

Section 1: The Five Points (TULIP)

Salvation by Grace Alone

Many teach that before God will cause a person to be born again, that person must do something *first*. They often refer to this activity as “giving one’s heart to Jesus” or “accepting Christ as Savior.” Such teachers say that this one activity must be performed *first*, and only then will God give the person a new heart.

Those who say this are really denying that salvation is entirely a work of God’s grace. Even though they limit what a person must perform to just one activity, they are still teaching the common and ancient error that a person is saved, at least in part, because of something he does. To say that a person has to do something first—no matter how small that something may be—is to teach that a person is saved partly by an activity that he performs. Such a teaching amounts to a denial that salvation really is by grace alone.

Scripture teaches something radically different. It says that before God gives a person a new heart he or she is spiritually dead.

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; (Eph. 2:1)

One who spiritually is dead is completely unable to repent and believe. So if God is going to save a person, He alone is going to be the one doing all the work. The unbeliever is dead. He is not able to contribute anything whatsoever. Even the act of requesting salvation is something he is completely unable to perform.

God alone performs the work of salvation. He begins this work by *quickening* the person, which means that He raises the person spiritually from the dead. He takes a person who has a dead heart, and gives him a new living heart. He breathes new life into the person, giving him a new spiritual heart that loves God and has the Word of God written in it. Then, after the person has received this new life, he willingly repents of his sins and places his trust in Christ.

In others words, God’s act of quickening a person is first, and the person’s act of repenting and believing is second. This, in short, is what is meant by salvation by grace alone.

***Saved because of our activity:* First we believe, and then God quickens us.**

***Saved by grace alone:* First God quickens us, and then we believe.**

What it means to be spiritually raised from the dead

All men by nature are the same—they are all spiritually dead. And as a corpse lying in a grave, they are unable to raise themselves to life. They cannot ask someone else to raise them, nor can they even desire that someone do this.

But then God comes to certain people, and raises them from the dead by the almighty power of His grace. He takes away their dead spiritual heart, and gives them a new living

heart that loves God and desires to do what pleases Him.

This is the way God Himself describes His work of salvation:

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. (Ezekiel 36:26–27)

God's work of salvation is nothing less than a resurrection from the dead.

Notice how this passage teaches that God's act of resurrecting a person is first, and then the person obeys. It is only after a person has received a new, living heart that he willingly turns away from sin and begins to walk in the way of God's commandments.

At first, these resurrected people do not realize that there is any difference between themselves and the others on this earth. But as they mature, they find within themselves a genuine sorrow for sin, and a burning desire to understand the Word of God, and to do what is pleasing to Him. The more they study God's Word, the more they recognize and understand what has happened to them, and why it is that they are different. They come to see that they were once dead, and that God has raised them from the dead. They marvel at what God has done for them, and they strive to show their thankfulness by a life of obedience.

The distinction between bodily life and spiritual life

This means there are two groups of people that are on this earth—and they are radically different. In one group are those who have only a bodily life, and when that life comes to an end, they never live again. But in the second group (which is a much smaller group) are those who have a twofold life, as shown in **Figure 1.1**.

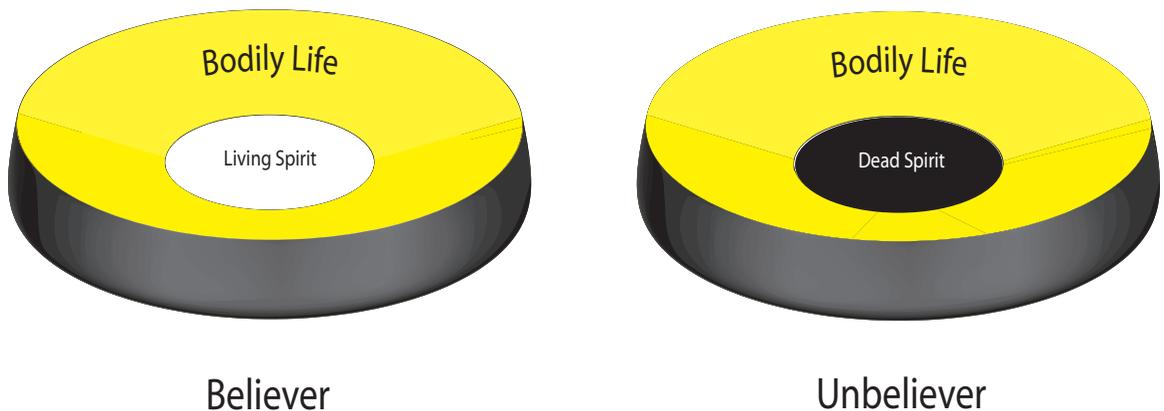


Figure 1.1

Those in the first group have a body that is alive, and they have a spirit that is alive as well. Those in the second group also have a spirit, but their spirit is dead. They think that

because their body is alive, their spirit must be alive as well. But such is not the case.

What it means for one's spiritual heart to be alive

A spiritual heart that is alive is a heart that has within it God's Word. Philosophers of the world like to debate about what life actually is. But the Scriptures tell us the answer. The Word of God within us is our life. That is what Christ Himself has taught us:

the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. (John 6:63b)

Those who have God's Word in their heart are alive, and those who do not have this Word in their heart are spiritually dead.

Once God writes His Word in your heart, you become spiritually alive and believe in Jehovah as your God. This truth was boldly proclaimed by the prophet Jeremiah:

After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:33b)

God's law is actually in the heart of God's resurrected people. And as a result they now delight to do what that law says. Such is the wonder of grace that God graciously performs in the hearts of His people.

God alone determines who receives a new heart

The fact that God's people are spiritually dead before they receive the gift of salvation is proof that they do not do anything to receive it. Their salvation is due solely to the fact that God in eternity chose them to receive this blessing. Before the foundation of the world God chose certain people, in distinction from others. He determined that they, and they alone, would be saved by Christ's death and would receive all the blessings of salvation that are found in Him.

God's decision was not based on anything those persons did or anything that God saw beforehand that they would do. He chose them simply because it pleased Him to do so:

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will (Ephesians 1:4-5)

He chose these people not **because they were** holy, but **in order that they might be** holy. He chose them not because of anything they did, and that God saw that they would do. It was solely "according to the good pleasure of His will" that He chose the people He did.

These people are referred to in Scripture as God's sheep. And it was for these sheep that Christ, the Good Shepherd, laid down his life:

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. (John 10:11)

Christ did everything that was required for His sheep to be saved. His suffering and death was perfectly sufficient. There is no condition whatsoever that the sheep themselves must fulfil.

God's regenerated people consciously experience salvation only in the way of believing in Christ. They have been regenerated, and thus are already saved. But they will **experience** this salvation only when they are consciously and constantly repenting and believing in Christ. This is what Scripture teaches when it says that only those who believe will be saved. Only those consciously believing will consciously experience the blessings of salvation.

This life that believers have is everlasting. It can never be lost. If a believer walks in sin for a time, God will make him feel miserable, to bring him to repentance. But when God gives a person a new heart, He never takes it back.

What a wonderful comfort it is to know the truth about salvation by grace alone!

TULIP: A summary of the truth of salvation by grace alone

This truth is commonly summarized under five headings, that can be easily remembered because the first letters of these headings spell the word TULIP (Figure 1-2). These five truths are central teachings of what has become known as *the Reformed faith*. It is called the *Reformed* faith because these truths were officially confessed by the churches that came out of the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century.

We will now turn to consider each of these five subjects in more detail. In doing so we will take a look at how these truths are repeatedly and clearly taught in Scripture. Furthermore, we will point out how these same truths are beautifully confessed in the Reformed creeds. In this way it will be demonstrated that these truths are not something only recently taught, but something confessed by God's people for centuries.

T otal Depravity	Man by nature is dead in sin, so that he is completely unable to repent, believe, or seek to be saved.
U nconditional Election	God in eternity chose to save certain people. His choice was not determined by anything these people would do.
L imited Atonement	Christ died only for these people. He fully atoned for their sins, so that there is no condition they must fulfill to be saved.
I rresistible Grace	God saves every individual He intends to save. When He gives grace to a person, that person will certainly be saved.
P reservation of the Saints	Those whom God has saved He also preserves forever. He graciously causes them to persevere in a life of obedience.

Figure 1.2

Salvation by Grace Alone

As Taught in the Reformed Confessions

The Heidelberg Catechism

Question & Answer 67

Are both word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to **the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, as the only ground of our salvation?**

*Answer. Yes, indeed: for the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments, that **the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which he offered for us on the cross.***

Note: Many professing Christians teach that a person's salvation is based on his act of believing on Christ. This article says that the sacrifice of Christ is the **only** ground of our salvation. In other words, the reason why some are saved and others are not saved is that Christ died for some and not for others. He died for the ones God had eternally chosen and given to Him to save.

The Belgic Confession

Article 14 — Of the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ

Now those, who are regenerated, have in them a twofold life, the one corporal and temporal, which they have from the first birth, and is common to all men: the other spiritual and heavenly, which is given them in their second birth, which is effected by the word of the gospel, in the communion of the body of Christ; and this life is not common, but is peculiar to God's elect. In like manner God hath given us, for the support of the bodily and earthly life, earthly and common bread, which is subservient thereto, and is common to all men, even as life itself. But for the support of the spiritual and heavenly life, which believers have, he hath sent a living bread, which descended from heaven, namely, Jesus Christ, who nourishes and strengthens the spiritual life of believers, when they eat him, that is to say, when they apply and receive him by faith in the spirit.

Note: To receive a new believing heart is to be regenerated. Those who have been regenerated are said to have a twofold life: the corporal (i.e. bodily) life

that even unbelievers have, and the spiritual, heavenly life that only God's elect people have. Only those who have spiritual life eat the spiritual food that is needed to nourish that spiritual life. That spiritual food is Christ, whom they eat in their souls by faith.

The Canons of Dordt

1st Head, Article 7

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will, chosen, from the whole human race... a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom he from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of Salvation.

This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than the others, but with them involved in one common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by him, and effectually to call and draw them to his communion by his Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of his Son, finally, to glorify them for the demonstration of his mercy, and for the praise of his glorious grace; as it is written: "According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved," Ephesians 1:4,5,6. And elsewhere: "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified," Romans 8:30.

Note: This article states why it is that some people believe while others do not. It is because God in eternity decreed to give them to Christ, who would die for them and bestow upon them faith and all the other blessings of salvation. And seeing as our salvation does not depend on any activity that we perform, it follows that our persevering unto the end does not depend upon us, but only upon the grace of our God, who powerful preserves us in the fellowship of His Son.

1 Salvation by Grace Alone

Ephesians 2:1

1. *What is an unbeliever like before God saves him or her?*
2. *Is this just a figure of speech, or is an unbeliever really dead?*
3. *Did Adam really die on the day he partook of the forbidden fruit?*

Ezekiel 36:26–27

1. *What is the spiritual heart of an unbeliever like before God regenerates him?*
2. *When God raises a person spiritually from the dead, what is it that the person receives that is new?*
3. *Which is first, God's act of giving a person a new spiritual heart, or man's act of repenting and believing?*
4. *How do many people turn this order around?*
5. *How does one with a living spirit manifest that he is spiritually alive?*

John 6:63 & Jeremiah 31:33

1. *What is the “life” that is in the spiritual heart of some people?*
2. *How would you describe the difference between the life a believer has and the life an unbeliever has?*
3. *Christ is referred to in Scripture as the Word of God (John 1:1), and as Life itself (John 11:25; 14:6). How would you put these ideas together?*
4. *Does every human being have the Word of God written in his or her heart?*

John 10:26–28

1. *What does this text say is the reason why some people believe while others do not?*
2. *Are all human beings Christ’s sheep?*
3. *Which is first, being one of Christ’s sheep or believing in Christ?*
4. *How does this text answer the question concerning whether a believer can lose his or her salvation?*