

Reformed Perspective

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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.



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This series of articles is devoted to explaining the well-known Calvinistic acronym TULIP. The letters of the acronym all stand for important doctrines of Calvinism's confession of God's 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. Together they summarize the main points of the truth that God's salvation of sinners is wholly gracious.

The first article in the series treated the truth that the sinners who are saved are totally depraved. They are incapable of doing any good and inclined to all wickedness. An especially important aspect of this truth of total depravity is that the sinner's will is bound in sin by nature so that he cannot choose God, Jesus Christ, or any good thing. God's work of salvation must be a wholly gracious and divine work because the sinners who must be saved are incapable of that salvation and unwilling to be saved. The total depravity of the sinners also magnifies the grace of God that saves because he saves those who are totally unworthy of his grace.

The second article treated the truth of unconditional election. God chooses which human beings will be saved and appoints them to that salvation eternally and without respect to anything in the sinners chosen. Belonging to that confession is also the truth that God appoints all others to damnation, or reprobates. This one decree of predestination, including both election and reprobation, is the Reformed confession that God is sovereign in salvation so that God chooses man and man does not choose God.

It was the truth of predestination that was and is particularly hated by the Arminian opponents of the truth of salvation and over against which they spread the lie that election consists in God's seeing before who would believe and choosing them. The Arminian lie, consistent with the Arminian lie that man has a free-will by which he has the power to choose Christ or not to choose Christ, is that man chooses God.

The truth of divine election gives glory to God because it locates the source of the grace that saves sinners in God's own sovereign and eternal choice. There is no reason in the sinner why he should be saved over another, but the reason is wholly in God's choice. Salvation is wholly of the Lord.

The next part of the acronym TULIP is L, which stands for limited atonement. When the five points of Calvinism speak of atonement they mean the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross of Jesus Christ is the only ground and foundation of salvation. At the cross Christ purchased by his suffering and perfect work every blessing and eternal life to which God appointed the elect in eternity. His cross is redemption accomplished. There he merited righteousness and everlasting life and laid down the basis for the perfection of all things in heaven and earth in his eternal kingdom.

Regarding that atonement of Jesus Christ, the Reformed, Calvinistic faith insists that it was a limited atonement. Limited refers to the extent of the atonement, or the number for whom Christ died. By the word *limited*, Calvinism intends to express the biblical truth that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross was intended and actually accomplished salvation for the elect and them only. This is no minor part of the Reformed confession of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul says concerning his preaching and the preaching of the true church of Jesus Christ throughout history, "we preach

Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:30). The cross of Jesus Christ stands at the heart of the gospel that the church preaches throughout history and to the ends of the earth. To this truth belongs the truth of the extent of that atonement, that is, the truth about those for whom Christ died. To corrupt the truth of those for whom Christ died is to corrupt the truth of the cross and to corrupt the truth of the cross is to corrupt the gospel. Nothing less than the gospel of Jesus Christ is at stake in the question of those for whom Christ died. And those that corrupt this truth, then, also do not have the gospel.

Insisting that the atonement is for the elect and them only is one aspect of the full truth of the doctrine of the atonement of Jesus Christ. Basic to Calvinism's understanding of the cross of Jesus Christ is that the cross of Jesus Christ was satisfaction made to the justice of God. That the cross was satisfaction was the great advance made in the doctrine of the atonement by the early medieval theologian Anselm of Canterbury. He asked the question *cur Deus homo*, which means *why did God become man?* What necessitated the wonder of the incarnation so that God became man? In view of the penetrating question of the theologian was: *why did God become man in order to die on the cross of Calvary?* The Son of God became man to die on the cross. His answer in brief was that the salvation of fallen human beings necessitated the satisfaction of the justice of God for their sins. That satisfaction could only be made by the death of the eternal Son of God in human flesh. He must be God to sustain the wrath of God against sin and to provide his sacrifice with infinite value that was necessary to make satisfaction to God. He must be man because only man can suffer for man's sins. The incarnation was for the cross and the cross of the incarnate Son of God was satisfaction.

The word *satisfaction* means to do enough. Applied to the cross it means that Jesus Christ did enough to pay for all of the sins of God's people and accomplished perfect righteousness in order to bestow on them every benefit of salvation. The cross must be satisfaction because the misery of fallen human beings is their sin, including both their guilt for Adam's sin in the garden and the resulting depravity of nature that they inherit and their own actual transgressions of the law of God. That sin incurs a debt with God. Because that sin is committed against the Most High majesty of God the payment for that debt involves bodily, spiritual, and eternal death. Jesus Christ made satisfaction by paying the sin debt of his people at the cross. He underwent the penalty that their sins deserved and delivered them from its penalty of death and damnation. Because of his suffering the Triune God said that the debt was paid.

Involved in the truth that Christ's cross was satisfaction is also the truth that he willingly underwent that suffering and offered himself to God in love for God who demanded that satisfaction be made. The sacrifice offered in love to God as well as the person who made it was well-pleasing to God. The activity of Christ the Mediator in his satisfaction was not only that he suffered, but also his perfect love for God.

Because he must make satisfaction to God the mode of Christ's death was also determined by God to be the cross. That was not merely because the cross was an especially agonizing and physically painful way to die, but rather because the cross was accursed of God according to the Law in Deuteronomy 21:23. The Apostle makes reference to this law in Galatians 3:13, "for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." At the cross he redeemed his people from the curse of the Law by his perfect satisfaction because he hung on the tree of the cross.

That the cross of Christ was satisfaction means also that the cross of Christ was substitutionary, or vicarious. Both words mean the same thing. They teach that on the cross Christ stood in the place of each one for whom he died and received from God their personal sins imputed to him so that God declared him guilty and worthy to suffer punishment for them. This is the teaching of the Scripture in Matthew 20:28, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." The Greek word translated as *for* means *in the place of*. Jesus gave his life in the place of many.

Because he made satisfaction to God as a substitute Christ actually saved by his death those for whom he died. By the cross Christ saved from death and damnation and to eternal life, fellowship with God, and glory those for whom he died. Because he died for them, they are saved. Christ's death as satisfaction is the one, only, complete payment for sin and the earning of salvation and eternal life for all for whom he died.

Every other fact about the cross depends on the truth that the cross of Jesus Christ was satisfaction. Because the cross of Jesus Christ was satisfaction, the cross was also redemption. Redemption refers to the cross as a price that was paid to God to free his people from the bondage of sin and guilt and for the accomplishment of their full and complete salvation. Because Jesus Christ made satisfaction at the cross he also reconciled those for whom he died to God. This the truth of the cross of Christ proclaimed in 2 Corinthians 5:19, "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." The subject in this verse is the work of God at the cross of reconciliation. He reconciled the world to himself there because he did not impute their trespasses unto them for their condemnation, but imputed them to Jesus Christ who made satisfaction for them and accomplished that reconciliation. That reconciliation was of the world to God and not God to the world. God was never their enemy, but they were his enemy. Regardless what the reference of the word *world* is, the gospel of the text is that the cross of Christ reconciled those for whom Christ died to God. Peace was established between them and God. The cross was reconciliation because the cross was satisfac-

tion. By the cross he removed the reason for that hostility, namely their sin, established peace, and provided the perfect and complete basis for bringing them into God's fellowship.

The truth that the cross of Jesus Christ was satisfaction is basic to the whole doctrine of Christ's death, so basic that if that truth is denied, the cross of Christ is denied. Because it is fundamental to the doctrine of the cross it has always been the object of attack. It is denied by the Roman Catholic doctrine that says that the cross of Jesus Christ is not effectual unless he is offered times without number by the priest in the mass. It is denied by those who say that the main point of the cross was to provide an example of the justice of God and to improve the moral character of human beings.

It is denied necessarily by all those who teach a universal atonement for all human beings because universal atonement does not in fact save any for whom Christ supposedly died. The argument about the extent of the atonement does not rest only on those specific passages that speak about the extent of the atonement, but upon the very idea of what the cross of Christ was and what it accomplished. Those who teach the universal extent of the atonement have a totally different view of the cross. The cross merely made salvation possible. The cross did not in fact accomplish salvation, make satisfaction, make reconciliation, and accomplish redemption, but made it possible for God to deal with men again and to prescribe new conditions for the salvation of man. Such a cross is vain and worthless, and such a Christ is no savior, but a would-be savior. But if the cross accomplished salvation, made satisfaction, made reconciliation, and accomplished redemption, it is impossible that Christ died for all, since it is readily admitted by even the most ardent proponent of universal atonement that not all are saved. On the basis of what Scripture teaches that the cross of Christ accomplished, one of these two things is true: either all—including the devil and his demons—will be saved in the last day, or the elect alone were the objects of the saving work of Christ on the cross because they alone are saved. On the basis of what Scripture teaches concerning the saving efficacy of the cross of Christ, if I thought that he died for the whole world, then I would immediately also begin teaching that every single human being head for head, as well as the devil and his demons, will be saved on the last day.

The Scriptures establish the cross of Christ was satisfaction. Scripture does not use the word *satisfaction*. The word is like the word *trinity* that is used by the church to express a doctrine contained in Scripture. Scripture teaches that the cross of Christ was satisfaction. Outstanding is Isaiah 53:5, 6

But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Here Scripture teaches that God laid on Christ the iniquity of us all, that he was wounded for our transgression, and bruised for our iniquities. This suffering of Christ was sufficient for our peace and for our healing: "with his stripes we are healed." Teaching the efficacy of the cross for peace and healing the passage establishes that the cross was satisfaction because it actually accomplished the salvation of those for whom Christ died.

The Reformed creeds teach that the cross of Christ was satisfaction most prominently in the Belgic Confession, article 21. The article is entitled: *The Satisfaction of Christ, our only High Priest, for us*. The article begins:

We believe that Jesus Christ is ordained with an oath to be an everlasting High-Priest, after the order of Melchisedec: who hath presented himself in our behalf before his Father, to appease his wrath by his full satisfaction, by offering himself on the tree of the cross, and pouring out his precious blood to purge away our sins; as the prophets had foretold.

Here are contained all the main truths about the cross of Christ. His cross was substitutionary, "in our behalf." It appeased his wrath "by his full satisfaction." It "purge[d] away our sins." It actually accomplished our salvation.

The Scripture also establishes beyond doubt that Christ died for the elect and them only. They alone are the gracious objects of his saving work on the cross and the saving efficacy of his work extends to them and them only. It is this that Calvinism intends with the words *limited atonement*. That the cross of Jesus Christ was limited refers only to the objects of his atoning work. The words in no sense intend to limit the glory, the power, or the magnitude of that work. Indeed, by teaching that the cross of Christ was for the elect and them only Calvinism establishes the glory, the power, and the magnitude of that work. The Arminian cross, which is a cross for all and a Christ for all, is a cross for none and a Christ for none. If Christ died for all men, the question is in what sense did he die for them? He died only in order to make their salvation a possibility if and when they decide to choose Jesus. The cross of Christ, then, in fact did not save anyone. The cross of Christ that is for all does not in fact save any and is an ignominious failure, an ineffectual cross, and nothing to glory in at all. A cross that is for the elect and them only, that is satisfaction for the elect, that reconciled them all to God, that provided the only ground and foundation of their salvation, and that accomplished all their redemption, is thus a cross that is glorious because it is effectual.

Scripture teaches plainly that the cross was for the elect and them only. The most powerful passage is Jesus Christ's own words about his cross: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep...As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:11, 15). Later Jesus says to the Jews, "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you" (John 10:26). Regarding these sheep Jesus says later, "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:29). The sheep, then, are the elect given to Jesus Christ in the eternal counsel of election, and are distinguished from those who are not of his sheep, but are reprobate. They manifest that they are reprobate because when the good shepherd comes and calls they do not believe. They do not believe because they are not his sheep, that is they are not reprobates because they do not believe, but because they are reprobate they do not believe. Jesus' sheep hear his voice. They believe in Jesus when he comes and calls because they are elect. Jesus Christ lays down his life for the sheep. Laying down his life is the way Jesus describes the cross. He lays that life down for no others.

It is because Scripture teaches that the cross was for the elect that the Reformed faith set this down in the Canons of Dordt Head 2, Article 8

For this was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation; that is, it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father.

This truth is in no way compromised by those passages in Scripture to which Arminians of every stripe appeal that speak of *world* or *all*. The favorite is John 3:16 which they put forward as their iron wall: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The understanding of the word *For God so loved the world* is supposed to be that God loved every human being head for head and ardently desired the salvation of every human. As the demonstration of that love he sent Christ Jesus to die for all humans. Basic to the Arminian understanding of the passage is a universal love of God for all human beings and a universal desire by God that all human beings be saved. But that understanding of the passage and with it the teaching that Jesus then died for all human beings is overthrown in the context in verse 36 where the Scriptures says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Here Scripture teaches that the unbeliever shall not see life. He shall not see life because he does not believe and faith in Christ is the only way of salvation. The Scripture then explains that they do not believe and shall not see life with the last phrase, "the wrath of God abideth on him." The text does not say the wrath of God comes on him when he does not believe, but it *abides* on him. It was already on him when the gospel comes to him. It was on him from all eternity and his faithless rejection of Jesus Christ preached in the gospel is the revelation that the wrath of God abides on him. It abides on him also after his rejection of Christ. There is no universal love of God and universal desire of God that all be saved so also with that goes the idea that Jesus and his cross, which are the revelation of the love of God, are universal.

What *world* means in John 3:16 is plain. It refers to the cosmos, or the entire universe that God made in the beginning. He made that universe in the beginning and he loves that universe that he made. In his love he intends its perfection and glory in Jesus Christ. At the heart of that universe stands the elect gathered out of all nations. In saving the elect out of all nations he saves the world. For that purpose Jesus Christ went to the cross.

The cross also, then, has a creation-wide significance. The cross of Jesus Christ provided the basis for God's wonder work in Christ whereby he will create a new heaven and a new earth which will be the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ and the eternal dwelling place of the elect made perfect body and soul. God's counsel of redemption does not only include the salvation of elect people, but the salvation of the entire creation and the redemption of that creation from the curse of sin under which it had fallen. The plan of redemption is not the restoration of creation to the standing it had before Adam fell, but the resurrection of that creation and the lifting up of that creation into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Creation will be made one: heaven and earth united and all things united and made one in Jesus Christ, creation's only and legitimate head, king, and Lord. This creation will be the dwelling place of the elect redeemed out of all nations and from this creation every reprobate will be eternally excluded.

So the believer glories in nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified. He counts all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.