

T.U.L.I.P. in Missions and Church Renewal

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In adapting and reacting to the world, church leaders these days may jump on a church cultural bandwagon that embraces seemingly successful secular models of operation. They can come to think that branding, marketing, corporate strategy, crafting cultural relevancy, and a whole host of other cutting edge activities may even be more important in healthy church growth and being missional (advancing the spread of the gospel) than historic reformed teaching and theology.

When devising a strategic plan for the next five to ten years in your own church, where will you turn? A very good place to start is to peruse the 17 Points of Church Renewal authored by Rev. John Payne and passed by the 2010 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America. It calls us back from an embrace of global corporate culture and instead a return to the Scripture and the historic reformed teaching and the faith once for all handed to the saints.

God's Word is always culturally relevant in all time. And summaries of its teaching contained in our theological heritage going back to the Reformation may well be a great guide and encouragement for your church.

Consider a beautiful flower this spring: the tulip. The Dutch imported this beautiful gem of a bulb from its land of origin, began breeding different varieties and colors and now they can be found all around the world. There was a meeting in the Netherlands; its deliberations and statements are also represented by the tulip: The Five Points of the Synod of Dort, often called the "Five Points of Calvinism" and summarized by the acronym, T.U.L.I.P.

When we consider beginning new plans for evangelism and missions, when we consider church growth, when we consider church health, it is well to remember the first verse of the Bible -- "In the beginning, God." The petals of T.U.L.I.P. encourage us as we are reminded of God's part in the work of the church.

The acronym, T.U.L.I.P. stands for: T for total depravity, U for unconditional election, L for limited or particular atonement, I for irresistible grace and P for preservation or perseverance of the saints.

Total Depravity means that all of a person is corrupted by sin. We cannot discover God unless God changes us and gives us a new heart. We cannot accomplish anything spiritually good. We are dead in our sins and transgressions. **Knowing that everyone comes from the same sinful lump of clay encourages us in our evangelism. When we share the Gospel we do not have to show any pretense or be afraid to expose our own sin and weakness. We have nothing to hide. We all are sinners who need a savior. We boldly proclaim with Paul that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst" (1 Timothy 1:15). Our dignity and value does not come from what we do or accomplish but it comes from the worth that God placed on us and the price that He paid for us.**

Unconditional Election means that God chose individual sinners to be saved not because of anything they had done but because of his pleasure. That you do not have to earn salvation is good news! Because, from the T in TULIP, we know could not earn salvation even if we wanted to. **So when you share the Gospel, you can tell people that you are not trying to sell them anything because God already paid for what you are offering them.**

Limited or Particular Atonement means that Jesus Christ died for the sins of His people. You could say that not one drop of Jesus' blood was wasted. He payed the full punishment of all the past, present and future sins of all of His people that will ever be saved, including you if you believe. The L in TULIP is such an encouragement. **If you were specifically bought and paid for, Jesus is going to come claim you.**

Irresistible Grace means that even though we all shake our fists in rebellion against God from the time we are born, when God gives us new hearts, we will indeed respond to the call to repentance and faith. **For Christians trying to carry out the Great Commission in missions, we simply share the Gospel with everyone, then God will make our words effective in those whom He has chosen. It is not up to us to get people to make a decision for Christ. We don't need to manipulate them emotionally or use our own words of human wisdom and persuasion to bring them to faith.**

Think of the Apostle Paul who came to the Corinthians to share the Gospel "in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling." Most of us feel exactly the same way when we try to talk about Jesus with others, especially if we have never done it before or are out of practice. Paul says further, "And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." (1 Cor. 2:3-5) **We share the simple Gospel as clearly and accurately as we know how, and we leave the result to God. His power is on our side. He is at work and He cannot be stopped.**

Perseverance or Preservation of the Saints means that the Holy Spirit will continue with those people who truly come to faith so that they will persevere in their faith and receive the crown of life. **Our labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).**