

Reformed Perspective

Spring, 2018

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 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.

This article is next in a series of articles examining the Reformed acronym TULIP. The letters of the acronym all stand for important doctrines of the Reformed confession about God's gracious salvation of sinners: T stands for Total depravity, U for Unconditional election, L for Limited atonement, I for Irresistible grace, and P for the Preservation of the saints.

Total depravity is the confession about the spiritual condition of all human beings as a consequence of Adam's fall into sin in the Garden of Eden. God originally made man good, but man departed from God who was his life and he entailed on himself and on all his posterity a terrible depravity of nature, which is a corruption of his whole nature, his heart, mind, will, soul and body. Because of this corruption of nature no man is able to choose God, Christ, or any good thing, but all men are in a terrible bondage to sin. Total depravity is the confession that all men are conceived and born in sin and are, therefore, unable to save themselves or even to prepare themselves for salvation. The confession of total depravity means, then, that the salvation of the totally depraved and in himself dead sinner is a wonder of God's grace.

This wonder of grace begins with God's choice in eternity of those whom he wills to save. This choice of God is what the Reformed faith intends to express with the letter U in the acronym TULIP: Unconditional election.

Election is one part of the eternal decree of God that determined the everlasting destinies of his rational and moral creatures, men, angels, and devils. That eternal decree is called predestination. In Scripture the word predestination only ever refers to the positive side of the decree called election. In theology, however, predestination is used to refer to both sides of God's decree determining the eternal destinies of his rational and moral creatures. Predestination has two closely related parts, election and reprobation. The first and primary part of that decree is election. Election is God's gracious choice of certain persons in Christ appointing them salvation. This decree of election is accompanied by the equally sovereign decree of reprobation. Reprobation is the just decree of God appointing certain persons who were passed over in election to eternal perdition. These two parts of the decree both belong to the confession of predestination.

Scripture teaches both election and reprobation. It is a favorite tactic of those who deny the truth of predestination to relegate the doctrine to the hidden things of God. But Scripture not only teaches the doctrine in one or two places, but throughout so that it is necessary not merely to quote those places where it is taught, but to choose out the clearest and most obvious.

In the Old Testament God explained this deliverance of Israel from Egypt by predestination in Deuteronomy 7:6-8, "For thou *art* an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people

unto himself, above all people that *are* upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye *were* the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

In the New Testament, explaining the salvation of men, the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:30, "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." When the Scriptures explain that some believe it ascribes this to election, for instance in Acts 13:48, "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

As clearly as the Bible teaches election of certain persons to salvation, it also teaches reprobation or the appointment of certain persons to damnation. In the Old Testament God said about Esau in Malachi 1:3, "And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." Explaining this passage in the New Testament the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 9:11-13 "(For *the children* being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

When Jesus explained why some did not believe in him he teaches reprobation in John 10:26, "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you." And when Peter explains that some hear the preaching of Christ and stumble over him in unbelief he likewise teaches reprobation in 1 Peter 2:8, "And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed."

The Reformed creeds also clearly state what they understand Scripture to teach about both election and reprobation. The Canons of Dordt define election in Head 1, Article 7 "Election is the unchangeable purpose of God whereby, before the foundation of the world, He hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault from their primitive state of rectitude into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation." About the relationship between election and the rest of the gifts of salvation, the Canons Head 1, Article 9 teaches, "Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects."

The Canons also define reprobation in Head 1 Article 15, "What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election is the express testimony of sacred Scripture that not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal election of God; whom God, out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehensible, and unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but leaving them in His just judgment to follow their own ways, at last for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and punish them forever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins."

From Scripture and the creeds we see that there are several important aspects to the confession of election. Election is an eternal decree of God. It was made before God created the world. In that eternal decree Christ is first. He is the elect one and all the elect are chosen for his sake and given to him to be redeemed by him. This election is also an appointment by God to salvation. Those whom he chooses he appoints to salvation and every benefit of salvation such as faith, righteousness, repentance, holiness, and ultimately eternal life itself. In short, men are chosen to faith, and they are not chosen because they believe. Election is the appointment of individuals to salvation. These individuals who are appointed to salvation are the elect church of Christ that is in due time gathered out of the world and to faith and repentance by the call of the gospel. Election is unchangeable and infallibly brings about the salvation of those appointed. The elect number is unchangeable from eternity and cannot be altered or diminished. This election, then, explains why some believe and others do not, why some are saved and others perish in their sins. It is as the Apostle says in Romans 11:7, "What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded."

All the elect of God in due time are assured of their election. They are assured of it by God himself through the preaching of the gospel and by faith in that gospel so that they come to a definite knowledge of election, of their own election, and the assurance of that election. It belongs to the graciousness of the decree and the grace of God that comes to the sinner by the decree that he is also assured by God of his election.

When the Calvinistic and Reformed confession of election describes that election in the acronym TULIP as *UNCONDITIONAL*, it intends to teach that this election of certain persons by God from eternity does not find its source or cause in the person chosen. God does not choose those whom he chooses because they accept Jesus into their heart, because they are naturally better than others, because they prepare themselves for the gospel better than others, or even because they are needier than others. There is nothing in the one chosen that explains, is the cause of, or is the ground of God's choice. It is an unconditional election.

Positively stated, unconditional election teaches that God's choice of certain individuals and his appointment of them to salvation finds its cause solely in the free mercy and grace of God. Freely and without any merits of those chosen, God appointed them to salvation.

Specifically, unconditional election teaches that God chose them because he loved them. This is the word of God concerning the election of Old Testament Israel in Deuteronomy 7:8, "Because the Lord loved you." Election is the manifestation of the love of God toward those that he chose. In that love of God he desired and willed their salvation from sin and that eternal happiness with him in his covenant of friendship.

An important implication of the teaching that election is unconditional is that all of God's salvation of the sinner is unconditional. Election is an appointment to salvation and all the benefits of salvation. If that election is unconditional, then also all the blessings that flow out of the election to the sinner are also all unconditional and so do not depend on something that sinner must first perform, but are given and granted to him freely by God's grace. Especially is God's covenant of grace unconditional. The covenant of God is his relationship of fellowship and friendship with his chosen people. That covenant is salvation. In that covenant God saves his people from their sin by forgiving their sins and renewing them from the corruption of sin. In that covenant God bestows on his people all the benefits of salvation merited by the death of Christ on the cross. In that God is their friend-sovereign, and they are his friend-servants. Since election is the source of all those benefits and the elect were appointed to that salvation unconditionally, then the covenant and all the saving benefits of the covenant are likewise unconditional.

A popular corruption of the teaching of election by the false doctrine of Arminianism denies this reality that election is unconditional. Arminianism is a term that describes the theology of James Arminius that was condemned by the Dutch Reformed Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-19.

Basic to Arminius' theology and the theology of all his followers, then as well as now, is that man has a free will. This free will of man was undamaged by the fall of man into sin so that fallen man, all fallen men, have this free will. By free will Arminianism does not merely mean that fallen man makes choices. Fallen man makes choices, but the problem with fallen man is that his will is bound under sin so that he always chooses sin and wickedness. Rather, Arminianism intended to teach that fallen man with his free will is capable of choosing good or bad equally. Especially is fallen and depraved man able to choose Jesus Christ with his free will. Following from this, Arminianism taught that God in the preaching of the gospel also offers Jesus Christ and salvation in Christ to all men. With that offer comes the chance for men to choose Jesus Christ. The Arminian preaching is that God promises everyone who hears that if they believe, they will be saved. There is in that preaching a universal offer and promise, and that universal offer and promise is conditioned on man's act of believing, accepting Jesus, or choosing God.

In order to maintain this false doctrine concerning the free will of man and the offer of Jesus Christ in the gospel, Arminianism corrupted the truth of predestination. Not only did they corrupt it, but they slandered the scriptural and Reformed doctrine of predestination. The Synod of Dordt that condemned Arminianism recorded some of the popular slanders of Arminianism against the doctrine of predestination in its conclusions. The Arminians were fond of saying,

That the doctrine of the Reformed churches concerning predestination and the points annexed to it, by its own genius and necessary tendency, leads off the minds of men from all piety and religion; that it is an opiate administered by the flesh and the devil, and the stronghold of Satan, and from which he wounds multitudes and mortally strikes through many with the darts both of despair and security; that it makes God the author of sin, unjust, tyrannical, hypocritical...that it renders men carnally secure.

The Arminians hated the Reformed doctrine of predestination. Indeed the whole controversy of Arminianism can be reduced to this question. Does man with his free will choose God or does God with his sovereign will choose those whom he wills to save? Does man choose God, or does God choose man?

Having grossly slandered the true doctrine of predestination the Arminians taught, and still today teach, that predestination was the act of God to see in advance who would accept the offer of Jesus Christ in the preaching of the gospel and believe in him. Those who accepted Jesus, God chose and appointed to salvation. The choice of God followed on and was conditioned by man's choice of God. It was an election that was based on foreseen faith. Man first fulfilled the condition of believing and God chose those who chose him.

The Reformed rejected this Arminian understanding of election in Canons Head 1, Article 9, "This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or condition on which it depended." Election is unconditional. Its cause is solely in God and is not found in anything in those chosen.

As clearly as Scripture and the creeds teach election, they also teach reprobation. From the Scripture and the creeds several important points emerge regarding their teaching of reprobation. Above all is the teaching that reprobation is one decree with election. This means that they must be confessed together and denial of the one inevitably leads to and is corruption of the other.

In the decree of reprobation there is first of all the act of God to pass the reprobate with the grace of election. Second, in reprobation there is also a definite appointment of those passed by with the grace of election to perdition.

Understanding that reprobation is one decree with election also makes reprobation serve the decree of election. It serves the decree of election by highlighting and illustrating the graciousness of God in election. Those who are appointed to salvation are as equally involved in ruin and worthy of condemnation as those who are appointed to damnation. Their choice and appointment to salvation, then, is solely due to the grace of God. Reprobation also serves election because those whom God appointed to damnation serve the elect and the gracious purpose of God to save his elect. They are the stalk on which the kernels of wheat grow; the chaff that will later be burned but which for the present serve the wheat of God. This shows the overflowing graciousness of God to his elect people as Isaiah teaches in Isaiah 43:4, "Since thou was precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life."

Reprobation, being one decree with election, also teaches that reprobation serves the glory of God as election does. In election God is revealed to his glory as the gracious God of salvation. In reprobation God is revealed as the just judge and avenger of sin.

Reprobation, being one decree with election, also means that reprobation is unconditional. God did not appoint men to damnation because of their sin. In that case all men would be appointed to damnation because all have sinned. The cause of reprobation is in God himself. Specifically the cause of reprobation is God's eternal hatred of those whom he appointed to damnation. This is what God himself says about the reprobate Esau in Malachi 1:3, "And I hated Esau," and again in Romans 9:13, "but Esau have I hated." This decree does not make God the author of men's sin. Man sins of himself and his condemnation will be on the ground of his sin, nevertheless, to that condemnation he was appointed by God from eternity.

The decree of predestination, both election and reprobation, serves as all the revelation of God serves, for his glory. In this decree he is revealed as the sovereign, gracious, and just God with whom all men have to do. In both sides of the decree he is glorified as the only God and Lord.

The proper response of man to this truth is not to murmur against it, but to believe it, adore these holy mysteries of God and to worship God. This is the call of the Canons of Dordt in Head 1, Article 18:

To those who murmur at the free grace of election and just severity of reprobation, we answer with the apostle: *Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?* (Rom. 9:20), and quote the language of our Savior: *Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?* (Matt. 20:15). And therefore, with holy adoration of these mysteries, we exclaim in the words of the apostle: *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. (Rom. 11:33-36)"*