
The Five Points of Calvinism (From the Synod of Dort, 1619)

The Synod of Dort was held in Dordrecht, Netherlands, in 1619, in order to discuss a doctrinal controversy within the Dutch Reformed churches. The Synod had international significance for Reformed theology (often labeled Calvinism), because churches from eight other countries sent delegates. The Synod reaffirmed several basic Calvinistic tenets and rejected the errors of Arminianism, a theological trend that emphasized the ability of human beings to earn salvation for themselves. Notice that the handy acronym—TULIP—can help you remember the five points. The quotations below come from a statement made by the Synod. —D. Voelker

1. **Total Depravity of Humanity**: “Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation.”
2. **Unconditional Divine Election and Reprobation**: “Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He has out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault from the primitive state of rectitude into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ. . . . Some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God, out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehensible, and unchangeable good pleasure, has decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but, permitting them in His just judgment to follow their own ways, at last, for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and punish them forever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins. And this is the decree of reprobation.”
3. **Limited Atonement by Christ**: As per #2, Christ’s death atoned for the sins of the elect only—not for the sins of all of humanity. The atonement was thus “limited” to the elect.
4. **Irresistible Grace**: The Synod roundly rejected the error “That God in the regeneration of man does not use such powers of His omnipotence as potently and infallibly bend man’s will to faith and conversion; but that . . . man may yet so resist God and the Holy Spirit.”
5. **Perseverance of the Saints**: “Those whom God, according to His purpose, calls to the communion of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, He also delivers from the dominion and slavery of sin, though in this life He does not deliver them altogether from the body of sin and from the infirmities of the flesh.” In other words, the

“saints” (or the elect) are able to be saved because they have been freed from the bondage of sin. This does not mean, however, that they never sin. But it does mean that they will ultimately be saved. A true saint, someone who is slated for salvation, will not fail to be saved.

These five points can be boiled down to a single, over-arching point: the absolute power of God over the process of salvation.

While the 17th-century Puritans of New England embraced this notion of God’s governance, they also tended to practice energetic self-examination in order to detect God’s work in their souls.



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