

**The Five Disputed Points of Calvinism:
The “U” in TULIP- Unconditional Election**

Every four years our nation **elects** a new president.

Many people run for this office. Each person campaigns like crazy, telling us why they would be the best person for the job. They make promises. They tell us everything.

They tell us about their wonderful traits, their wonderful families, their extensive life experiences, and their philosophies on government. They tell us how they are going to fix all of our problems, real or perceived.

They tell us how they are going to fix the economy, the health care system, the educational system, the environment, and our tax problems.

They tell us how they plan to fight terrorism and deal with rogue nations. They tell us why they would be the best face for America. By the time they get through telling us these things we can't help but conclude that they have just told us they are Superman!

Faster than a speeding bullet!
More powerful than a locomotive!
Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound!

In short, politicians spend their whole lives telling us why we ought to **elect** them, or **choose** them, to be our next president.

The whole basis for our choosing them is the perceived **goodness** of their character and qualifications. This is what they are trying to sell to us and these are the **conditions** that we place upon them. If we think they do not meet them we do not choose them to be our next president.

We spend our whole lives living in this kind of world. We are either “the determiner” or the one who is being “determined” by such conditions. We are constantly “sizing up” others or being “sized up” by others, based off whether or not of we meet certain conditions.

Recently, as you and the nominating committee already know, I worked on my PIF (resume) to send out to churches. In it I had to tell about all of the supposed wonderful things about me and my ministry. If I didn't do that I would not have gotten a call. I also had to do some “determining” on the other end. I had to look at CIF's (church resumes) and determine which ones did and did not “cut the mustard.”

You, Forest Park Presbyterian Church, had to do the same thing, but from the other side. You became the “determiner” and by God's grace you had to **determine** who did and did not meet the qualifications for being the next pastor of this church. Your decision, in large part, was based

off the “perceived goodness” of the candidate’s character and qualifications. You thought I was a pretty good guy so you called me.

We do this same kind of choosing in our relationships as well. We are always looking for the perfect person to marry, or be friends with. We set certain standards and we must meet certain standards, lest the relationship never materialize, or even worse, crumble.

All of this choosing and electing that we do and have done to us in this world, which is all based upon a person’s ability to do and be good, can be a crushing thing for people.

Someone once shared with me an experience that he had at work. The expectations and demands that had been placed upon him at his job were so great that one day he had to pull his car over on the side of the road because he was hyperventilating. He thought he might be having a heart attack.

Surly this kind of heavy pressure to be “good enough,” to be **elected** and **chosen** robs years off of our lives. It raises the question of where can we get relief from this crushing, humanly imposed condition?

Where Can We Get Relief from the Pressure of Having to be Good Enough?

This brings us to the subject of this morning’s message. The “U” in TULIP- Unconditional Election. The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that God does not deal with his people in the same kind of ways that humans deal with one another when it comes to the most important subject in the whole world- our salvation. God is **so** utterly different than us when it comes to being saved.

Our being saved, our being reconciled, our being restored back into a right relationship with God, our being forgiven of our sins, or receiving the gift of eternal life, has nothing to do with us having to meet certain kinds of preconditions such as being good, fixing all of the world’s problems, or our own problems for that matter.

God is not in the business of “sizing us up” to see if we are fit for salvation. If this were the case then none of us would make it, because none of us “cut the mustard.”

We learned this last week when we studied the doctrine of “total depravity.” We have a sin problem that is far more destructive than most are willing to admit. We are addicted to ourselves and in that addiction we have lost the capacity to choose God in any kind of way that would be pleasing to him.

So what does God do? Well, He gives us His grace. God, out of the mystery of His love and mercy, decides to choose us from “before the very foundation of the world” to be His child and He does so without requiring any preconditions.

That is why this second point of TULIP is called **unconditional** election.

God does not require that we meet any preconditions before God chooses us, not even the precondition of faith.

This is not because faith is unimportant or unnecessary. To the contrary, having faith is hugely important and it is **totally necessary**, but God does not require these things as a precondition because it would be asking too much from us. Remember, we have a sin problem that makes meeting such prerequisites impossible.

So, in short, what I am trying to say to you is that even our faith does not make our salvation real. To the contrary, **our salvation makes our faith real!** Our salvation comes before our faith. For it is only when God chooses to save us that we are given the capacity to believe. When does this happen? It happens when God, out of sheer, unmerited (unearned) love and mysterious mercy, from before the very foundations of the world, chooses us to be His beloved child.

It is unconditional. Thank God it is unconditional!

This is the teaching of the Bible that stood out so strongly to John Calvin.

Listen to the ways God's unconditional election shines forth from the Bible.

Unconditional Election in the Bible

God **called** a man named Abraham and from him chose a people to become a special nation almost 3,000 years ago. From them God would shine the light of his love, justice, mercy and truth in the world. This people would be called Israel and through her God revealed himself to be the one true God of the universe. He gave this special people, His people, the light of His holy law so that we might know God's holiness and the utter depths of our own sin and depravity. How can God save us unless we knew these two things? In this special relationship with this special people God showed the world the extent of His mercy because Israel constantly failed, yet God never gave up on her.

So the question is why did God choose this people, out of all the peoples of the world, to show to the world the light of His love and His desire to save? Was it because Israel was great, mighty, and numerous? Was it because she had such a good resume? Or had her "stuff together"! Was it because she was "good" at "being good"? Is this why? No! God did not require such preconditions from her because they did not exist! To the contrary, Israel was the least worthy and smallest of all peoples. God chose her simply because her because God loved her and was determined to keep the oath that He made to deliver her from the bondage of Egypt. It is a mystery.

Why did God choose Isaac instead of Ishmael for the passing of the promise of Abraham? Isaac did not meet the precondition of being the firstborn.

Why Jacob instead of Esau? Jacob was not the firstborn either, plus he was a deceiver.

Why Joseph and not his eleven older brothers. Joseph was a young punk, a bragger.

Why Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt? He was a hot-head and stutter-er.

Why did God choose little David to be Israel's model king? He was guilty of adultery and committed murder.

Why did God choose the apostle Paul to be the one to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentile world? He was the church's number one persecutor and the chief of all sinners.

What preconditions, I ask you, did God see in this man? None. That is why God knocked him down, blinded him with the light of His grace, and quickened his dead, faithless heart to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and life with God.

Dealing With Our Objections

But there are many people who object to the mystery and mercy of God's ways when it comes to salvation. They claim that if it is this way then God is being unfair when He chooses some, but not others. People don't know what they are saying when they make such a charge.

What they don't understand is that is that being unfair is a **good** thing.

If God were to be fair with us He would elect no one. All people deserve death for their sin. The wages of sin is death. Such a humbling thing, but it is true. We can not get around this without getting around the Bible. If God were always being fair with us there would be no mercy- only death, judgment, and eternal separation from God.

What person would like to stand up in God's courtroom and make a case as to why himself, or any other human being is deserving of salvation? Only a person ignorant of God's holiness.

So this brings us to the apostle Paul and what he had to say in his letter to the Romans to those objectors who had a problem with God choosing some, but not others.

I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and compassion on whom I have compassion.

I am free and well within my rights to harden the hearts of some (They are sinners already anyway. It is not as if I have been unjust.), and soften the hearts of others (They too are sinners, yet I choose to give them mercy).

Your salvation does not depend upon your effort, not even on your faith (that too is a gift), but only on God's mercy. Unless you first get my mercy there will be no saving faith in your life.

And by the way who are you, o' man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it-why did you make me this way? Does not the potter have the freedom and right to shape the clay as he so chooses?

Now if I may stop for a moment and say that the subject of God's unconditional election and predestination of His people probably needs another week devoted to it, but I'm not going to be able to do that. So let me deal quickly with a couple of matters.

Some people, when they encounter this doctrine for the first time are stricken with doubt. This is ironic because the chief purpose of election and predestination is to give you comfort.

The salvation that you have in Jesus Christ is in God's hands, fully and completely, so you can't screw it up.

Jesus is the one who saved you. He is the one who died and rose for you. He is the one who paid the wages for your sin to the Father so that you wouldn't have to pay it with your life in eternal darkness (hell). Jesus is the one who chose you and gave you the capacity to believe. Jesus Christ is the author and perfecter of your faith, not you. The doctrine of predestination is meant to assure you of this. Your salvation is in God's hands where it can't be lost.

If you are in Christ and Christ is in you then you should be able to sleep at night. Yet some, when they first encounter this doctrine can't rest. The questions race through their minds. Have I been chosen? Did God really choose me? What if I am not chosen?

Friend, if these thoughts are running through your mind then consider it evidence that you are chosen. Those who aren't never really consider such questions. It's not even on their radar screen. (Saved from what? I didn't fall out of the boat.) The things of God are non-sense to them. They are blind, and they don't worry about such questions. In fact, they usually make light of such matters with wise-cracks. But my friend, if you are seriously wrestling with such questions then God is at work in you. The Holy Spirit is doing His good work in your life, and is drawing you closer to Jesus.

No Cheap Grace Allowed

The final matter I will briefly deal with as I bring this message to a close is the subject of "cheap grace." It is one of the strongest objections raised to the doctrine of election and predestination, and it is a legitimate objection.

Detractors often say that if a person believes in such a doctrine then it will lead them to conclude something to the effect of "That since my salvation has been predestined and rests entirely in the hands of God then I can do what I want. I can sin freely."

This kind of thinking- unlike doubts about whether or not you have been chosen by God- gives evidence that one may not be saved. This is cheap grace, which is really no grace at all. The Bible forbids it. The Bible condemns it. "What shall we say then? Shall we sin all the more so that grace may abound? No! We died to sin!"

There are far too many Christians who are comfortable in their faith.

Ben Lacy Rose said this in his sermon on unconditional election. “A lot of people are playing at religion, dawdling with it as a child dawdles with food he or she doesn’t want to eat. They worship, they pray, they read their Bibles, they work in the church only when it is convenient-which is not very often. Such half-hearted activity only confirms **indecision** and raises grave **doubts** about their calling and election.”

The apostle Paul told the believers in Philippi to “work out your salvation with fearing and trembling.” Peter said be sure to “make your calling and election sure.” We do this not because we think it will save us, but out of gratitude for God’s grace.

One of the greatest signs that we are genuinely converted to Jesus Christ is an inward desire to grow in our Christian faith, as evidenced by a growing love for God, others, worship, study of the Bible, a commitment to prayer, and an intense hatred of sin in our lives.

There must also be a continual desire for repentance in our lives so that when we do fail (And we will fail. Remember last week’s sermon on total depravity?) it will deeply grieve our spirits, thus leading us back to a life of faith and repentance in Jesus Christ.

My friend, we must make our calling and election sure.

Amen.