

Free Will or Predestination—What Is the Truth?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | November 4, 2021



Do you believe in free will, that your choices matter, that you determine the eternal outcome of your life? Or do you believe in predestination, that you really don't have freedom, that God has predetermined what will happen to you and for you, and that it is God's choices alone that determine your eternal destiny?

This is a long-standing debate, going back centuries, within Christianity, leading to two general theological views:

- Arminianism, which is named after Jacobus Arminius, is the belief in free will—that our salvation is dependent upon our individual choice.
- Calvinism, which is named after John Calvin, is the view that God alone decides who is saved and who is lost.

There are sincere, loving Christians on both sides of this debate, yet these views are mutually exclusive, meaning they both cannot be true. It really is one or the other.

So how can we know which view is true and which one is the misperceived view? By understanding

God's design laws, how reality actually works. As we unpack the core principles of Calvinism, we will discover that one of these two views is an expression of reality, God's design laws, while the other is built on claims, assertions, and proclamations—not testable evidence.

Indeed, one of these views, if true, would destroy love. And that is why it really does make a difference which view we hold, because our beliefs change us—meaning we want to be lovers of the truth, for the truth always leads us to ever-increasing intimacy with Jesus, the source of all truth.

Historic Calvinism has five main pillars, and proponents of that view use the acronym TULIP to remember and teach them:

T—**Total Depravity.** This is the idea that all humans are born corrupt, at enmity with God, possessing a carnal nature that naturally wars against God, and that we can do nothing to change it.

In this view, total depravity means that we are so corrupt, so sinful, so selfish, so darkened, that we have no ability to respond to God and accept His offer of salvation.

There are several problems with this position. First, it fails to recognize that God (Genesis 3)—as soon as Adam and Eve broke trust with Him and corrupted themselves with sin—immediately interceded in the human condition and put enmity between Satan and sinful humans. This means that God intervened to prevent our sinful nature from having absolute sway over our power of choice. God intervened in humanity and placed a desire for something better, a longing for healing, reconciliation, for freedom from fear and selfishness. God intervenes in every heart to convict and woo us by His Spirit, and though we are still tempted by our carnal natures, God's intervention has protected our liberty, our power to choose, so that we do have the ability to choose to surrender to Him for complete healing and salvation.

When we choose God, we open the heart to Him and then receive the indwelling Spirit, which provides the divine power to resist sin and live victoriously. In other words, while we cannot overcome sin by our choice or by our power, we do have the power to choose to trust Jesus, surrender our lives to Him, open the heart and invite Him in, and He heals and transforms us.

Another problem with the theory of total depravity is that it doesn't represent Adam and Eve after sin; it more accurately represents the sinner at the end of time, the eternally lost, who have rejected God's love, have despised truth, have persistently chosen over and over again the lies, fear, and selfishness that sears the conscience, warps the character, and hardens the heart.

Sin persisted in eventually destroys the faculties that are sensitive to the movements of the Spirit of truth and love. When those faculties are fully destroyed, a person then enters into a state of total depravity, a state in which no amount of truth or love has any more impact upon them. But how does a person end up in such a state? By the exercise of their power of choice to reject every entreaty from God, thus hardening their heart beyond healing—just as Pharaoh did. For an exploration of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart demonstrating God's role and Pharaoh's role and how Pharaoh was the one who actually hardened his own heart, see my blog [God Is in Control of What?](#)

U—Unconditional Election. In Calvinism, this means that God *chooses* to give some people

eternal life because He wills it regardless of what that person wants, chooses, or does. God's election is sovereign and overrules any choice on the part of the sinner—and this view is claimed by Calvinists to be an evidence of God's love.

But this is a gross perversity of God's agape love; it is, in reality, a violation of the design laws of love and liberty, teaching that love is authoritarian and domineering, that it forces its way and doesn't grant real freedom. The laws of love and liberty reveal that it is impossible to experience genuine love without freedom. Further, if God were to do this, it would erase the individuality of the sinner, making instead a programmed robot.

L—Limited Atonement. Calvinism teaches that the atonement was made only for the elect, not for all humans, that Jesus' death did not make it possible for all human beings to come to salvation, but only those whom God has chosen to save.

They make this argument for several reasons, but all of them are based in multiple layers of false assumptions. Calvinists believe the lie that God's law functions like human law and, therefore, that Jesus' death was necessary to pay our legal sin debt—rather than the truth that after Adam sinned, humankind was “dead in trespass and sin” (had a terminal sin condition) and that without a remedy would die.

They fail to recognize that when Adam sinned, neither God nor His law changed—and, thus, nothing needed to be done to fix God or His law, but that, in fact, the actual condition of Adam and Eve was changed. The first humans were changed from beings operating upon God's design law of love to beings infected with fear and selfishness (carnal nature) and without eradicating the infection of fear and selfishness and restoring God's design law of love within, all humans would die. “Those who sow to the carnal nature, from that nature reap destruction” (Galatians 6:8). Thus, Jesus came as the second Adam, taking up our nature, being tempted in all points like we are (Hebrews 4:15) yet without sin, thereby “destroying death and bring life and immortality to life” (2 Timothy 1:10).

This distortion of God's law as imperial (God making up rules and then enforcing His law through externally inflicted punishment) leads to a distorted view of the atonement. Calvinists ask questions, “If Christ's death was for all men, then why are all men not saved?” “Couldn't a sovereign God save all men if He wanted to?” Thus, because they misunderstand God's law, they misunderstand God's sovereignty and think that whatever happens, like some people being lost, is because God wants them lost, otherwise, God would choose to use His power to save them. Worse, they claim that God is the one who chooses for them to not only be lost, but to burn in hell.

When we understand God's law as design protocols for life, such conflicts resolve because we understand His sovereignty correctly. God as the Creator built reality to operate upon design protocols, the supreme one being love, and genuine love requires genuine freedom. Robots cannot love. Thus, God sustains and maintains His laws, including liberty, which means that some freely choose to reject the love and life that God offers.

I—Irresistible Grace. This means that whomever God decides to hit with His grace, they are unable to resist it and will be saved. According to this teaching, God's grace *cannot* be resisted. Thus, only those whom God *chooses* are saved. The lost are lost because God didn't choose them and didn't hit them with irresistible grace. This view corrupts the truth of God's character of love by teaching that God, apparently, just doesn't love everyone enough to be bothered to dispense His grace on everyone and, thereby, save everyone. But such behavior, if it were to occur, would be a violation of the law of liberty, and would erase individuality, destroy personhood, create puppets, and make human beings devoid of the image of God.

Who really wants to destroy the image of God in man? This doctrine teaches ideas that if they were true would result in the destruction of individuality, identity, the capacity to think and do, and the ability to love, creating mere robots controlled by the supreme power.

And what kind of god would God be if He actually operated this way? This is exactly Satan's view of God—a being who arbitrarily chooses to do things—such as make up laws and then enforce them by inflicted punishments.

P—Preservation of the Saints. This means that if God has chosen you and has hit you with His irresistible grace, then He will preserve you so that you can never be lost. It is a form of "once saved always saved," but even more corrupt because in the Calvinist view, you don't even have to initially choose to be saved. You are a passive pawn in the hands of a controlling god.

Again, such a view destroys individuality and the ability to love because we have no freedom and are merely puppets directed by the whims of God.

Arminianism advances the principles of free will, that God provides what is necessary for salvation for all human beings but that each person must choose to accept what God offers. This view retains our individuality and is in harmony with the laws of love and liberty; thus, it advances the restoration of the image of God within and retains our ability to love.

Arminianism has widespread support in the Christian church—Methodist, Baptist, and Adventist, and many others have traditionally embraced the teaching that God has granted free will to humanity.

Understanding the real issues in this debate is about God's law, which is a direct manifestation of God's character. Imposed law is the law of dictators. Design law is the law of our Creator. Imposed law takes away freedom and destroys love. Design law is the basis of freedom and the manifestation of love.

I invite you to reject the imposed-law lies and choose life, love, and freedom by embracing the design-law reality of our Creator God of love.