

The Doctrines of Grace

Written by Josh Winslett

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This article is titled the Doctrines of Grace. Simply put, the doctrines of grace describes the doctrinal belief that emphasizes the complete sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners. For the purpose of brevity we will discuss the five main points of this belief. These points can be illustrated by using the acronym *TULIP*. This acronym is expanded into the following doctrinal points:

(1) *Total Depravity*, (2) *Unconditional Election*, (3)

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Limited Atonement

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(4)
Irresistible Grace

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(5)
Preservation of the Saints

Salvation is at the very heart of the gospel. The Bible itself is God slowly revealing His story of redemption throughout the centuries. This knowledge should lead every believer to press toward a more full knowledge of God's redemption story. How is a person saved? Is a person saved because of their personal choice or is salvation all by the grace of God? These are excellent questions, questions that are often overlooked or ignored by many Bible teachers. So, how is a person saved? What is salvation? The Bible describes salvation as not being an act of human volition or human works. Paul wrote the church at Rome that grace and works are completely contrary one to another. Dear reader, Jesus did not come to make us savable or to offer redemption to the fickle will of man. The message of the gospel is that Christ accomplished redemption for his chosen people. It Is Finished! That was the victory cry of Christ on the cross, declaring His success in saving His people from their sins. No sin can separate God's children from their Savior! By dying for their sins, Christ secured eternal life for all that the Father had given Him. For the elect of God, salvation isn't merely an option, but is a reality!

The following lessons will expand on this message of sovereign grace. Each lesson is broken down according to each letter in the above acronym.

1) **Total Depravity**

Total Depravity is a phrase used to describe how humans are completely dead to spiritual

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things and totally incapable of recovering themselves from this fallen state by their own free will and ability. This fallen state is a result of Adam's disobedience. Adam disobeyed by the breaking of God's commandment, in eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Though Adam was made in God's likeness, all of Adam's posterity was made in his fallen likeness (Genesis 5:3). As a result of this original sin, the entire human race lost every capability, thereby becoming dead in trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1-5). All of Adam's descendents died because of Adam's sin (Romans 5:12-21).

The human race is now incapable of recovering themselves from this fallen state by their own free will or ability (Job 25:4-6). Humans have no ability to come to God. Their very heart is wicked, and their mind is at enmity against God. (Genesis 6:5, Genesis 8:21, Ecclesiastes 7:20, Isaiah 64:6, Matthew 19:17, Romans 3:10-18, Romans 3:23, Colossians 2:13). Therefore, a person cannot in any way understand or believe the gospel until he is first given life (born again). This does not mean that every depraved human is as sinful as they possibly could be, but instead it means that humans apart from God's grace only have the ability to sin.

There are two observable evidences to prove this doctrine. First, it is easily seen that every human that lives long enough manifests sin to some degree (Romans 3:10-18, Psalms 14:2-3). For example, young children must be taught how to be respectful and obedient, yet, young children do not have to be taught how to be selfish and defiant. One sin is enough to manifest this principle, but this proof is habitually confirmed in our own proclivity towards sin and our experience with others. Secondly, it is an undeniable proof that all humans, regardless of age, die. From the unborn to the elderly, all humans prove that the wages of sin is death (Romans 5:14, 6:23).

The punishment for sin (disobeying God) is an eternity in the lake of fire. All humans would spend eternity exactly where they chose to be if it were not for the overruling grace of God through Jesus Christ.

2) Unconditional Election

Unconditional Election is defined as God's unmerited decision in electing from the fallen human race those whom he would save to eternal life. God's electing grace was purposed and first implemented before any child of God did any good or evil (Romans 9:11). Before the world began, God chose His people in Christ and predestined them to be heirs of eternal glory. The

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doctrine of election declares that it is God that chose us, and it is not we that chose him (John 15:16).

This election was not done because of any foreseen merit or righteousness on the part of humans. What God saw when he looked down from heaven was not righteous humans choosing God, on the contrary, He saw totally depraved humans perpetually choosing unrighteousness and sin. This divine choice was done solely according to the sovereign will and purpose of God (Psalms 14:2-3).

This doctrine is often charged with making God sound unfair. This argument is answered in Romans 9:14-15, "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." God has full sovereignty in the salvation of sinners. The fact is that there would be none saved if it were not for God's electing grace. All humans are totally depraved and dead in their sins. God is doing no injustice to those He did not chose to save. He simply left, or passed over, them in their fallen natural condition (Romans 9:22). The non-elect will receive the just punishment for their sins, the same punishment we would receive if not for God's electing grace.

Furthermore, God would have been righteous and just if he had chosen to not save any human and send the entire human race into the lake of fire for all eternity. Without divine intervention, no human would ever choose God. This is why unconditional election is so glorious. This doctrine of election emphasizes the sovereignty of God in salvation; thereby giving God the complete glory, without any glory going to man. (Romans 8:28-34, I Peter 1:2-4, Ephesians 1:3-6). Thanks be to God that he has revealed to us His purpose of salvation that was first given to His children in Christ before the foundation of the world.

3) Limited Atonement

Limited Atonement is defined as the belief that Jesus died for a specific definite people only (His elect) and not for the entire human race. The term limited atonement, also known as particular redemption and definite atonement, does not mean that Christ's sacrifice was limited in its sufficiency or ability, but instead, it means Christ's sacrifice was limited to a particular people out of the human race.

Jesus came to save his elect only. He did the will of the Father and died for those to whom the

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Father loved and elected (John 17:2). Romans 9:13 confirms that God does not love everyone; "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Jesus himself said, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me." (John 17:9) Paul continued in Romans 9 to declare that God is certainly righteous in his action of having mercy on his elect and leaving those he hates in their own punishment (Romans 9:14-24). This does not mean that there will be people left out that want to be saved. Apart from God's grace, humans are depraved and do not seek after Christ, nor do they desire salvation.

Jesus, on the cross, literally paid for all the sins of all of His chosen people (2 Corinthians 5:21). He did not pay for the sins of all of the human race. If Christ did pay for the sins of all humans without exception then either Hell would be vacant or Christ would be a failure because someone for whom He died was in Hell. Jesus did not come to make us savable, but instead, He came to fully accomplish salvation (Matthew 1:21). None of Christ's sacrifice failed or was wasted. His sacrifice was both sufficient and efficient only for those to whom He died. He obtained eternal redemption for his elect (Hebrews 9:12).

The words "limited" or "particular" do not imply that only a small number of people are among the elect. Revelation 5:9 declares that God has a people out "of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues." God's people are described as "a great multitude, which no man could number" (Revelation 7:9). Throughout the Bible, the family of God is not limited to only a small group but is described as many (Romans 5:19, 8:29, Hebrews 9:28). The elect are as innumerable as the stars in the sky, dust of the earth, and sand on the seashore (Genesis 13:16, 22:17, Hebrews 11:12).

4) Irresistible Grace

Irresistible Grace is defined as the belief that all for whom Christ died will be quickened sometime between conception and death (John 6:37). Irresistible grace, also known as the effectual call, has many other biblical names, such as regeneration, new birth, quickening, translation, and washing. The soul of a person must be changed in order for them to enter into eternal glory. The natural man apart from God's grace would always oppose God. Therefore eternal life is imparted to the dead alien sinner by the sovereign will of God alone. This gracious act by necessity is irresistible, meaning that this quickening grace is effectual and cannot be hindered by the actions of humans.

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Irresistible does not mean that God drags an unwilling, God hating person into eternal glory. When God's quickening Spirit comes to a child of God they are given a willing spirit. Psalms 110:3 states that God's "people shall be willing in the day of thy power." When God calls, His children answer.

The elect are totally depraved and cannot act or believe in order to be quickened (John 6:44). The gospel has no power to them who have not already been quickened by God (1 Corinthians 1:18). Therefore eternal life is imparted to the depraved individual by the sovereign will of God alone. God does not use the gospel, nor any other human instrument in this divine act. This work is accomplished without the aid of men. The elect sinner is born again by the mighty working of the Holy Spirit through the life giving power of the voice of Jesus Christ (John 5:25, 1 Peter 1:23). The Holy Spirit imparts eternal life onto the soul while the individual is yet depraved. This work is done effectual in the exact same fashion for every child of God (John 3:8).

The effect of this work is a new nature. God's laws are written on the heart and mind in the new birth, and the elect individual is made to know God. The sinner who loved sin and was drawn toward it is now made to hate sin, love God, and to be drawn towards Him. If a person loves righteousness, Jesus Christ, and His people then they have passed from death unto life by God's sovereign work in their heart. Other evidences of this work of grace are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, and temperance (1 John 5:1-3, Galatians 5:22-23).

5) Preservation of the Saints

Preservation of the Saints is defined as the belief that those who have been born again will be kept in a state of grace and never finally fall away. Preservation, also known as eternal security, teaches that nothing can separate an elect person from God (Romans 8:38-39). God, who began this work of salvation, will finish it to completion. We literally have been predestinated to be preserved unto glorification (Romans 8:29-30)

If a born again individual could lose their salvation, they would. Thankfully, Christ is the surety for the elect (Hebrews 7:22). Preservation does not depend on their works or natural ability (Romans 11:6). Every person that God the Father chose, and God the Son died for, will be in heaven without the loss of one (John 6:37). When Christ died and rose again; it was as if His elect had died and had risen again. All spiritual blessings given to God's elect were secured in the body and blood of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:33, Ephesians 1:4).

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This doctrine teaches us that when an elect individual is born again he can never become unborn again (1 Peter 1:3-5). When a person is regenerated they are sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:1). Paul was confident that God, who had begun a good work in His elect, would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6). Once God's seed is placed in an individual there is nothing that can happen, whether external or internal, that can remove that divine seed (1 John 3:9).

Though a child of God may fall away from fellowship with God, God knows all that are His (2 Timothy 2:19). This divine relationship can never be severed. God never abandons one of his elect (1 John 3:9). The saints are kept by his power, in Christ, to be raised again on the last day (John 6:44, 1 Peter 1:5). We have great peace in knowing that our eternal security is in the hands of our sovereign God (John 10:27-29).

This doctrine is often falsely charged with being a license to sin. On the contrary, this doctrine is the greatest motivation for godly living. After proclaiming the doctrine of preservation, Paul exhorted all that aligned themselves with Christ to depart from all iniquity (1 Timothy 2:19). Preservation is the greatest motivation to seek assurance.