

## You Might Be A Calvinist If...

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Some people object to being called Calvinists though they believe in a couple of points in TULIP. They have the mistaken notion that if they claim to hold onto less than five, or even four, points of TULIP that they are not a Calvinist or certainly are not hyper-Calvinists. The number of points of TULIP is not an indicator of whether one is any sort of Calvinist or not. For one thing TULIP did not even exist during John Calvin's lifetime, though the ideas behind TULIP did. My point is TULIP is not a measure of whether or not one is a Calvinist, nor is it a scale that indicates how much of a Calvinist a person might be. All the petals of TULIP are dependent on each other. Therefore if you follow any one of them, as they are originally intended, you have bought in to Calvinism.

Philip F. Condon wrote, "a tulip is a beautiful flower, but bad theology. The fruit of the flower is appealing; the fruit of the theology is appalling...works, as an inevitable result, are necessary for salvation."<sup>1</sup>

Most people who hold some of the points of TULIP have no real understanding of what each point really means. I can make the case that a person is a Calvinist by holding onto any single point of TULIP. To demonstrate my point I'll take the first point... "T".

The **T** in TULIP is for **Total Depravity**, also called "total inability". It means although a person can make other moral choices, man is incapable of responding to the gospel, and though unable to repent and believe the gospel, he is still responsible for doing so or rejecting it. It means every person born into the world is utterly depraved and unable to choose to follow God and to accept salvation as it is freely offered unless God has specifically chosen that person, predestined him, for salvation for no other reason than it is God's "good pleasure" to do so.

Dave Hunt noted, "Not only is Total Depravity not a biblical concept, but...John Calvin *himself* said that man is not *so* totally depraved that he cannot receive much truth from God; he just doesn't get enough truth, because God withholds it... in order "to render man inexcusable..."<sup>2</sup>

Paul tells us in Romans that God did not withhold knowledge of salvation from anyone and that God made it plain:

*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. **Romans 1:18-20***

*Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.*

**Romans 5:18**

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Paul also tells us:

*In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. Acts 17:30*

According to Reformed Theology **T** means that a person does not have the capacity or ability to accept Christ until they have *first* been regenerated by God and that God only regenerates certain people. In Reformed Theology regeneration precedes faith, which means you can be regenerated and still lost...

In reality a person is regenerated when he hears the gospel and responds by accepting Christ as his Lord and Savior, not before. That is what is meant by being *born again*. Man can hear and respond:

*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? Romans 10:14*

*Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." Romans 10:17-18*

*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. Psalms 95:7-8*

*He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." Luke 11:28*

*After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe." Acts 15:7*

*But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. 2 Timothy 4:17*

That man has the capacity to hear and to respond to the gospel is precisely why Paul *reasoned* with the Jews in Acts 18:4-19. Some heard and believed and some heard didn't believe, either way it was their choice how they responded.

While it is true that man cannot do anything to save or redeem himself and that *all* have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, it is still possible for a person to hear the gospel and heed the nudging of the Holy Spirit and accept the gift of salvation that Jesus offered us when he died on the cross for us. Again, man does not have to be regenerated or reprogrammed *first* before he can be saved and neither does God reprogram only certain people. God tells us in the scripture from beginning to end, wanting each one of us to repent and change our ways.

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Yes, we're all sinful and lost, but not so *totally depraved* that we cannot hear and respond voluntarily to Christ's invitation without God first deciding if we are one of the elect and regenerating us. We *can* heed the Master's call by repenting and accepting Christ's gift of salvation, or reject it. Yes, it goes against our depraved nature, but it is not impossible.

In conclusion, if you believe that man is so *totally depraved* that he can *never* accept the gift of salvation without God first deciding if we are one of the elect and regenerating us, whether we want to be changed or not, then you are a Calvinist. The above is just taking one petal of TULIP. Though I won't do it, similar arguments could be made that one is a Calvinist for any of the five points, even the **P** in *Perseverance of the Saints*. Though, as I stated, I won't get into it, P has nothing to do with "*once saved, always saved*" so even that is not a point of agreement.

### References:

1. Philip F. Condon, "Soteriological Implications of Five-point Calvinism," *Journal of the Grace Theological Society*, Autumn 1995, 8:15,55-58. Cited in Dave Hunt, *What Love is This?*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition., 108.
2. Dave Hunt, *What Love is This?* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 131.