

Exegeting Calvinistic “Proof” Texts, by David Brewer¹

Concise Critique of TULIP

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

The Bible does not teach that regeneration precedes faith or that faith is a gift of God. The expression “dead in sin” in Ephesians 2:1 does not mean that an unbeliever’s spirit is dead and he is in effect like a cadaver or a rock. The Bible does teach that of his initiative, an unbeliever would never seek God. An unbeliever can respond to the natural revelation he receives (Romans 1:19-20) and to the Spirit’s conviction (John 16:8-11), “wooing,” and drawing ministry (John 6:44; 12:32). Any unbeliever who diligently seeks after God will find Him (Acts 17:27; Hebrews 11:6). There is a major difference between an unbeliever not seeking God of his initiative, and an unbeliever lacking the ability to seek after God. Another important distinction is between “seeking” and “responding.” God seeks and initiates and an unbeliever can respond.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

I believe that God chooses individuals for salvation, but He did not choose them apart from their own choice to believe in Him. In other words, nowhere in Scripture does it say He chooses people to believe or predestined them to believe. Rather, He chooses to save those who place their faith or trust in His Son. Since God is omniscient and has always known all things, there was never a time when He did not know that we would believe and so it would have been impossible for Him to choose us apart from His knowledge of our choice to believe in His Son. I don't believe His foreknowledge was causative as Calvinism teaches (i.e., He didn't make us believe); however, it is exhaustive (i.e., He must have foreknown all those who would believe in Christ) (I'm thankful to Pastor/Dr. Tom Stegall for this statement on divine election; personal correspondence December 14, 2017).

LIMITED ATONEMENT

Messiah Jesus died for the entire world, but His death is only effective to those who believe in the gospel and place their faith in Him. In other words, Jesus’s death made salvation potentially possible for everyone (Isaiah 53:6; Luke 19:10; John 1:29; 3:16-17; 4:42; 8:12; Romans 5:6, 18; 1 Timothy 4:10; Hebrews 2:9; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:2), but only those who place their faith in Him find the atonement efficacious for them (John 10:11, 15; 15:13; Acts 20:28; Romans 8:32-35; Ephesians 5:25-27; Hebrews 9:28). We are commanded to proclaim the Gospel to all human beings (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; cf. 17:30; Titus 2:11; 2 Peter 3:9). Salvation is potentially possible and available to all, but it becomes actual only for the elect. A distinction should be made between the provisional benefits of the Messiah’s death and the appropriation of

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those blessings by the elect. The provision is unlimited, but the application of it is limited. Many will be unwilling to receive the gospel and will reject the offer of salvation, so the benefits of Messiah's death are not applied to them (John 5:40; cf. Matthew 23:37) (For this section on "unlimited atonement," I am indebted to Ron Rhodes' excellent two-part article in the *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* (volumes 2:2 and 2:3, Fall 1996 and Winter 1996) on "The Extent of the Atonement: Limited Atonement Versus Unlimited Atonement").

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

I do not believe that the Holy Spirit forcibly imposes eternal life on unbelievers apart from their choice (in an irresistible manner). An unbeliever can resist the conviction, "wooing," and drawing ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not overrule human freedom.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

I believe the focus should not be on a believer's perseverance, endurance, and performance. The proper focus should be on Christ's ability to keep His promise to preserve His saints. It takes God at His Word and rests upon His sure promises. I believe that sanctification is certainly desired, but not necessarily guaranteed or automatic.

A Personal Critique of "Unconditional Election"

How the Calvinists Define "Unconditional Election"

"Those of mankind who are predestinated unto Life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable Purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen in Christ to everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving Him thereunto" (The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689) (Smelley).

"The doctrine of election declares that God, before the foundation of the world, chose certain individuals from among the fallen members of Adam's race to be the objects of His undeserved favor. These, and these only, He purposed to save."²

Source Used

Smelley, Hutson. *Deconstructing Calvinism: A Biblical Analysis and Refutation*, chapter 5.

Ephesians 1:4-5

⁴just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will (NASB 1995).

- Thesis Statement and Expansion of statement
- Purpose or intention of God's choosing
- Believers are chosen to be holy
- The main point of Ephesians 1 -- what spiritual blessings will be applied to those who believe in Jesus?
- Nobody becomes a believer as a result of God's choosing

² David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, P and R Publishing Company (2d ed. 2004), p. 27 note 3.

- Significance of “according as/even as” in Ephesians 1:4
- He chose us IN HIM before the foundation of the world
- The choosing has nothing to do with salvation
- Calvinists conveniently leave out “in Him”
- We were chosen in Christ for holiness and blamelessness; predestined to adoption
- An excellent question
- More details about adoption from Dr./Pastor John Clark’s Sermon Powerpoint on Ephesians 1:1-14
- Conclusion

Acts 13:46, 48

⁴⁶ Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

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 (NASB 1995).

- Calvinists never talk about Acts 13:46
- In a sense, Acts 13:46 and 13:48 are opposites
- Greek Grammar Lesson
- What ordain does not mean and what this passage doesn’t say
- Two key questions about Acts 13:48
- Calvinist theology
- No unbeliever can seek God in Romans 3:11?

Romans 8:29-30

²⁹ 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; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified (NASB 1995).

- Definition of “unconditional election”
- What Romans 8 doesn’t teach
- Romans 8:28 is addressing believers

John 6:69-70

⁶⁹ We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.” ⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and *yet* one of you is a devil?” (NASB 1995).

This verse has nothing to do with Judas being chosen to salvation or chosen to condemnation, but it simply says that he was a disciple of Jesus that He chose to serve as one of His disciples, both practically and officially. See also John 13:18, 15:16, 19, and Acts 1:2 concerning His choosing the apostles Acts 1:15-26.

John 15:16

¹⁶ You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you (NASB 1995).

¹⁶ You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you (NASB 1995).

- Is this passage a proof text for the Calvinistic belief of individual election to salvation?
- How *eklegomai* (“choose”) is used in the NT

Acts 15:7-8

⁷ After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us (NASB 1995).

- “Unconditional election” flows naturally from “total inability.”
- God chooses individuals for salvation, but He did not choose them apart from their own choice to believe in Him. In other words, nowhere in Scripture does it say He chooses people to believe or predestined them to believe. Rather, He chooses to save those who place their faith or trust in His Son.
- Peter was not chosen for eternal life or death, but God chose him for a particular mission, i.e., that through Peter’s preaching the Gentiles would believe the gospel.

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 ² 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 (NASB 1995).

- This passage explains the “how” of election, it’s through the sanctification or setting apart of the Spirit.
- I agree with my friend Tony Badger when he wrote, “The text simply says that they were choice (qualitatively) and that they were so considered in accord with (κατὰ πρόγνωσιν θεοῦ πατρὸς) the Father’s foreknowledge. Nothing here equates foreknowledge with the Calvinist idea of election.

Colossians 3:12

¹² So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (NASB 1995).

- This verse is not teaching unconditional divine election, which is the “U” in TULIP (Calvinism’s five points).
- Paul is simply telling them to live up to their calling as their appropriate service (along the lines of Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 3:1-3) and this is, once again, synonymous with the desire of God that believers be holy and blameless in his presence as seen in Ephesians 1:4.
- This verse does not teach that election is a decree of God, that it is eternal, that it is unconditional, or that it results in salvation.
- The word “elect” in this verse is simply a title for NT believers signifying valuation or worth and appraisal or assessment.

- The Calvinist would want us to think that just because the verse contains the word “elect” that his doctrine of Unconditional Election must be biblical.
- It is clear from this verse and many similar verses that no one is elect until he is saved.

Galatians 1:15

¹⁵ But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased (NASB 1995).

- Paul’s purpose in Galatians 1:11-17.
- This verse doesn’t teach unconditional divine election, but it says that God separated Paul from his mother’s womb for a particular task, to be the spokesman for the gospel to the Gentiles. So, even before Paul was born, God had his eye on him and set him apart for his important apostolic ministry. This is very similar to several OT passages that refer to prophets who were set apart from the womb for their future tasks (e.g., Is 49:1-6; Jer 1:4-5; for a similar idea, see also Gen 25:23; Ps 71:6; Is 44:2; and Luke 1:5-17).

John 6:37-40

³⁷ All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (NASB 1995).

- The context of verses 38-39 makes it evident that the ones given to the Son by the Father are the ones who believe in Christ and therefore come to Him in faith. See verse 40.
- While it is very clear that those who are given to the Lord are believers and therefore have come to Christ in faith, it is not clear, as Calvinists want us to believe, that those given to the Son by the Father *believed because they were given*.
- Those given to Christ are given to Christ because “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).).
- Summary.

All who will ever place with faith/trust in Jesus have been given to Him by the Father. These individuals “will come to” Jesus, that is, they will believe in Him. Jesus clarifies that doing the will of His Father means not losing anybody who places their faith in Him. This promise does away with the false idea that eternal life can be lost. If it can be lost, then Jesus was unsuccessful in doing the will of His Father.

Crucial Questions to ask Calvinists

QUESTIONS REGARDING TOTAL DEPRAVITY (i.e., total inability)

Definition of “Total Depravity” according to a key Reformed theologian

“Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not – indeed he cannot – choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit’s assistance to bring a sinner to Christ – it takes

regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to salvation, but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation – it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God" (Steele, 5-6, quoted in Badger 83).

Sources used for the above quote

Badger, Anthony B. *Confronting Calvinism: A Free Grace Refutation and Biblical Resolution of Radical Reformed Soteriology*.

Steele, David N., Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn. *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*.

If you speak with somebody who believes in the "T" in TULIP and they make it clear they think it means "total inability," here are many questions you should ask them.

Are you able to present Scripture that clearly states that an unbeliever must be unregenerated before he can be saved by faith in Christ? In fact, many passages declare the opposite that faith always precedes salvation/regeneration (Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 1:13; 2 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 1:23-25).

Genesis 6:3 – how can there be real "striving" if man is dead in sin and therefore unable to hear or be persuaded? Why would the Spirit of God strive with a corpse?

Genesis 41:8 – if an unbeliever is spiritually like a rock or cadaver, why how can it be that Pharaoh's spirit was troubled within him?

Deuteronomy 2:30 – if an unbeliever is unable to respond to God, how did He harden the spirit of Sihon king of Heshbon? How can the spirit of somebody who is like a rock or cadaver be hardened?

1 Kings 21:5 – if an unbeliever is spiritually dead (unable to respond to God), then how is it that Ahab's spirit was sullen? we are told that Ahab's spirit was sullen?

1 Chronicles 5:26 – how was God able to stir up the spirit of Tiglath-Pileser if he as an unbeliever was like a spiritual corpse?

2 Chronicles 36:22 – how was God able to stir up the spirit of Cyrus the Persian to free the Jewish people if he as an unbeliever was unable to respond?

Ezra 1:1 – If Cyrus as an unbeliever is like a rock or cadaver, how could God had stirred up his spirit so that he sent out a proclamation throughout his kingdom?

Psalm 10:4 & John 5:40 – do these verses teach that unbelievers are unable to seek God? They don't teach "inability" but they do teach that many unbelievers are unwilling to spiritually respond to God.

Psalm 14:2 & 53:2 – if an unbeliever is incapable of seeking God, why would He look down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after Him? Doesn't God know that these sons of men are incapable of doing this?

Psalm 81:12; Romans 1:24 – since the Bible teaches at certain points God ceased to strive and plead with men because of man's continued rebellion, isn't it the logical conclusion that before God did that, there was a time when He was genuinely striving to convince and win them? If Calvinism were true, it would be meaningless for God to say that His Spirit will no longer strive with man.

Isaiah 1:18 – if man is incapable of responding to God, then is the Scripture irrational, because this verse says God offers to reason with man?

Isaiah 55:1-6 (also see **Jeremiah 29:13** and **Hebrews 11:6**) – If an unbeliever is like a spiritual corpse, then why would God invite unbelievers to freely drink from the waters of salvation (vv. 1-2) and why would He ask unbelievers to seek Him while He may be found and call Him while He is near (v. 6)? Why would God ask unbelievers to seek after Him (while in a lost state)?

Lamentations 3:25 – if an unbeliever can't seek after God, then why did Jeremiah write that the Lord is good to those who wait for Him (to the soul who seeks Him)?

Daniel 2:1, 3 – how is it that Nebuchadnezzar's spirit was able to be stirred if he as an unbeliever was like a spiritual corpse? If the spirits we receive from God come with depravity (i.e., total inability), then for the Calvinist there is an ethical problem with a God who creates evil (James 1:13).

Daniel 5:20 – if Nebuchadnezzar was like a spiritual corpse as an unbeliever, how is it that his spirit was able to be hardened with pride?

Zechariah 12:1 – how can an unbeliever's spirit be like a rock and cadaver when God created the spirits of all people?

Matthew 13:10-17 – if man doesn't have the freedom to respond to God, then why did God judicially blind the Jews or use parabolic language to hide His truth? Wouldn't this be like putting a blindfold on a corpse?

Matthew 28:16-20 – how can the Great Commission from Jesus Christ be valid if unbelievers cannot place their faith in Jesus? This very command implies man's ability to believe the Gospel.

Luke 8:12 – in this verse the devil works to snatch the gospel out of unbelievers' hearts *lest they should believe and be saved*. This implies he does the snatching *because* they can believe. If an unbeliever has total inability, why would Satan snatch the gospel out of unbelievers' hearts lest they should believe and be saved?

John 1:35-51 – If an unbeliever can't seek God, how is it that Andrew and John were able to seek the Lord after hearing John the Immerser's witness. Also, Nathaniel came to check out Jesus.

John 3:1-21 – If an unbeliever can't seek God, how is it that Nicodemus was able to seek out Jesus and ultimately come to faith (John 19:39-40)?

John 5:25 -- if an unbeliever is spiritually unable to respond, then how can the dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear (who believe) will live?

John 5:40 – why did Christ rebuke the rabbis for being unwilling to come if they could not come to God unless He caused them to do so?

John 7:37; also see **Isaiah 45:22**; **Matthew 11:28**; **John 4:10-14**; **6:35**; **Revelation 21:6**; **22:17**– why would Jesus give these invitations to those who are thirsty and hungry to come to Him (and as a result place their faith in Him) if unbelievers cannot do that?

John 8:24 -- Jesus himself made man personally responsible for his faith: "...unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins." This verse makes no sense if an unbeliever is spiritually unable to respond to Christ's words

Acts 8:26-38 – If an unbeliever can't seek God, how is it that the Ethiopian eunuch, though an excluded Gentile, traveled to Jerusalem to worship and found Christ through Philip's ministry?

Acts 10 – according to Reformed Theology, if an unbeliever has total inability, how is it that Cornelius (while still an unbeliever) was seeking God in Acts 10:2, 4 by giving alms and prayer? He didn't become a believer until later in the chapter (in Acts 10:43-44; compare these verses with Acts 11:17). More accurately, Cornelius was responding to God's drawing and conviction ministry.

Acts 17:10-12 – if an unbeliever can't seek God, how about the noble-minded (or "open-minded") Bereans who examined the Scriptures daily to verify Paul's message and "therefore" believed?

Acts 17:30 – why would God ask all men everywhere to repent if they are like a rock or cadaver?

Acts 18:4, 19 – if an unbeliever can't spiritually respond to God, was Paul wasting his time reasoning with the Jewish people?

Acts 20:21 – If an unbeliever is unable to respond to God, then why does Paul believe that anyone could respond and not just a select group that needs to be sovereignly regenerated before they can place their faith in Christ?

Acts 26:14 – if an unbeliever is unable to respond to God, then how was Paul as an unbeliever able to kick against the goads? This implies the Spirit had been convicting and drawing Paul before he believed. This verse teaches that not only is resisting the truth hard, but it is possible. Resisting the truth presupposes that one understands it. At one point, Paul stopped resisting, which implies that he had "free will." Jesus's words can and should be an appeal to Saul's free will.

Romans 3:24; 5:17 – if salvation is a "free gift," then what ability is required to accept a gift?

Romans 14:12 – if God created us depraved and unable to obey, why would He call upon us to "give an account" of ourselves to Him? The concept of God making us accountable to Him for doing something He knows is impossible for us, is incompatible with the true nature of God (2 Peter 3:9; 2 Timothy 2:3-4). The Judgment itself suggests that we can *respond* (responsible) in obedience to God.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 – if an unbeliever is incapable of spiritually responding to God, then why would Satan expend the effort to place a veil over the minds of unbelievers, effectively blinding them to the truth? Satan exerts himself in this way because he knows that unbelievers are certainly capable to respond to the Spirit's drawing and conviction ministry.

Ephesians 1:13 – this verse teaches that is "after" we believe that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. How can this be harmonized with the teaching of Calvinism that one must receive the Holy Spirit (be regenerated) before one can have faith?

Titus 2:11 – if unbelievers are incapable of spiritually responding to God, then why did Paul write that God's grace brings salvation appears to all men?

1 Peter 3:15 – if an unbeliever is like a rock or cadaver, then why would Peter ask the readers to give a *reason* for the hope that is in them? Could a rock or a cadaver even understand the reasoning?

How can Calvinism declare man to be incapable of faith, then condemning him for failing to believe? Isn't it irrational to blame the non-elect for failing to do what they can't do?