

COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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TULIP AND THEOS

TULIP

Total Depravity

Unconditional Election

Limited Atonement

Irresistible Grace

Perseverance of the Saints

THEOS

Transcendence

Hierarchy

Ethics

Oath

Succession

I've pastored two churches. I've been at my present charge for twelve years. But I only lasted six **months** at my first church. I'll never forget the experience. I met with the search committee and when asked what my theology was I answered, "Calvinism." They said, "Great, we're Calvinists too, come be our pastor." I naively said, "Great, I'll come." So, I packed my pregnant wife and child into my brother-in-law's old pick-up and took off to my first **pastorate**. --

Not long after I was there, I was confronted by an **elderly** lady in the congregation named Daisy. She was nearly eighty years old, but she was undoubtedly the strongest elderly lady I've ever met. As the wife of a farmer in the congregation, she could cut a cord of wood with a **single**-edged ax. She looked as though she could bench-press me over her body.

Anyway, a few months after I had been there, diligently preaching through the Book of Genesis, she came into my **office** one day after church. She was carrying a long belt that she used on the kids in the nursery if they go out of line. (And you thought Christian **Reconstructionists** were **tough**!) She sat down in the corner and said in a typical East Texas accent, "Pastor, I **jist** got to know sompthen. Is you one of them? **Acause** I ain't **one**!" Obviously I had no idea what she meant, so I cleared my throat and tugged my collar as the temperature seemed to soar in my **office**. I said, "**Uh**, Daisy, I don't know what you're talking about. One of what?"

She said, "**Youuuuuuu** know, one of them **thar** **Cilvinists**. Well is you or not?"

I kind of stammered and said, "**WWWWell**, yyyyes, but . . ." and she cut me off. She blurted out, "I **jist** a

want you to know that you ain't long for this here church cuz these here folks ain't no Calvinists. How kin you believe such a thing?"

I tried as best as I could to explain the sovereignty of God to no avail. My problem was that I would say one thing, and she would take it to mean another. I felt as though we were "ships crossing in the night." I thought she had so many misconceived ideas about Calvinism that she could not be "confused with the facts." She was **pre**-suppositionally locked and couldn't hear my presentation.

Maybe I was just too nervous and so was she. Daisy really did love Christ and I know it was difficult for her to talk to me. She even began to cry a little bit as she broke down over even the thought that I could believe in such a strange doctrine as "Calvinism." But soon she got her composure and let me off the hook, finally leaving my office with the suggestion that I probably had to leave.

And so I did. But I had had re-enforced a very important lesson. I realized once again that **Calvinism** is seriously misunderstood not only by the liberal humanists, such as the ones who taught me in college, but by the modern evangelical church! It's so misrepresented that it has become a kind of curse word in some circles, even when those using it don't really know what it means.

T h o s e D _ Calvinists!

I remember reading several years ago a story told by Duane Spencer, a great man of God and one of the finest expositors of the Word of God I have ever heard. He had been a Methodist minister when he became a Calvinist in his theology. He eventually took his congregation into the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Grace Orthodox Presbyterian in San Antonio. In the middle of his life and with apparently many years left in the ministry, he was taken home to be with the Lord as the result of a heart ailment. I shall never forget his stunning radio broadcasts where he presented fascinating word studies.

Dr. Spencer also wrote books. He produced a fine presentation of the five points of Calvinism in a little booklet simply called, *Tulip*. In it, he tells a remarkable story about confusion over the word **Calvinism**. It is about a Calvinistic Baptist minister whose father was extremely prejudiced against Calvinism.

"To illustrate the kind of ignorance and prejudice of which I speak, let me tell you about an incident which took place while I was a Bible teacher for a city-wide conference in Birmingham, Alabama. A fine looking young man came up to me and said, 'I can tell by your teaching that you hold the old-fashioned doctrines of the Protestant Reformers.' (I acknowledged that I did.) He continued, 'I am a Baptist preacher and my father was a Sunday School teacher most of his life. He was a very godly man with a

patient disposition. Occasionally, when some one disagreed with him about what the Bible said, he would call that person a D

Calvinist! When I inquired just what kind of person **that** was, he was not sure, except it was someone who disagreed with his concept of the teachings of the **Scripture!** The young preacher continued with a smile, saying, 'You won't believe this, but his [the father] preacher-hero was Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the famous English Baptist. Knowing this, I ordered all of the sermons of **Spurgeon** in book form for Dad, and gave the full set to him before I went to seminary. I returned to college and did not see him until graduation. To my surprise, when I met him and mother at the airport, his first words were: 'Son! Did you know that Charles Haddon **Spurgeon** was a **Calvinist?**' Frankly, I did not because none of my college studies had given me any insight into Baptist history. 'Well,' said Dad, 'listen to a couple of quotes I brought you!' And here are the notes he handed me."

The old truth that Calvin preached, that Augustine preached, that Paul preached, is the truth that I must preach today, or else be false to my conscience and my God. I cannot shape the truth. I know no such thing as paring off the rough edges of a doctrine. John Knox's gospel is my gospel. That which thundered through Scotland, must thunder through England again!

"And the second one was much the same, for it read:"

I love to proclaim those strong old doctrines nicknamed Calvinism, but which are surely and verily the revealed truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus.

"Sir," said the young preacher, 'Did you know that **Spurgeon** the **Baptist** was a full Calvinist?'

"Of course my [Dr. Spencer] reply was that I was well aware that Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a **Calvinist**. I was also fully aware that many who profess to admire his evangelistic zeal, and missionary endeavors, bad mouth the great Protestant Reformer whose doctrines Spurgeon held dear, with much the same ignorance as this fine young man's dear father! I told him that if he were to study his history he would discover that William Carey, the shoemaker who evangelized India, held Reformation doctrine. Great spiritual giants of history like M'Cheyne, Whitfield, Brainard, Bonar, Burns of China, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Latimer, Tyndale, Rutherford, Bunyan, Goodwin, Owen, Watson, Isaac Watts, Jonathan Edwards, Newton, Hedge, Warfield, Pink – one could go on **ad infinitum** – held the great Bible doctrines of the Protestant Reformation."¹

When Dr. Spencer says, "The great Bible doctrines of the Protestant Reformation," he means **Calvinism**. And yet, it's true that today, **Calvinism** is one of those words that evokes a wide variety of responses. Some imagine an austere Calvin with followers all perceived to be wearing black gowns. Some think of the words predestination, fatalistic and robot in the same thought.

Others recall a man named Servetus burning at the stake, a man whom they were taught in their public schools was put to death by John Calvin; in fact, Calvin pleaded with the town council not to burn Servetus, but **they**, the **council**, along with the majority of Catholic and Protestant leaders in Europe, decided to put him to death.

Calvinism: Some Historical Background

Calvinism is no doubt seriously misunderstood because people form an opinion without knowing the facts. **Calvinism** bears the name of John Calvin (1509-1564), even though he was not the founder; the ideas he ex-

pounded had been around **long** before his time. Yet as so often happens, because he was a great **systematizer**, he set the theological agenda for centuries to come. Even more, his system impacted the entire intellectual world of his day. One man has said that the history of the Western world can be understood in terms of the two John's of Geneva: John Calvin and John Rousseau.

Calvin's system is normally thought of in terms of the acrostic above, **TULIP**. Certainly it is much more extensive than these points, but it is often expressed in its "short-hand" form by them. Ironically, however, they were developed in response to another five point outline of theology, summarized in a document called This "protest" was presented to the government of the State of Holland by disciples of a Dutch seminary professor, Jacob Hermann, whose Latin surname was **Arminius**. Born four years before Calvin's death, he was reared in a Calvinist home. He was taught to believe in the teachings of Calvin, but he was never settled in his own mind. Even so, he went on to become a leading theological teacher in this great Calvinist society.

One year after his death, his disciples summarized his teachings around five points. They presented these to the State because they wanted the Reformed Church of Holland to substitute them for the great doctrinal statements of the Reformation: **Belgic** and the

The Synod of Dordt was convened by the States-General (analogous to the Congress) in 1618 for the purpose of examining the Five **Points of Arminianism**. They met as an august body of eighty-four theologians and 18 secular commissioners for one hundred and fifty-four sessions from November 13, 1618 until May 9, 1619. Their findings were unwavering. Arminianism was declared **heretical**. What were they?

Five Points of Arminianism

Point 7: Incomplete Depravity

Man's depravity, as a result of the Fall, is not total but **partial**. According to the Arminian, man sinned and fell, but aspects of his being are not effected by the Fall, especially his will. Man has not lost the faculty of self-determination, nor the ability to do that which is good in the sight of God. Man is the author of his own repentance and faith unto salvation since the human will is viewed by the Arminian as the **primary** cause of regeneration.

Point 2: Conditional Election

Man is selected by God on the basis of what **he** does. After he believes, he then becomes the elect of God. He holds God in abeyance, making the Lord wait on man to act. God cannot in any way influence a man's "decision for Christ," because to do so would imply some kind of prior choice of God. Neither can God **know** what will happen ahead of time. If He does, then His knowledge would be determinative. In other words, how could God possibly know something was going to happen if there is a possibility that it cannot happen?

Point 3: Universal Atonement

Christ indiscriminately died for all men. All men have their sin already paid for. Salvation is therefore based on the decision to choose or reject Christ. Damnation is based on the lack of faith not sin.

Point 4: Obstructable Grace

Man can resist and obstruct. Since man is the author of his own salvation, he also has the power to stop the application of grace.

1. Duane Spencer, *Tulip: The Five Points of Calvinism Studied in Light of Scripture* (San Antonio: Duane Edward Spencer, 1975), pp. 2-4.

Point 5: Thwarted Grace

Man can not only resist and obstruct grace, but he can **thwart** it. He can stop the work of God in his life and in the world.

These were the five points of Arminianism. They were countered by the classic, five **points of Calvinism**. The Calvinistic points precisely counter the Arminian view. They even follow the basic covenantal pattern, demonstrating that this Biblical pattern was intuitively recognized hundreds of years ago.

Tulip and Covenant

The **covenantal** structure of the five points of Calvinism clarifies each point. Often the five points are considered apart from a larger theological and **covenantal** background. The result is that not only is Calvinism reduced simply to these five points but the rationale for the **order** of the points is missed. If, however, the five points are considered in light of the broader, **covenantal** context of Scripture, their **Biblicalness** and logical order take on sharper and even newer meaning.

Point 1: Total Inability (Depravity)

The first point of **Tulip** concerns the issue of **sovereignty**. Arminianism says that man has the **ability** to save himself. His will is not damaged by sin so that all he has to do is muster enough fortitude to choose God.

The Calvinist, on the other hand, argues that man is not able to respond to God **apart** from a prior work of grace. Sin has so stained man's mind, emotion and will that he cannot think, feel or force his way to the kingdom of God. Scripture tells us, "But as many received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the **will** of the flesh, nor of the **will** of man, but of God" (John 1 :12-13).

A famous Puritan, Thomas Boston, used a graphic analogy to convey the Scriptural truth of man's total inability. He referred to the image of a man in a pit. He said the man in the pit is like man's condition of **lostness**. Some will tell him to crawl out for salvation waiting him at the top, but he can't crawl out because the walls are too high. Others will say that salvation is the same as letting down a rope or ladder. But the Calvinist reminds us that none of this advice nor any of these devices will get the man out of the pit. Why? Because the man in the pit is **dead**. Dead men can't crawl and dead men can't grab hold of ropes or ladders to **pull** them out. The only way the man in the pit can escape is through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, giving new resurrected life and enabling him to take proper means to get out of the pit.

Salvation is the result of the **Sovereign Act of God**, who is the Divine **Suzerain**. This is the first point of God's **covenant**. God is transcendent and Sovereign. Man is **unable** to respond to God apart from **His** initiative. Only a God who is Suzerain could provide such help and this is how a covenant relationship with God begins.

Point 2: Unconditional Election

The second point teaches that there were no prior conditions met by man. Instead, he was elected by God **before** he was converted. This concerns a hierarchy of actions, describing an order of decrees within the Godhead. These decrees are Sovereign declarations that set the **order** of events in the salvation of man. They are outlined and contrasted **below**.²

2. Benjamin Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 31. Warfield's book has many helpful insights and his chart of the different views of salvation is good to a point. He only represents the Anglo-Catholic view of salvation under Anglicanism: he does not point out that the

Calvinist	Arminian
* Permission of the Fall	Permission of the Fall
* Election of Some to Life	Death/Resurrection
* Death/Resurrection for the elect	Sufficient Grace for All
* Gift of Spirit to Save the Redeemed	Salvation for all who freely co-operate
* Sanctification of the Regenerated	Sanctification by co-operation with the Spirit

Notice the contrast of order. The Calvinist believes election is **prior to** salvation, even before the Death and Resurrection of Christ. The Arminian believes one is not elect until he believes. The Calvinist disagrees on the basis of several passages of Scripture. Paul says, "He [God the Father] chose us in **Him** [Christ] **before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He **predestined** us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will" (Ephesians 1 :4-5). Luke also comments, "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; **and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed**" (Acts 13:48).

Thus, the second point of **Tulip** concerns a hierarchy of events, referring to the covenant structure. The second part of the covenant outlines how the covenant is represented, pointing to manifestation of the Suzerain's sovereignty in history through covenant headship. The second aspect of **Tulip** describes the same demonstration of God's Lordship through the order of the decrees.

Point 3: Limited Atonement

The third point of Tulip counters the Arminian view that Christ's death atoned for each and every person who has, is and ever will live. The Calvinist believes that Christ died only for those predestinated by God the Father, the Elect: "I know my sheep and am known of Mine . . . and I **lay down My life for the sheep**" (John 10¹ 4-15); "God commends His love toward **us** in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for **us**" (Romans 5:8); "He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for **us** all, how shall He not with Him also freely give **us** all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's **ELECT**?" (Romans 8:32); "Christ loved the **Church** and gave Himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25).

The Arminian responds by citing those passages where apparently Christ is said to have died for each and every person: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16); "We have our hope fixed on God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers" (1 Timothy 4:10). A Scriptural response is fairly simple. The first passage, John 3:16, does not exactly say that Christ died for every single individual. It states that Christ died for the "world," literally in the Greek, the **cosmos**. It means that Christ died for the physical universe as well as the elect people on it.

The second is more difficult for both sides. It is difficult for the Calvinist because the verse says Christ is Savior of "all men." Whenever facing a hard-to-interpret verse, look for the obvious. The obvious in this case is that Christ died for all men in a way that is not "especially for those who believe." So just because the text says He is Savior

Evangelical position within Anglicanism would be very similar to the Historic Presbyterianism, which in my opinion is not represented at all on his chart. Interestingly, Warfield leaves out the role of the sacraments in the Presbyterian outline of the order of decrees, as though Presbyterians did not believe the sacraments to be means of grace, a position all of their creeds emphatically embrace! This being the case, there is supposed to be some kind of relationship between the church and the application of salvation in the Presbyterian view. But since Warfield was a rationalist, believing in a kind of salvation apart from the church, he speaks of the application of salvation apart from the means of grace: word and sacrament.

of all men does not mean He died necessarily for their sins.

I think we have to see a general and special distinction of salvation, what has been called the difference between common and special grace. Let's start with the obvious. In a **special** sense, Christ is the Savior of those who believe: He died for their sins in a special way. In **general** Paul says that Christ is Savior of all men. This is a reference to **Common Grace**, applied to the unbeliever because of the work of special grace. In other words, the **effects** of the benefits of salvation for the elect go to all men. For example, in the Old Testament, there was a national sacrifice offered on the **Day of Atonement**. It restrained the wrath of God on the nation as a whole, even holding back temporarily from the unbelievers in Israel the awful judgments of God. On a personal level, however, only a believer could offer a specific sacrifice at the Temple – sin, burnt, or peace offering – for his own particular sins. They covered his particular sins and not those of the unbeliever. These sacrifices, therefore, had a **common** and special application, or a general and specific.

At a more theological level, the so-called **universal passages of the New Testament create serious problems** for the Arminian. If Christ died for every man then on what basis would any man be condemned? True, the Arminian says man is condemned for **unbelief**, not **sin**. But isn't unbelief a sin? And if it is a sin, did not Christ die for it too? If He didn't, then there is one sin not paid for that applies to everyone; no one has the sin of unbelief atoned for and so everyone would have this one sin keeping him from God. If Christ did die for the sin of unbelief, on the other hand, then it wouldn't make any difference whether someone believed; his unbelief is eradicated anyway. The result is **universalist**, the salvation of every single individual. Certainly the history of Arminianism proves that it has collapsed time and again into unitarianism! So the Arminian is caught on the horns of a ridiculous dilemma if he persists that man is condemned on the basis of unbelief and not his sin.

This whole discussion of the atonement in the third point of Tulip is directly tied to the covenant. How? It has to do with **Christ's satisfaction of the law**. The third part of the covenant is **ethics**, obedience to the law. It specifies the demands of faithfulness for the covenant-keeper. **Tulip** at this point is therefore addressing the fulfillment of the law by the true Covenant-Keeper, Jesus Christ.

Point 4: Irresistible **Grace**

The fourth point of **Tulip** is responding to the Arminian notion that man can resist God. It specifically discusses the application of salvation to the individual. The Calvinist follows on the other points, especially the first one, which says God is Sovereign; He is God and not man; the creature cannot obstruct grace: "Jehovah does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and no one can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What are you doing?" (Daniel 4:35); "All that the Father gives Me **shall come to Me**" (John 6:37).

The Arminian calls' attention to places in Scripture where God apparently "changed His mind" (Jonah 3). For

example, God sent Jonah to Nineveh to call the city to repentance. He promised that if they did not repent He would destroy the city. Did this mean God changed His mind when the city repented? Yes in a **covenantal** sense, but no from the point of view of Gods eternal decree known only to Him. God was speaking **covenantally** on the basis of the conditions of His covenant. His covenant says that if man is covenantally faithful he will not be judged. If he is not, then he will be judged. It is this simple. The places where God apparently "changes" His mind or occasions where God issues a final statement of judgment, meaning the curses of the covenant will come if repentance does not occur. God is not resisted, in other words; He is obeyed and certain sanctions result.

This is the connection of the fourth point of **Tulip** with the fourth segment of the covenant. Grace is the ultimate blessing/sanction. As someone has defined it: God's Riches At Christ's Expense. Tulip is once again developing a fine theological point within the fourth aspect of the Biblical covenant.

Point 5: Perseverance of the Saints

The final point of **Tulip** answers the Arminian view of **losing one's salvation**. This is a direct challenge to the **sovereignty of God**. The Calvinist argues for the **perseverance of the saints**. God does not preserve the saints, as someone would preserve strawberries. Rather, He perseveres them: "**Now unto Him Who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory**" (Jude 24). This means that a true believer will bear fruit in his life because God is sovereignly at work. Granted, it is not mechanical in its outworking. It is dynamic through the work of the Spirit. Nevertheless, God's people do show development and progress in their lives.

But much more is involved over this point. The Calvinist believes that there is a necessary, positive effect of salvation. He maintains a cause/effect relationship between salvation and the fruit of salvation. There is **historic continuity between knowing Christ and bearing fruit**. The Arminian is saying that there can be the possibility of **no historical continuity**. The effects of salvation do not necessarily result.

Here is the point of contact with the final point of the covenant. It has to do with **succession**. The lawful and faithful heirs **inherit**. There is reward because God promises fruit to those who persevere. Disinheritance is not an option for those who truly know Christ.

Conclusion

Tulip and Theos have a definite relationship. The former grew out of the latter, having become essentially a theological development. Unfortunately, Calvinism has become in its history a discussion of the theological apart from the rich Biblical and covenantal background. And on the other hand, there have been those who have examined the Biblical and **covenantal** without considering the theological. These problems we will consider in a later issue of