will to be done in us; not to change God's perfect eternal will) but, has direct implications for our understanding of soteriology (how is it that God saves some from just condemnation while others are consigned to eternal death?). Volumes can be, and have been, written on this issue, and it likely will not be resolved in the minds of many in this very brief essay. Incorrect and unbiblical views of the mystery behind God's complete sovereign foreordination and human free will for which every individual is held accountable has contributed to the heresies of Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism along with eschewed notions represented in Arminianism. Ideally, this great mystery is best explored together interpersonally and prayerfully and within Spirit-led fellowship under the authority of God's Word. Nevertheless, I will try to provide a general framework to begin better informing the scope and nature of this discussion. Much of this will be based on **Romans 5-9**. Please give this a careful read; especially **Romans 8**.

First and fundamentally, we must acknowledge what Scripture affirms about the human condition. We are born spiritually dead in our trespasses. Not only are we dead in our trespasses (original sin), but we are also condemned in Adam (imputed guilt). Therefore, as an illustration, one must view humanity as collectively condemned; in a net, let us say, of condemnation that we deserve because we are 1.) born into an already justly condemned state within the net of God's just wrath against a race of cosmic rebels; and 2.) we, naturally, as being inclined to sin personally (original sin), desire that which condemns us. Within the net of God's just condemnation, we personally affirm our condemnation by our display of free will (more accurately termed '*free agency*'). We choose, freely and willingly (because we are born spiritually dead in sin) to rebel against God. Even that which is apparently objectively good in our moral choices is still, deep down, driven by our sinful desire to choose for ourselves that *which is good and evil* autonomously; apart from God's authoritative Word. While we are born with free will; our will is inclined to choose apart from God's Word. This is the Fall, original sin, in us. We are dead in our sins, and we cannot choose rightly; even though we freely choose. It is an issue of **desire**. Sin pervades our entire being, and we cannot even begin to understanding its depths and hold on us apart from what the Bible says; we are spiritually dead, and our choices, while free and according to our desires, are sinful and contrary to God's will. This is why the apostle Paul says we are dead in our trespasses (**Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 2:13; Romans 5:6**). This is why Jesus had to rightly and perfectly desire to do His Father's will FOR us; on our behalf, because, we are unable, prior to our conversion/regeneration, to possess such desires. Because of Christ's work and perfect desires for us, His Spirit then, graciously and freely, gives His elect such Godly desires. This comes to us, by means of God's foreordination and through His divine providence, in the preaching of the Gospel by which God's Word enlivens God's elect saints by His Life-giving Spirit. ***This is why the Gospel must always be preached; because, it is the supernatural means by which God has sovereignly decreed that His elect will be 'born again' or 'regenerated.'*** Thus, God's predestining some to be saved does NOT discount the need for evangelism. Proclaiming the Gospel is the means by which God effectively calls His predestined elect unto eternal life through a spiritual resurrection from the dead upon hearing the Good

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News. Upon such conversion, one is able to believe and receive this Good News evidenced in saving faith (**John 6:65; cf. 6:44; 10:3, 4; 25-28; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14**).

This is our **Total Depravity (T)**. Naturally born into this world, we can no more rightly choose according to our free will that which is in accord with God's perfect and holy will any more than we can make ourselves spiritually alive unto the Lord. We must be regenerated, sovereignly, by God's grace and unmerited favor towards us. We must be born again, born from above by the Holy Spirit; we must have our heart of stone replaced by a heart of flesh; we must have the Spirit of God placed within our hearts that we may rightly choose. Just as we have no choice in our physical birth; we have no choice in our spiritual re-birth; being spiritually raised from the dead by God. Faith is the evidence of this rebirth through which we are saved from 1.) the eternal condemnation, the net of God's just wrath against us, that we deserve and 2.) from our fallen inclination and sinful desires to choose for ourselves that which is good and evil apart from God's authoritative Word. Only those born again, regenerated by God's sovereign goodness, have His indwelling Holy Spirit in them Who truly allows them free will; the true God-given ability to discern that which is good and evil by the enabling Holy Spirit according to God's Word for the Father's glory and our joy as His creatures. This freedom is not freedom to do what we want, but it is freedom to do as we ought. Therefore, those truly regenerated by the Holy Spirit could not even imagine continuing in lawlessness (antinomianism); because, such continued sinful behavior is unthinkable. One who is regenerated **truly desires** (because of their new spiritually alive heart) to glorify God and do His will (**Romans 6:15-23**)!!

God's predestining of certain individuals to be regenerated, or saved, is based upon His **Unconditional Election (U)**. **Romans 8:29-30** (cf. **Ephesians 1:3-11; Romans 9:22-23; 1 Thessalonians 5:9**) sets this 'order of salvation' before us. It is important to note, in the pericope from Romans 8, that God **foreknows His elect people Whom He predestines**. This is not to be incorrectly understood that God 'knows' who will believe in Him and, therefore, elect them to be saved because of some meritorious work (aka: believing) on the part of the individual. What this means is that God eternally **knows** (biblical 'knowing' means an intimate personal relationship; not merely an awareness of actions or circumstances) His Elected Saints; those He predestined to be saved or delivered from fallen humanity in a justly condemned state (i.e., *sub- or infralapsarian predestination*). Another biblical illustration of God's Unconditional (aka: NOT conditioned upon an individual's merits but by the pure sovereign and gracious choice of God) Election is **Malachi 1:2-3** (cf. **1 Peter 2:8; Romans 9:14-24**) which also lends itself to God predestining others to Reprobation (remaining unsaved in their already condemned state which they willfully choose based on their fallen and sinful desires). Those whom God graciously and unconditionally elected are the recipients of Christ's **Limited Atonement (L)**. While Christ's death atoned for the sins of the whole world (*kosmos*), the benefits of Christ's saving Person and work on our behalf is applied by the Holy Spirit to God's Elect Saints. This application of Christ's atonement via the Holy Spirit is **Irresistible Grace (I)** and is in the form of being made a new creature; being saved; being regenerated; being born from above and evidenced in saving and persevering faith. That this grace is irresistible and based on God's eternal Unconditional Election is a blessed means of assurance for those saved by grace through faith; because, what God has begun in His elect, He will bring to completion (**Philippians 1:6**). Those who appeared to have saving faith and walked in fellowship with Believers for a

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time but who fall away (visibly apostatize from the church) were, in eternal reality, never really saved as God's elect and part of Christ's Body (**1 John 2:19; Matthew 13 – The Parables of the Sower and the Wheat and the Weeds; cf. Matthew 7:21-23**). This assurance that we, as Believers, have with the Holy Spirit, Who is our down-payment and guarantee (**Ephesians 1:14; 2 Corinthians 1:20-22**), is God's pledge which undergirds the **Perseverance of the Saints (P)** (**John 17:2, 6, 9, 24; Romans 8:31-39; Hebrews 3:6; 6:11; 7:25; 10:35-39**). Nevertheless, as regenerated disciples of Christ, we are called and enabled by the leading of the Holy Spirit to, now, truly choose that which is good and evil by God's enabling grace to His glory and for our joy; because, it is what we truly desire to do (**Galatians 5:16-18, 22-26; Romans 8:12-17**). Nevertheless, we must always turn to and trust in the Holy Spirit to work in us; being assured of the promises to eternal life we have in Christ Jesus (**2 Peter 1:10-11; 2 Timothy 2:19**).

What has been laid out above, very generally and briefly, is the *Five Points of Calvinism* and is that which lies behind *Articles 10* and *17* of The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. Why is this so hard for many to accept? Because, we are sinful and have sinful desires. We want to rob God of His glory, His sovereignty, His graciousness, His goodness, and His love toward us who are undeserving of such Divine Disposition. We are glory robbers, and we want to rob God of His glory by claiming that we had a choice (some meritorious work) in our salvation. However, the reality is that we deserve eternal death and condemnation, and it is only because of God's sovereign goodness that He delivers some from such just condemnation for His glory and for our joy. This simply affirms God's complete sovereign graciousness and love towards us undeserved sinners.