

# Reformed Perspective

Fall, 2017

*The Reformed Perspective is a publication devoted to explaining the Reformed doctrine, promoting the Reformed life of the Church and believer, and combating old and new errors that threaten to disrupt the Reformed faith and life. This publication is produced by the Evangelism Committee of Crete Protestant Reformed Church of Illinois. Visit us at [www.prccrete.org](http://www.prccrete.org) for more information.*

**SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICES: 9:30 A.M and 5:00 P.M.**  
**1777 E Richton Road, Crete, IL 60417**  
**ALL SERVICES ARE LIVE STREAMED ON OUR WEBSITE.**



October 31, 2017 is the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the great 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation of the church. On October 31, 1517 the Reformer, Martin Luther, nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. That significant anniversary calls for a simple examination and explanation of the Calvinistic and Reformed doctrine of salvation that is the heritage of that Reformation. Over against the Roman Catholic doctrine of works righteousness, the Reformation taught the truth of God's gracious salvation of the sinner. The Calvinistic and Reformed doctrine of salvation received from the Reformation is very often referred to by the acronym TULIP. Those letters stand for **T**otal depravity, **U**nconditional election, **L**imited atonement, **I**rrresistible grace, and **P**reservation of the saints. By means of this acronym the Calvinistic and Reformed branch of the Reformation intended to summarize what it understands as the basic Reformation and Scriptural doctrine of salvation.

This doctrine is Calvinistic because it received its most famous expression from the French minister, John Calvin, who labored in the city of Geneva, Switzerland for most of his ministry. This doctrine is Reformed because the Reformed received this doctrine from John Calvin, embraced it, and developed it in particular in connection with the truth of God's covenant. The covenant is God's relationship of friendship and fellowship with his elect people in Christ. The peculiar Reformed contribution to the doctrine of salvation is the truth of the covenant. The Reformed developed this doctrine more than any other and insisted that the Reformation and Calvinistic doctrine of salvation summarized by TULIP be applied to the truth of the covenant and that the covenant be understood in terms of this doctrine of salvation. This short series intends to provide simple explanations of the main terms of the acronym, TULIP, and to do so from the Reformed, covenantal perspective.

The first letter of TULIP stands for the doctrine of total depravity. By the term total depravity the Reformed faith intends to describe the spiritual condition of the natural, fallen man, and the spiritual condition of the regenerated child of God according to his still sinful, depraved, and fallen old man of sin. When the Reformed speak of the natural, fallen man they mean what man became after his fall into sin through Adam his legal and representative head.

Man was not originally created totally depraved. God made Adam good and perfect in the beginning. That goodness of man in which God created him consisted in the image of God. Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them." The image of the God was the creaturely likeness that Adam had to God his Father.

We learn what that image was in Adam by examining what Scripture teaches is restored to us in Jesus Christ in whom believers are made again in the image of God. Colossians 3:10 says, "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Ephesians 4:24 teaches, "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." When this passage says "after God" it is referring to the image of God. Combining these two passages, then, we learn that the image of God consists in three things: the knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. The image of God in Adam was that original goodness of his whole nature consisting in his knowledge of God, his original righteousness, and his holiness. Created in the image of God, Adam was perfect in the beginning, able to know and do God's will, love God, and obey him perfectly.

Man must always remember this when considering the truth of his total depravity because this reminds him that all the sin and evil that is in him and his current misery is his own fault. Besides, this truth magnifies God's grace. God not only graciously saves those who are undeserving of his goodness, but also those who actually forfeited all that goodness by throwing away all the good that God gave to them in the beginning.

Adam was made perfect in the beginning, but he was able to fall from perfection. Adam rebelled against God his Creator when he ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil about which God commanded him that he must not eat. We read of God's command in Genesis 2:16, 17, "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Through the instigation of the devil, who came into the Garden of Eden through the snake, Adam ate of that tree. Eating of the tree was the sin because of which Adam died. God judged Adam's sin just as he said and Adam died. That death of Adam included a spiritual death, a corruption of his whole nature, which we call total depravity.

The easiest way to understand total depravity is spiritual death. Total depravity means that the natural, fallen man is dead in trespasses and sins. This is the teaching of Ephesians 2:1, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." As death makes any physical activity impossible so total depravity means that the natural man is spiritual incapable of doing any good. As the dead body only gets worse and worse in its rot, so also the spiritually dead sinner also becomes worse and worse in his sin. He is spiritual incapable of doing any good, and he commits sin with all his will and power.

The Reformed creeds define total depravity this way in the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 3, "so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness." The natural man cannot do anything that is good and pleasing to God. He might do many things, and may do many things that are useful to man, but these are not pleasing to God at all. Besides, the natural, fallen man is inclined to all wickedness. This does not merely mean a tendency in man toward evil

which he might be able to resist, but rather speaks of what man loves. Man loves wickedness. Because he loves wickedness he does what he loves.

Belonging to the confession of total depravity is the truth that by Adam's fall into sin the natural man lost the image of God and took on the image of his spiritual father, Satan. This means that man lost the goodness of his nature, and his nature was corrupted by evil, rebellion, and spiritual ignorance. The Canons of Dordt describe this reality in Heads 3 and 4, article 1, "Revolting from God by the instigation of the devil...[man] forfeited these excellent gifts [of the image] and on the contrary entailed on himself blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment, became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in his affections." In all of this the Canons are describing what became of the image of God, namely that man lost it, and what man became instead, namely a thorough child of the devil.

This understanding that man lost the image of God contradicts the popular theology that all men are made in the image of God and that all men are thus children of God. This is not true and not Reformed. Man was originally made in the image of God, but because of the fall he lost that image and spiritually became a child of the devil. That man lost the image also points out the truth of the believer's salvation in Christ. God graciously restores the image and glorifies the believer with the image of God as it is in Christ.

An especially important part of the Reformed confession of total depravity is that the natural man does not possess a free will. When the Reformed deny that man has a free will, they are not denying that man has a will. Man was made a rational, moral creature and belonging to that is the truth that man, also fallen and totally depraved man, has a will. Man chooses. Man also always chooses what he loves. The problem with totally depraved man is that he loves sin and he hates God so that by nature he always chooses sin and chooses against God. When the Reformed deny that man has a free will, then, they are especially denying that totally depraved man is able to choose God, choose Christ, and choose salvation. Especially do they deny this over against the popular theology that God offers salvation to man and man must accept that offer, and invite Jesus into his heart. Rather, the natural man always chooses sin, chooses death, and chooses against God. His will is in bondage to sin and to Satan. The natural man chooses God as much as a dead man can choose what to eat, which is to say not at all.

This, too, points out the graciousness of the believer's salvation. The one that could not choose God, who would not choose God, and who would choose against God unto his own condemnation, God chose and appointed to life and salvation in his son Jesus Christ. This same man God also renews so that the will that was bound in sin he sets free and the believer does choose the good and seek heavenly things.

The total depravity that was a consequence of God's judgment upon Adam and Eve in the fall passes to all their children and thus to every single human being as an hereditary disease. The one exception is Jesus Christ. Every human is conceived and born dead in trespasses and sins, is incapable of doing any good, cannot choose the good, and is inclined to all evil.

The question is: if total depravity, spiritual death, was the consequence by God's just judgment of Adam's sin, how is it that a baby, who did not sin like Adam, is still born totally depraved? The answer is that Adam did not sin as a private person, or as an individual, but as the covenant

head of the whole human race. The sin of Adam can be conceived similarly as the sin of a father who takes his children out of the church of God and leads them in the way of evil. Those children did not commit that sin themselves, but their father did and did so as the head of the household and so the children all partake of the consequences of God on that sin. Adam was covenant head of the whole human race. He sinned as a head and his sin was reckoned by God to all his children. All human beings are judged by God as having sinned Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, and as a consequence of that judgment they are all conceived and born in sin. This is the answer of the Apostle in Romans 5:12 to the question of why all are born sinners: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

Because all men are totally depraved they cannot choose God, Christ, or spiritual good. All men are by nature the enemies of God and hate both God and their fellow man. They are spiritually the exact opposite of what God requires of man. God requires that man love him, with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, and his neighbor as himself. Being totally depraved all men stand outside of salvation and indeed hinder and resist their own salvation. Total depravity makes it necessary that man's salvation come only from God's grace.

Total depravity implies that the only way that the dead sinner can be saved is the marvelous work of regeneration. The truth of regeneration is the positive side of the confession of total depravity. Regeneration is a wonder work of God's grace by which he raises sinners dead in trespasses and sins to new life in Christ Jesus. In that work God takes those who are children of the devil and makes them his children. Because the sinner whom God raises from the dead and regenerates is dead in his sins that regeneration is not the work of God in the sinner in response to the sinner's accepting an offer of salvation from God. Just as a dead man cannot hear or receive an offer, the sinner who is spiritually dead cannot hear or accept an offer from God. Rather, God by himself according to his own sovereign choice raises that dead sinner to life.

The truth of total depravity is also important in connection with the Reformed understanding of the covenant of grace. The popular understanding of the covenant of grace is that God incorporates all children who are baptized into the covenant. Salvation in the covenant is conditioned on the child's faith and obedience to God. The proponents of this view defend their conditions by saying that they are fulfilled by grace. But the truth of total depravity denies this as a possibility. It is true that in the covenant the child of God is regenerated and raised to new life. That regeneration is the gift of new life to the child of God who also retains all his life long an old man of sin. That old man of sin pollutes and defiles all that he does, also all that he does by grace and through the Spirit of grace so that even when he believes and does good works those are all mingled with sin. Because they are mingled with sin, they cannot be acceptable to God as the condition of the believer's salvation, but those works must also be sanctified by God. Rather, the covenant of God is unconditional so that God does not require conditions of his children whom he regenerates but he gives them as a gracious gift all the blessings of the covenant, including their faith, perfect righteousness in Christ, and all their good works.

Because no man by nature can choose God, God must choose men. To this we turn next time in our consideration of TULIP.