

Reformed Soteriology (“TULIP”) - Week 2

B. Hodges

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1. Introduction / Recap

- What it means to be Reformed
- Reformed soteriology - doctrine of salvation
- Reformed theology is a worldview - “God is the Lord of creation, and he rules all things according to the council of his will.”
- “From him and through him and to him are all things.” (Romans 11:36)
- Last week we talked big picture about the sovereignty of God in our salvation.
- History -
 - An old debate
 - Pelagianism, semi-pelagianism
 - Reformation
 - Arminianism
 - All make the same error - salvation is cooperative
- Synod of Dort, “Five articles of Remonstrance” / “Five points of Calvinism.”
- Nothing magic. Just a summary.
- Really about one point: “God saves sinners, sinners do not save themselves.”
- “This is the one point of Calvinistic soteriology which the ‘five points’ are concerned to establish and Arminianism in all its forms to deny: namely, that sinners do not save themselves in any sense at all, but that salvation, first to last, whole and entire, past, present and future, is of the Lord, to whom be glory for ever; amen.” (Packer)
- We covered two of the five - Total depravity & unconditional election (in reverse order to start with the decree of God)
- Unconditional election
 - Arminianism - God elects or condemns on the basis of foreseen faith or unbelief
 - Calvinism - God, before the foundation of the world, chose whom he would save, completely of his own free will, not based on anything in us or done by us
- We made the biblical case that God is in complete control over everything in his creation, including human behavior.
- And that God is completely sovereign in the matter of our salvation. God softens and hardens hearts as he sees fit.

- Bible passages
 - Ephesians 1 - “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will
 - Romans 9- “though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”
- We also talked about how this is good news, because the Bible also teaches that human beings are completely helpless in the matter of our salvation.
- “Total depravity”
 - Ephesians 2 - “Dead in trespasses & sins”
 - 1 Corinthians 2 - “Natural person does not accept the things of God, they are folly to him”
 - Romans 3 - “No one is righteous, no one seeks for God. no one does good, no not one.”
- “Total Depravity” & “Unconditional election”
- This week we’ll talk about the last three points, which are implications of the first two
- If you take the Reformed view that God saves sinners of his own free will, these three points follow
- The question that will hold all of these points together is this - Does God save sinners, or does he make it possible for sinners to save themselves?
- We’ll also talk about some common objections or stumbling blocks, and leave time for discussion

2. Limited Atonement (Particular Atonement)

- The Arminians said that Christ died for all people. Only those who choose to believe will be saved. God leaves the choice up to the free will of the individual.
- The Reformed position is that the death of Jesus was only intended to cover God’s elect
- In a nut shell, Arminian - death of Jesus covers everyone; Reformed - his death covers the elect
- Arminian position seems obvious to many. This one is perplexing to a lot of people. It almost sounds insulting, like we’re detracting from the death of Christ. “What do you mean that Jesus only died for some.” “*Limited atonement*”?
- But the implications result in some serious problems

- We're looking at things from God's perspective - who was the death of Jesus intended to cover?
 - The death of Jesus isn't a substance that gets spread out over the world, like peanut butter. The death of Jesus is a thing that happened in history.
 - The death of Jesus either satisfies God's wrath toward your sin or it doesn't. God either considers your sin paid for or he doesn't. That's a question about the mind of God. God is the judge. He is a law unto himself. When you ask, "did Jesus die for you," it's another way of asking "does God consider your sin paid for."
 - So the Arminian position is that the God intended for the death of Jesus to pay for everyone's sin, but it doesn't. Some reject it. He wants to consider your sin atoned for, but he can't - because of your unbelief.
 - You can see why this is a big deal. Can the will of God be thwarted by human will? I suggest that if the will of God can be thwarted, then he isn't sovereign, and if he isn't sovereign then he isn't God. Whatever trumps God's will, that thing is in control.
 - It creates a law higher than God. That's a serious problem.
 - Quoted last week. If this doctrine of universal atonement is true, then it means that we have to understand the gracious invitations of Christ "not as expressions of the tender patience of a mighty sovereign, but as the pathetic pleadings of impotent desire; and so the enthroned Lord is suddenly metamorphosed into a weak, futile figure tapping forlornly at the door of the human heart, which He is powerless to open. This is a shameful dishonor to the Christ of the New Testament." (Packer)
 - It's an insult to the person of God, and also to the death of Christ
 - His death didn't infallibly secure the salvation of anyone. His death was intended to cover everyone's sins, but it was not enough. Only when our belief is added to it does it become sufficient to save.
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- Reformed say "God saves sinners, sinners do not save themselves."
 - The death of Christ actually accomplished the salvation of sinners. Not just the possibility.
 - It accomplished exactly what it was intended to. It was perfect, and powerful to save. Not one drop of blood was wasted.
 - If Christ died for all men, then all men would be saved. The fact that all men are not saved means that he did not die for all men.
 - This all follows from what we talked about last week. If God chose a particular people for himself, before the foundation of the world, and chose to save them by the blood of his Son, then those are the people, his chosen ones, who the death of Jesus was always intended for. It wouldn't make any sense to say that God chose a particular people for salvation, but then in some strange sense intended the death of Jesus to cover those who were chosen for judgment.

- Certainly most folks on the non-Reformed side reject the premise that he chose anyone ahead of time for salvation or for judgment, and so they reject this conclusion.
- But there are also some folks who call themselves “4 point Calvinists.” This is the point that those folks usually drop.
- But I think it’s a necessary implication of the one main point.
- If you look to the Bible, there are many verses that describe the death of Jesus as actually accomplishing the salvation of God’s chosen people, not just the possibility for all.
 - Matthew 1:21 - “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he *shall save his people* from their sins.”
 - Hebrews 9:12 - “He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus *securing* an eternal redemption.”
 - Titus 2:14 - Christ “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to *purify for himself a people for his own possession* who are zealous for good works.”
 - 1 Peter 3:18 - “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might *bring us to God*”

- God chose a people for himself before the foundation of the world. He sent his Son to be an atonement for their sin, to secure the salvation of his people and bring them to God.

- Not “limited,” but rather “particular.”
- Your love for your children - is it “limited” because it only applies to your children and not everyone else’s? In a sense, but it is better to call it “particular.”
- Spurgeon quote:
 - We are often told that we limit the atonement of Christ, because we say that Christ has not made satisfaction for all men, or all men would be saved. Now, our reply to this is that, on the other hand, our opponents limit it: we do not. The Arminians say, Christ died for all men. Ask them what they mean by it. Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of all men? They say, 'No, certainly not.' We ask them the next question--Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of any man in particular. They answer 'No.' They are obliged to admit this, if they are consistent. They say 'No' Christ has died that any man may be saved, if--and then follow certain conditions of salvation. Now, who is it that limits the death of Christ? Why, you. You say that Christ did not die so as infallibly to secure the salvation of anybody. We beg your pardon, when you say we limit Christ's death; we say, 'No, my dear sir, it is you that do it.' We say Christ so died that he infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, who through Christ's death not only may be saved, but are saved and cannot by any possibility run the hazard of

being anything but saved. You are welcome to your atonement; you may keep it. We will never renounce ours for the sake of it."

- If Christ's death only secured the possibility of salvation for everyone, but did not actually secure salvation for anyone, then we're toast. Remember from last week, that to the natural person the things of God are folly. We don't understand them and don't accept them.
- If the death of Jesus doesn't fully accomplish the salvation of sinners, then the gospel isn't good news
- Someone once quipped: "For the Calvinist, the atonement is like a narrow bridge which goes all the way across the stream. For the Arminian it is like a great, wide bridge that goes only half way across."
- Objection: What about verses that say that Jesus died for the whole world, or that he desires that all men be saved?
 - John 3:16 - "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son"
 - John 1:29 - "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"
 - 1 John 2:2 - "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

 - 2 Peter 3:9 - "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."
 - 1 Timothy 2:3-6 - "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all"
- Do the hard work - don't shy away from anything in the Bible. Don't apologize for any verses. Don't make the Bible say what we want it to say (both sides think the other is guilty).
- Do these verses mean that Jesus died for every individual person in the world, and that his desire is for every individual to be saved, or do they mean something else?
- The non-Reformed has a problem also. If it means every individual person, then you inevitably end up a universalist.
- John - "takes away the sin of the world." How can you say that Jesus takes away the sins of someone who ultimately ends up condemned? If they are condemned to hell, then Jesus didn't take away their sin. If he did, and they are still condemned, then God is unjust.
- 1 John - "he is the propitiation ...". Same problem

- Unless you're a universalist, everyone ends up agreeing that these verses don't mean that he actually takes away the sins of every individual in the world.
- The non-Reformed has to say, that "He is the propitiation" actually means, "he might be the propitiation", or "takes away the sins of the world" means "he creates the possibility for sins to be taken away."
- So everyone ends up agreeing that we have to dig a little deeper

- Likewise, when it says that "he desires all people to be saved" or that he "does not wish that any should perish," the Arminian has to explain, does that mean that everyone will be saved (universalism) or that he is not powerful enough to save? Both of those should be out of the question. Or possibly that there is some sense in which he desires that everyone to be saved, but there is something else that he desires more?
- On that point we may actually find some agreement, though we'll disagree on what it is that he desires more.
- The non-Reformed will say that God wishes for everyone to be saved, but he values human free will (as they define it) even more. He will not violate human ability to choose.
- I think this is a confused notion of "free will" - grasping for something that does not and cannot exist (autonomy - freedom from the decree of God).
- It's true that there is a sense in which God does not delight in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:32, 31:11). It's possible for us to agree that there is a sense in which he desires all people to be saved.
- He is slow to anger and abounding in love.
- Some in the Reformed world have talked about "two wills" of God. There is some sense in which God can decree that something will happen, that in another sense he disapproves of.
- The classic example is the death of Christ. It was clearly God's will to bring about the death of Jesus. In another sense, there was terrible sin committed by those involved, that God did not approve of.
- I.e. "will of command" and "will of decree."
- We have to be careful here, because there is no conflict in God. His will is never thwarted. It's always a mistake to say that God wants something, but he can't have it.
- Just be aware of that idea.

- Another way of addressing some of these verses is to point out that "world" or "all" is a way of referring to all of humanity generally, with no regard for class, race, status, etc, and not every individual person.
 - God shows no partiality. In him there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free.
 - Remember what a seismic shift was taking place - the people of God are not just Jews, but everyone. Read the NT through that lens.

- The gospel invitation is extended to the whole world, not just a particular nation, class, etc
 - 1 Tim 2:1-7 - Read the whole passage and understand the context.
 - [Pray for kings and people in high positions] “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. 7 For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle [...], a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”
 - He has in mind the inclusion of the Gentiles - “the whole world”, not just Israel.
- Don’t get fooled by proof-texting. Do the hard work.

3. Irresistible Grace (Effectual Grace)

- The “I” stand for “Irresistible Grace.” Some prefer to call it “effectual grace.” I think “effectual” is better
 - This is the same issue, from a different angle. Does God save sinners, or does he create the possibility of salvation, and make an offer that it’s up to the will of the person to either accept or reject?
 - The non-reformed say that grace of salvation is offered to everyone in the same way. Some respond in faith, and others reject it.
 - The reformed position is that God’s grace is effectual, it accomplishes what it sets out to accomplish. In that sense it cannot be resisted. So we call it “irresistible grace.”
 - “Effectual grace” is better. It accomplished what it requires. The word of God is effectual.
 - Isaiah 55:11 - “so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”
- It’s true that there is a call to repent and believe that goes out to the whole world. And it’s absolutely true that some people reject that call.
 - There are two different kinds of calling described in the Bible. The first, you could say is a call or a command, to obey God and believe the gospel, that goes out to the whole world. The whole world is under an obligation, a command, to obey the law of God and to believe on him. Romans 1 says that no one has an excuse. That’s the universal call that many do resist. They know God, but they do not honor him as God.
 - Sometimes called his “will of command”

- There is another kind of call, though, that cannot be resisted. “Will of decree.” What does God actually speak into being.
- The result of that calling is certain. It accomplishes what it requires.

- Romans 8:30 - “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”
 - The outcome is certain. It starts in the decree of God, and ends in our glorification
- Acts 13:48 - “As many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”
 - One thing led inevitably to the other
- John 6:37 - “All that the Father gives me *will come to me*, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

- But don’t think of it as strong-arming or coercing. Packer says “His grace proves irresistible just because it destroys the disposition to resist.”
- Again, remember 1 Corinthians 2 - the natural man does not accept the things of God, they are folly to him.
- God changes the heart and destroys our disposition to resist
- Ezekiel 36:26-27 - “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”
- In Acts 16, “The Lord opened [Lydia’s] heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.”

- When God’s saving grace comes to us, it changes us. The change is from death to life.
- A dead man doesn’t resist being raised back to life. Was Lazarus free to resist when Jesus raised him from the dead?
- His word is powerful and effective. It is a light shining into darkness. Darkness has no power over light.
 - Ephesians says that “at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”
- When you turn on a light, what happens to the darkness? What power does the darkness have to resist the light?
 - John says that when Jesus comes, “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it”
- So, we say that God’s saving grace is irresistible, or effective. But the image that I want you to have is not of someone being dragged against their will. Rather, think of light shining into a dark room, or a dead man being raised to life.

4. Perseverance of the Saints

- Is it possible to lose your salvation? Can someone who is truly saved fall away?
- The Arminian has to say “yes.” If human free will is so sacred that God cannot violate it at the moment when someone either accepts or rejects the gospel, then there is nothing to prevent that person from deciding down the road that they no longer believe.
- The Reformed say “no.” If God saves sinners sovereignly, by his own will, then our perseverance is in his hands, and he promises that he will not let any go.
- This is the same question that we’ve been asking, just applied to a different stage in the process
- We’ve been asking, “Does God save sinners, or does he make it possible for sinners to save themselves?”
- In this point we’re asking, “Does God keep sinners, or does he make it possible for sinners to keep themselves?”

- John 6:37, Jesus says, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me *I will never cast out.*”
 - Notice that the decree of God is the starting point - “All that the Father gives me will come to me”
 - And the outcome is certain - “and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”
- John 10:27-29 - “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”
 - Who are the sheep? The ones who the Father has given to the Son. Again the will of God is the starting point.
 - What is the promise? “I give them *eternal* life. They will *never* perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.”
 - Whose strength is it that gives us confidence that we will make it to the end?
 - Instead of “Perseverance,” many say “preservation of the saints.”

- God saves sinners. And when God saves a sinner, he finishes the job.
- Paul says in Philippians 1, “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”
- This is a continuation of everything that we’ve discussed so far. If God’s decision to save us is based in nothing more than his eternal decree, before the foundation of the world, then that decree doesn’t change after he has saved us.
- He saved us, knowing that we had nothing to offer. There is nothing for him to discover along the way that could make him change his mind.

- It wouldn't make sense to say that he saves us by a gift of free grace, but then leaves it to our own strength to finish the race.
- Galatians 3 - "Having begun by the Spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh?"
- No, it's all a gift, and God is not an Indian giver. He doesn't give the gift of salvation and then later take it back.

- This is such good news. This doctrine is the only possible grounds that we could have for any assurance of salvation.
- Romans 8: "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (8:38-39)
 - Remember the Martin Luther quote that we ended with last week?
 - "I frankly confess that, for myself, even if it could be, I should not want "free-will" to be given me nor anything to be left in my own hands to enable me to endeavor after salvation; not merely because in face of so many dangers, and adversities and assaults of devils, I could not stand my ground ..."

He knew that if our salvation is left to the strength of our own will, then the Romans 8 promise is hollow. The devil is constantly trying to deceive me. How can God promise that nothing will separate us from his love if it's ultimately up to me to hold on?

"But now that God has taken my salvation out of the control of my own will, and put it under the control of His, and *promised to save me*, not according to my working or running, but according to His own grace and mercy, I have the comfortable certainty that He is faithful and will not lie to me, and that He is also great and powerful, so that no devils or opposition can break Him or pluck me from Him. "No one," he says, "shall pluck them out of my hand, because my Father who gave them to me is greater than all."

(Luther, The Bondage of the Will)

- That's what we mean when we talk about "perseverance of the saints."

- The obvious objection - what about people who show every sign of having been regenerated, but then fall away?
- The Bible does address this. The Apostle John also assumes that the truly saved will be preserved to the end. That's ultimately how you know who is truly saved. It's the ones who make it to the end.
- 1 John 2:19 - Speaking of people who had gone out from the church, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us."
- This is not a straightforward, mechanical thing. God is a storyteller. Viewed from within the story, people come to faith, and sometimes they leave the faith. Then sometimes they come back again. You only know at the end.
- But if someone truly leaves then we have to conclude, soberly, with the apostle John, that they were never truly of us. We thought so. They may have thought so. But in the decree of God, they were never truly of us.
- This is a sobering, and for some of us a very personal struggle. We know and love people who seem to have fallen from the faith.
- I can only say that we should pray, and trust our Savior. There are sheep who wander. Trust the good shepherd who leaves the 99 to go after the one. Thank God that he does not leave it up to our will to come back to him, but he goes and gets the lost sheep.
- But it's also true that sometimes God's ways are just not our ways. There are those who seem to be with us but prove that they were not. We weep and pray, but we still trust that God is good.
 - Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
(Habakkuk 3:17-18)

- This is a reminder that this isn't simple or mechanical.
- "Once saved always saved" has some truth, but it's misleading. But this doctrine is not an invitation to coast.

- In this question about perseverance, and also in this whole topic about God's sovereignty in our salvation, we are looking at things from two perspectives. From our perspective and from God's. We're talking about his eternal decree, which is invisible to us except for what he tells us about it, and also how that plays out in the created world.
- We can't be simple minded. The Bible speaks from both perspectives at various times.

- Preservation and perseverance are two sides of the same coin. One is God's perspective, the other is ours.
- Does God keep save us and keep us by an act of his will alone? Or do we have to believe and then be faithful and diligent? Yes. Both.
- We act, and choose, but along the way we remember what Paul said:
 - "It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13)

- This promise that he will never let us go is a promise, and also a call to action.
- How does God preserve his saints? He has ordained certain means of grace, like the hearing of the word and the fellowship of the saints.
- Hebrews 10 - "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. [...] For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised." (Hebrews 10)
- The Bible says that God keeps his saints, and also that it's those who persevere who will make it to the end. Both things are true.
- The way that God's promise to preserve his people works out in the story of our salvation is through our persevering in these means of grace that he has given us together.
- As we run the race, we constantly give God the glory. Because "it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

- One way to think about this is "primary" causes and "secondary" causes. I suspect that Daniel is going to have more to say about this next week, so we won't go into much detail.
- But it matters to this question about salvation. A common objection you'll hear is that the Bible speaks many times about God judging people for their refusal to believe - for their own stubbornness or hardness of heart. And it speaks of him rewarding people for their obedience and faith.
- Make sure you understand what we're saying. People do make a choice to either believe the gospel or reject it. That choice is real. It's not an illusion. But in some sense your choices are a secondary cause.

- This is deep stuff, but it's good to think hard about it.
- Try this one on ... your choices are as real as you are. Your existence depends completely on God. Without God actively speaking you into being from moment to moment, you would vanish out of existence. You don't exist on your own. You only exist because God wills it. Does that make you an illusion? No. It makes you a creature, rather than the creator.

- Likewise, your choices are real, in the same way that you are. But your choices are not independent of God, just as you are not. They can't be. He is God. He is the potter, you are the pot.
- When people demand autonomy - independence / freedom - from God, it's like a child who wants to slap his father in the face, but he can't even reach that high. So his father holds the child up as the child slaps at his face.
 - I believe that God gives people a kind of "free will." We can talk another time about what that means. But if you want a will that is free from the decree of God, "sorry."
- People will also say that Calvinism turns people into robots. Wouldn't you rather have a relationship with someone who chooses to love you?
 - I understand that sentiment, but understand that being subject to God's decree doesn't make you a robot, just a creature.
 - God loves you and brings you into a relationship with him. That's not robotic. He really does love you, and your relationship with him is real. It's not pretend.
 - Your choice to love him is real. But it is subject to the will of God.
- Those are the five points of Calvinism -
 - Man is so corrupted by sin that he is completely unable to take even one step toward God unless God changes his heart and draws him to himself. (Total depravity, total inability)
 - God, before the foundation of the world, chose whom he would save, completely of his own free will, not based on anything in us or done by us. In other words, not conditional upon anything we did. (Unconditional election)
 - The death of Christ accomplished exactly what it was intended to accomplish, no more, no less. In other words, the death of Christ was only intended to cover those whom God has chosen for salvation (Limited/particular atonement)
 - Man's will cannot resist the work of God in salvation. When God changes a person's heart, he changes their desire. His grace is effective - it perfectly accomplishes what it sets out to accomplish (Irresistible grace, effectual grace)
 - Preservation of the Saints (Perseverance of the Saints). The truly elect will be kept and preserved by God to the end of time.
- Really just one point-
 - God saves sinners. Sinners do not save themselves in any sense whatsoever. Salvation, first to last, whole and entire, past, present and future, is of the Lord, to whom be glory for ever; amen.