

Doctrines of Grace

Historical Introduction

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October 20, 2026

- This is a study in systematic and historical theology
- Relationship between systematic and biblical theology;
 - Biblical theology deals with the revelation of God and His work of redemption within the progress of the salvation history
 - Systematic theology approaches the Scripture thematically (what God is like; the Person and Work of Jesus, Holy Spirit, covenant, kingdom of God, etc.)
 - Both Biblical and Systematic Theology are practiced within the context the church teaching (Historical Theology)
- We will be looking at what is commonly refer to as "Five Points of Calvinism" or TULIP
- Both of these terms came late in the church history (late, meaning long after these five points were articulated)
- Calvin did not write about the "Five Points of Calvinism", but his writings contain the truth expressed in these statements
- The TULIP acronym first appeared in 1905-1913 in the lectures by by Dr. Cleland B. McAfee
- The TULIP acronym was later popularized by Loraine Boettner (1932) and David Steele and Curtis Thomas (1963)

- The TULIP acronym became popular as a memory and communication device
- Other popular acronyms:
 - KISS – **K**eeP **I**t **S**imple **S**tupid
 - YOLO – **Y**ou **O**nly **L**ive **O**nce
 - PATRIOT Act – **U**niting and **S**trengthening **A**merica by **P**roviding **A**ppropriate **T**ools **R**equired to **I**ntercept and **O**bstruct **T**errorism Act
- Continuous discussion among the Reformed theologians resulted in abandoning the TULIP acronym and replace it with "improved" terminology;
 - **T**otal Depravity – **U**nconditional Election – **L**imited Atonment – **I**rresistable Grace – **P**erseverance of the Saints
 - Radical Depravity – **U**ncoditional Election – **P**articular Redemption – **E**fficacious Grace – **P**ersevering Grace
- They are called *The Doctrines of Grace* because all of them describe the work of God in providing redemption/salvation for His people, the work which is possible only because of God's grace
- By way of introduction to our discussion of the Doctrines of Grace, we will talk about historical background of these doctrines (their specific formulation) and about the meaning of *God's grace*

Historical Context of the Doctrines of Grace Arminius contra Dutch Reformed Church:

1. The five statements are the response of the Dutch Reformers to the documents published by the followers of the Dutch minister and theologian Jacobus Arminius (1559-1609)
2. The followers of Arminius were in the minority in Holland and they were afraid of the discipline so they petitioned the state (the state controlled the church discipline at the time) in 1610 by writing a petition (Remonstrance) which presented their theological position and requested that the government ensure the tolerance and protection for their church

3. Dutch Reformed Church responded to the Remonstrance at the Synod of Dordt (Dordrecht) in November 13, 1618
4. The Remonstrance contained five articles (five points) – hence the response from the Reformed Church was in five points
5. Calvinism has never summarized itself in five points – it has five answers to Arminianism
6. Calvinism, Reformed Theology is summarized in the Westminster Standards, Heidelberg Catechism and Belgic Confession

Augustine and Pelagius The beginning of the theological controversy:

1. At the heart of this theological controversy is the understanding of what role a man plays in the God's work of redemption
2. Apostle Paul devotes a significant portion of his epistles to this subject
3. The polemic between Augustine and Pelagius – a first example of the theological polemic on the subject
 - Pelagius (around 354 – 418) – taught that Adam's sin/transgression had no consequences for his posterity, just provided a bad example. All people sin because of the overwhelming influence of the sinful environment. They can, if they will, follow the law and live virtuously. Living in the sinful environment necessitated "helping grace": natural law for pagans, moral law for Israel, and the gospel for Christians
 - Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430) – Adam's sin rendered all humans *dead in their sins and trespasses*; external means (the Word and sacraments) are not sufficient; no internal grace, the grace of the Holy Spirit must come to regenerate and move a person towards faith

Semi-Pelagianism Also known as Arminianism:

1. In contrast to Pelagius who taught that it is human will that begins faith and continues in the walk of faith, Rome teaches the need of the prior grace – prevenient grace

2. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact definition of prevenient grace (external call or internal work of the Holy Spirit, gracious assistance)
3. Roman Catholic Church teaches that prevenient grace can be not only accepted, but also refused and rejected by a person
4. Prevenient grace in its operation is dependent on human will
5. Semi-Pelagianism present in both Roman Catholicism and some Protestant traditions
6. Even within Park Cities Presbyterian Church – To God Be the Glory is a hymn with lyrics by Fanny Crosby (Trinity Hymnal #55). Here is the original first stanza as written by Fanny Crosby:

To God be the glory, great things He hath done, so loved He
the world that He gave us His Son, who yielded His life an
atonement for sin, and opened the life-gate *that all may go
in.*

That last phrase is replaced in Trinity Hymnal with *that we may go in*. Yet at the last Sunday worship service I heard almost half the congregation singing *that all may go in*.

Understanding of Grace in Reformed Theology Calvin, Bavinck and Kuyper:

1. Grace as unmerited favour, or better, receiving something that one does not deserve
2. Grace vs. mercy – Mercy: withholding something (punishment) that is due
3. *Grace is a benefit of the Union with Christ* – Herman Bavinck (compare Ephesians 1:3-14)
4. *People cannot discriminate themselves, for they are all alike dead in sins and tresspassess. But God discriminated among them according to His eternal good pleasure and by the power of His grace* – Herman Bavinck
5. *There is no other kind of grace but that which comes to us directly from God* – Herman Bavinck
6. *God's activity does not produce possibility that we can exhaust, but an actuality to which we cannot add* – Calvin Institutes II.ii.10

7. *Calvinism seeks God not **within** the creature, as with paganism; Calvinism does not isolate God **from** the creature, as with Islam; Calvinism posits **between** God and the creature no mediated fellowship, as with Rome; rather, Calvinism proclaims the exalted idea that God who stands high in majesty above every creature, nevertheless, through His Holy Spirit exercises **immediate** fellowship with that creature.* – Abraham Kuyper
8. **Covenant of Grace** – *is a gracious bond between the offended God and the offending sinner in which God promises salvation in the way of faith in Christ and the sinner receives this salvation by believing.* – Geerhardus Vos
9. **Common grace** *represents a period of delay from the final judgement at the consummation of history.* – Meredith Kline (see Genesis 2:17; Matthew 5:45)

Grace in the Bible Interpreted within the framework of the Covenant:

1. Aaronic Blessing: Numbers 6:24-26
 - Blessed and gracious disposition of God (contrast with curse and wrath)
 - All the goodness of God comes to us by His divine grace
 - Privilege of beholding God's face (countenance) see Exodus 33:18-23; John 1:14, 17
 - *Grace and peace* benefits of God's covenant of grace; peace means the war is over, those who are in the covenant of grace are no longer the enemies of God (Romans 5:8 and John 20:19)
 - Paul's greetings to the recipients of his letters: ...*grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* echo the aaronic blessing

Living by God's Grace Grace in the life of a Christian:

1. We are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9) – not means but *because of* God's grace
2. Not only are we saved by grace, but we need God's grace, His gracious provisions, for our daily life (Ephesians 2:10)

3. Constant reminder of our need of God's grace should result in our wholehearted gratitude
4. If God is gracious toward us, should we not be gracious toward our neighbours? (compare Matthew 6:12)