

TULIP | *The Fairest Flower in God's Garden*

By John H. Gerstner

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

When man first sinned he “died” (Gen. 2:17). Now man is spiritually dead—not well, not sick, not even terminally ill, but “dead” in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). His DEPRAVITY, pertaining to all aspects of his personality, is TOTAL. This is not to be confused with utter depravity for there is room for deprovement. Consequently, this slave of sin (John 8:34) exploits every opportunity to sin in every area of his being: in thought, word, and deed, by commission and omission, and even his “good works” are bad (Gen. 6:5). TOTAL DEPRAVITY is our one original contribution to Tulip; we are the dirty soil in which God plants his flower and from our filth produces a thing of divine beauty. (Those who have eyes to see will notice that the Tulip is an infralapsarian plant).

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

If man is as depraved as the Bible says he is, his divine ELECTION to salvation would have to be as UNCONDITIONAL as the Bible says it is (Rom. 9:15). How could totally depraved persons exercise faith in a God they hate or behave virtuously while averse to virtue? If it were a matter of foreseeing, what would God foresee but sin and unbelief unless he elected to rescue some of the deservedly perishing? The *election* to salvation is absolutely unconditional but the *salvation* is not, faith being its prerequisite and good works its postrequisite.

LIMITED ATONEMENT

The ATONEMENT is the means by which God brings totally depraved but unconditionally elect persons to himself without violence to his own inexorable holiness. His mercy constrains him to save and his holiness restrains him from saving unjustly. So God became man in Christ that he could pay the price of sin and remained God (he did not “empty” himself of deity when he became incarnate!) so that the purchase was infinite in value. Thus the Atonement was UNLIMITED in its sufficiency as in its *offer* and LIMITED only in its specific design for those who believe (John 3:16). Those who believe are the elect (Rom. 8:30). “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy” at once explains the unconditional character of election and the limit-
edness of the Atonement.

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

The infinitely precious atonement would be of no value (because totally depraved persons, even though elect, are utterly hostile to God) unless something was done *to* them in grace that corresponded to what was done *for* them in the Atonement. Saving grace need not only be provided but applied by means of union with Christ and regeneration. This divine GRACE is IRRESISTIBLE or efficacious because it mercifully changes the depraved soul. When a person is born again from above by the Spirit, he, as a new creature, finds it as natural (irresistible) to come to Christ as in his depravity he finds it natural (irresistible) to flee from him (John 3:3-8). Grace is irresistible not by being *against* man's will but by recreating his will.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

The purpose of God would fail if the last one of Christ's sheep were not brought and kept within his fold (John 17:20, 21; 2 Pet. 3:9). So the saints must be persevering and this could only be possible or certain by God's preserving. Having put his hand to the plow God never turns back (Phil. 1:6). Because he does not, neither do his saints (Phil. 2:11, 12). The perseverance by the saints is the consequence of the PRESERVATION OF THE SAINTS.

*“Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus,
on whom our faith depends from beginning to end.” Heb. 12:2*