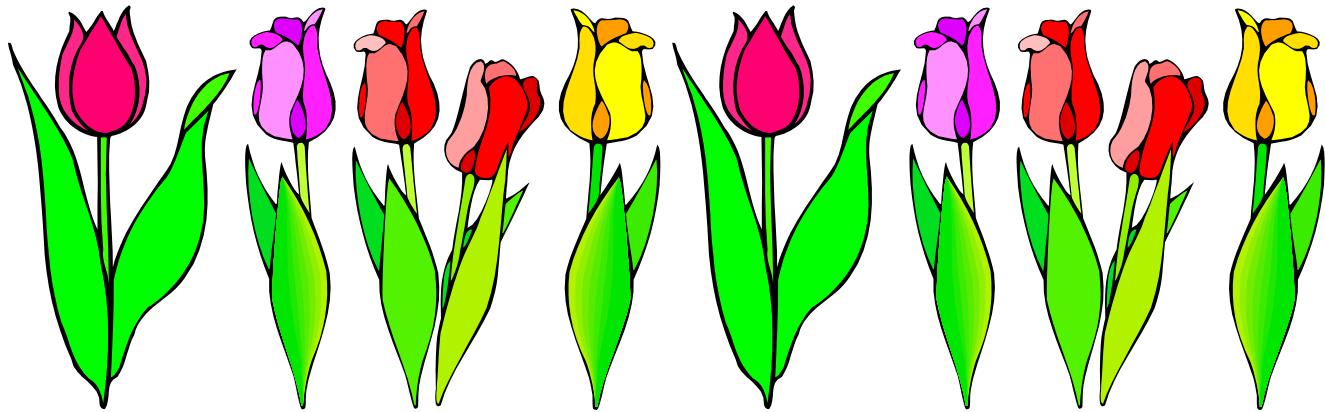


# Theological Gardening, The Problem With TULIPs



## I. John Calvin

Calvin came to be the important figure in the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of the Protestant Reformation, as Luther had been the important figure of the first generation.



### A. Home

1. A Frenchman, a city man, not a peasant.
2. Born 1509, thus he was 8 years old when the 95 Theses of Martin Luther were nailed to the door at Wittenburg.
3. Raised in a noble family for whom his father worked as a notary.

### B. Education

1. As good as the times afforded.
2. University of Paris, a brilliant student, graduated 1528.
3. His father sent him to other universities to study law. Calvin graduated, but never practiced law. His theology was to reflect his training in law, just as Luther's theology reflected his monastery training.
4. His father died and Calvin returned to the university of Paris, joined the circle of Humanists, and wrote a commentary on Seneca, which made his reputation as a scholar.

### C. Conversion

1. It was an intellectual conversion about which he wrote very little (as opposed to Luther, who dwelt on it).
2. The crest or seal adopted by Calvin was a flaming heart on the palm of an outstretched hand, i.e., he took his soul in his hand.

### D. Wanderings

1. In face of the severe persecution of Protestantism in France, Calvin, in 1533 fled for his life. He wandered for a time and wrote The Institutes of the Christian Religion. This was an early edition. He worked on this for the rest of his life. He lengthened it, but never altered its theology. It was addressed to the French monarchy to explain and defend Protestantism.
2. To understand his career, it is helpful to survey the theology of Calvin as set down in the Institutes.

### E. The Institutes of the Christian Religion

1. Purpose
  - a. An apologetic, designed to explain to the king that Protestantism did not threaten the security of the state.
  - b. A handbook of the Christian faith. A systematic statement of Christianity. Just as the Roman Church did not trust the Bible to define and guide the Church, the Protestant leaders were convinced that the Bible alone would produce mass confusion. The former assigned the Church the task of explaining Christianity, the latter the creeds. The dominant Protestant creeds came to be based on, more than any other single document, the Institutes by Calvin.
2. Value
  - a. The Institutes is one of the few books which have genuinely affected history. Parenthetically, the four theologians who have had the most powerful and important influence of the Church through its history are, 1) Augustine, 2) Thomas Aquinas, 3) John Calvin, and 4) Friedrich Schleiermacher.
  - b. The theology of Calvin was neither radical or new, but the Institutes gave form, substance, and direction to a chaotic movement.
3. Doctrine
  - a. The sovereignty of God. This was the central emphasis. By this, Calvin meant what Augustine meant, i.e., that the immutability of God was such that His will alone in the universe is free and that nothing can happen apart from His will and plan. He also took the corresponding anthropology of Augustine, and declared man's total moral inability. The logical outgrowth of this is the five-fold outline of fundamental Calvinism:

TOTAL DEPRAVITY (absolute moral inability)

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

LIMITED ATONEMENT

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

This was comforting doctrine. In contrast to the Roman system of fear, indulgences, merit, etc., it was a joy for those of the Reformed tradition to think that their actions had nothing to do with salvation and that history was on their side.

b. The Sacraments

Baptism, for Calvin, was a sign and a seal, not a means of grace. A public expression of faith, an initiation into Church (not salvation). A sign from God to man to remind and assure him that he is forgiven, that he is among the elect and that his stand is with God and the Church. Calvin held that immersion was the apostolic mode, but that the mode was immaterial. Infant baptism was a sign that a child had been born into the Covenant Family, a presumption of future regeneration. In Presbyterianism, an infant is baptized to announce that the baby, adopted by God before he is born, is a part of the Covenant or the Church. Later he will become, by an act of his own will, a communicant member (Confirmation).

In the matter of the Lord's Supper, Calvin tried to mediate between the views of Zwingli and Luther. He agreed with Luther that there was a Real Presence in the elements, but held that it was a spiritual, not a physical presence.

c. The Church

Calvin distinguished between the visible and invisible Church. Some in the visible Church may be lost, and some not in the visible Church may be among the elect.

The visible Church was known by the Word and the Sacraments.

In contrast to Luther, Calvin set about organizing the state church along the New Testament pattern. He did not get very far.

In the relation of the Church and the state, it was the role of the state to protect the Church and punish heresy, while leaving the Church to govern its own affairs. There was to be no control by the state (vs. Luther's view). As a matter of fact, however, the Church in Geneva remained under the control of the town council.

The state and the Church were to work together to build a Christian society (We shall see the importance of this idea later under the subject of New England Puritanism), in contrast to the view of Luther that this was the task of the state

d. Works as evidence of election. Calvin's emphasis on works made the Reformed movement more evangelistic and produced a more dynamic society. The famous German sociologist, Max Weber, offered the controversial theory (1904-05) that the Calvinistic work ethic was the decisive impetus for industrialism and capitalism.

F. The influence of Calvin in summary

1. Calvin became the second generation leader of the Reformation; the only genuinely international reformer. The Institutes went through several editions and into nine languages before 1630.
2. Calvin corresponded with all classes of all Europe.
3. He organized, saved, and extended the Reformation. Young men came from all Europe to study in his academy at Geneva. They returned to spread the Reformation.
4. Calvin became the theological norm for Protestantism.
5. Calvin inspired, in part, modern democracy.
6. Calvin inspired, in part, modern education.
7. Calvin inspired, in part, modern capitalism.

# Total Depravity

I. This is the concept that man is ONLY evil, i.e., man is depraved of any good whatsoever = total depravity.  
Examples:

"To be totally depraved, however, does not mean that a person is intensively evil as possible, but as extensively as possible. It is not that he cannot commit a worse crime; rather, it is that nothing he does is good. Evil pervades every faculty of his soul and every sphere of his life. He is unable to do a single thing that is good."\* Palmer, p. 9

"Total depravity means that natural man is never able to do any good that is fundamentally pleasing to God, and, in fact, does evil all the time. This is the clear witness of Scripture." Palmer, p. 13

"No one can come to me unless it has been granted to him by the Father" (john 6:65). Here is *total* depravity: man cannot choose Jesus. He cannot even take the first step to go to Jesus, unless the Father draws him. And this depravity is universal. 'No one' can come, says Jesus. Not just cannot, but none can come. That is universal, total inability." Palmer, p. 16

"A baby never desires or decides to be born. He never contributes an iota toward his own birth. In a similar fashion, the unbeliever cannot take one step toward his rebirth. He must be generated by the Spirit." Palmer, p. 17

II. Is man depraved? Yes

A. Scriptures that teach man's depravity:

Romans 8:7, 8 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Ephesians 2:1-5 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Colossians 2:13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

B. Scripture indicates that the alien sinner cannot please God in the state he is in! The question is, can man change his state or is he in bondage to total disability?

III. Depravity and faith.

A. According to Calvinism, God must give a person faith for man is not capable of obtaining faith of his own accord. Man is totally depraved. Faith comes after regeneration.

B. The Bible teaches that faith precedes regeneration. Colossians 2:12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

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\* *The Five Points of Calvinism*, by Edwin H. Palmer. Baker Book House, 1972. Palmer is a good treatment of the basics of Calvinism from a Calvinist.

1. Calvinism wrongly equates man's response with works-that-make-righteous. The only righteousness that will save us is the righteousness of Jesus (Romans 3:21, 22; 10:1-4).
2. Calvinism wrongly attributes faith to God, by misinterpreting Ephesians 2:8-10:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

3. Faith is produced by the Word of God, not by the act of regeneration.

Romans 10:17 So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

James 1:18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

1 Peter 1:23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.

#### IV. Man sins because he chooses to sin. Man does not sin because he has no choice.

- A. Who is more evil, the one who chooses to sin because he desires to, or the one who sins because he has no other option?

- B. Calvinism places the guilt and solution of sin in the heart of man.

1. Man must be regenerated first, then he is capable of having faith.

2. This means lostness resides in the heart of man and for forgiveness to take place, the heart condition must first be cleansed. For example the hymn, *Glory to His Name*.

Down at the cross where my Savior died,  
Down where for cleansing from sin I cried,  
There to my heart was the blood applied;  
Glory to His name.

- C. Man's lostness resides in the mind of God.

1. We are sinners because God views us that way.

a. Sin forces God to separate Himself from man, unless man is under grace.

b. When we offend God (sin), we are not forgiven until we have been forgiven of the offence by God. It is not a matter of God changing us (that occurs after forgiveness, i.e., sanctification), but is a matter of God forgiving us.

2. Guilt lies in the mind of God whether we feel bad or not, therefore man is not a new creature until God views him that way.

# **Unconditional Election**

I. This is the concept that since man is totally depraved, in order for there to be salvation God must regenerate man. Since not all men will be obtaining salvation God has had to choose those who will be the saved, i.e., the Elect. Since This is solely God's choosing, and since man can do nothing to be worthy of salvation, God" election is Unconditional. Therefore comes the Calvinistic concept of Predestination. Examples:

"Nothing in this world happens by chance. God is in back of everything. He decides and causes all things to happen. He is not sitting on the sidelines wondering or perhaps fearing what is going to happen next. No, He has foreordained everything 'after the counsel of his will' (Eph. 1:11): the moving of a finger, the beating of a heart, the laughter of a girl, the mistake of a typist – even sin." Palmer, p. 25

"By way of anticipation, it should be noted that the Calvinist keeps both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, even though he cannot rationally reconcile the two." Palmer, p. 35

II. The predestination of believers to salvation is included in the eternal plan as it's goal. People are predestined to glory on the basis of God's foreknowledge of our relation to Christ, just as the plan of God could be based upon God's foreknowledge of the obedience of Jesus to the plan.

A. Biblical predestination: our eternal destiny has already been determined.

2 Timothy 1:9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

Romans 8:28-30 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Ephesians 1:3-11 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would 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, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

B. Not ordained to believe, but ordained to eternal life. Acts 13:48 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.

C. On the basis of God's foreknowledge.

1 Peter 1:1, 2 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

1 Peter 1:20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you

D. Calvin (and Luther), following Augustine, took the Greek view of God, i.e., that the sovereignty of God demanded that He be unchangeable and that His will be the only truly free will in the universe. He, therefore, saw the decree of God as the cause, the choice of man as the effect, rather than the other way around. His point of reference for all his theology was a misunderstanding of Romans 9.

# Limited Atonement

I. This is the concept that since God has only elected some of mankind to be saved, then Jesus did not actually die for all of mankind. He only died for a limited number, i.e., the elect. Examples:

“To them (Arminians, i.e., anyone who disagrees with Calvinism) the atonement is like a universal grab-bag: there is a package for everyone, but only some will grab a package. Christ not only shed His blood, He also spilled it. He intended to save all, but only some will be saved. Therefore, some of His blood was wasted: it was spilled.” Palmer, p. 41 (parenthesis mine)

## II. The extent of the atonement

A. The basic error of Calvinism on this point is thinking of the death of Christ in terms of quantity (How much blood did it take to remove the sins of the world?), when in reality, the effects of the death of Christ are potentially infinite. We are not freed of the guilt of sin by having a little bit of the blood of Jesus “applied” to our sins, we are saved by the fact of His substitutionary death. In NT language, blood and death are used synonymously (Romans 3:25). The blood was “applied” to God (Hebrews 9) in that the death of Christ was directed toward God. It is “applied” to the sinner (1 Peter 1:2) in that he, in obeying the Gospel, enters into the salvation God made available. In either case it is not physical and must not be quantified.

### B. Scriptures to consider:

#### 1. Passages that reflect a limitation to the atonement speak of result, not potential:

Titus 2:14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

Romans 8:29-32 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,

#### 2. Passages that speak of universal atonement as far as intent is concerned:

Hebrews 2:9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

1 Timothy 2:6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.

1 John 2:2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

#### 3. Passages that indicate that some for whom Christ died may be lost:

Romans 14:15 For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.

1 Corinthians 8:11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.

2 Peter 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Revelation 3:5 ‘He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

# **Irrresistible Grace**

I. This is the concept that since God has chosen someone to be saved, just as he had no choice in his salvation, God now forces him to believe and obey, i.e., be regenerated. Example:

“God changes the heart of man from evil to good. By nature man loves sin and everything that is going to bring him unhappiness and eternal punishment. By irresistible grace God does not leave the heart unchanged and thus drag man into heaven against his will. No, God regenerates the man, changes his nature and radically alters his character so that man now is truly sorry for his sin and loves God. Now, with his heart changed, he abhors the things he used to do. Now Christ is the fairest among ten thousand. Christianity now becomes exciting. He freely, eagerly seeks God.” Palmer, p. 58

II. Regeneration is a Biblical concept, but Calvin had it wrong.

A. Regeneration: Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

B. Renewal:

Ephesians 4:23-25 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE *OF YOU WITH HIS NEIGHBOR*, for we are members of one another.

Colossians 3:10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—

C. Rebirth

John 3:3-8 Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. “Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Peter 1:22, 23 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.

III. Problems.

- A. If irresistible grace is true, it logically leads to sinless perfection through the life of the regenerated man.
- B. Regeneration is the result of the addition of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Acts 2:38) rather than the miraculous alteration of our minds and spirits. Regeneration gives us a new orientation. We are “tuned to a different channel.” The agencies of this new influence are the Word of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.
- C. Regeneration does not completely remove our sinfulness. It guides us in a new direction, not a transformed condition (Roman 7:14-25).

## **Perseverance of the Saints**

I. This is the concept that since God has chosen a person to be saved, he is saved and nothing can change that. Example:

“Once saved, always saved. It is one of the grandest thoughts in the Bible: Once you believe, you can never be lost, you can never go to hell. Christ will always be your Savior. It is possible to get your eternal destiny settled once for all so that you never have to worry about it.” Palmer, p. 68

This is also known as the doctrine of “Eternal Security.”

II. This concept can only be true if all other facets of Calvinism are also true, and they are not.

III. Scriptures to consider.

Colossians 1:21-23 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Hebrews 3:12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

Hebrews 6:1-8 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits. For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

2 Peter 2:20-22 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, “A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT,” and, “A sow, after washing, *returns* to wallowing in the mire.”

Galatians 5:4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

Other verses to consider: Matthew 13:3-9; 18-25; 18:21-35; 24:11-13; Luke 8:13; 12:42-46; John 15:1-6; Romans 11:22; I Corinthians 15:1,2; I Timothy 4:16