

TULIP: The Doctrines held by Calvinists

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Theologians past and present have used a bouquet of initials and analogies to describe Calvinist doctrine.

**...Something Baptists
find increasingly
difficult**

Historically, the Reformed Synod of Dort in the Netherlands delineated the differences between Calvinism and the teachings of James Jacobus Arminius. For the sake of simplicity—and playing on an association with the best-known Dutch flower—those teachings have been summarized through the TULIP acrostic.

- **Total depravity.** Human beings are dead in their sins, and they stand justly condemned before God, unable to do anything to save themselves.
- **Unconditional election.** From eternity, God in his sovereignty chose specific human beings to be saved. That salvation was determined entirely by God, not simply God’s foreknowledge of who would respond to his offer of grace.
- **Limited atonement.** Also known as “particular redemption,” the doctrine teaches the death of Jesus Christ was intended for the remission of the sins of elect human beings only; in other words, the intention of the atonement and its effects are the same.
- **Irresistible grace.** Many Calvinists prefer the term “effectual calling” to express this idea—God’s call to salvation will not fail to bring about the repentance and faith of the elect.

- **Perseverance of the saints.** This doctrine teaches all true believers in Christ will be saved because God grants them faith to persist to the end of life, and God will keep them safe.

Timothy George, founding dean of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School, has proposed an alternative floral acrostic. George, a Reformed theologian, recommended a change in terminology from TULIP to ROSES—radical depravity, overcoming grace, sovereign election, eternal life and singular redemption.

James Leo Garrett, emeritus distinguished professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has noted Dortian Calvinists and early Arminians may not have differed on total depravity. Rather, he said, the key difference may have been whether faith and repentance were gifts from God—as the Calvinists taught—or human duties—as the Arminians insisted.

“That would call for FULIP (for faith) or RULIP (for repentance), not TULIP,” Garret said.

Without benefit of floral reminder, Garrett also has delineated the five points of Hyper-Calvinism:

- **Supralapsarianism.** God's decree to elect some human beings for salvation and to damn others eternally is logically the first of God's eternal decrees.

- **Covenant of redemption.** An eternal covenant exists among God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for the redemption of elect humans through the Son.

- **Eternal justification.** The elect are justified in eternity without their demonstration of requisite faith in history.

- **No offers of grace.** Preachers should be discouraged from offering grace indiscriminately to their hearers, who presumably would include both the elect and the damned.

- **Antinomianism.** Christians are not obligated to obey the moral laws of the Old Testament.