



Full product can be ordered by calling
1-800-333-8300 or by visiting
www.FaithAliveResources.org

show me 

sample

Faith Alive Christian Resources
From CRC Publications

Property of Faith Alive Christian Resources. All rights reserved.



F A I T H
u n f o l d e d

A FRESH LOOK AT
THE REFORMED FAITH

JIM OSTERHOUSE

F A I T H
u n f o l d e d

A FRESH LOOK AT
THE REFORMED FAITH

JIM OSTERHOUSE

CRC Publications
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Cover photo: Janis Christie / ©PhotoDisc

Quotations from *Grace Unknown* by R. C. Sproul, © 1997, used by permission of Baker Book House Company.

Unless otherwise indicated, the Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION, © 1973, 1978, 1984, International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

F.A.I.T.H. Unfolded, © 2000 by CRC Publications, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560. All rights reserved. With the exception of brief excerpts for review purposes, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the publisher. Printed in the United States of America on recycled paper. ⊕

We welcome your comments. Call 1-800-333-8300 or e-mail us at editors@crcpublications.org.

ISBN 1-56212-554-0

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Introduction	5
1 Fallen Humankind	7
2 Adopted by God	11
3 Intentional Atonement	15
4 Transformed by the Holy Spirit	19
5 Held by God	23
6 Another Way of Saying It	27
7 Questions and Answers	33
8 The Great Mystery	41
9 Why Did God Reveal This?	45
10 How Do I Know If I Am Elect?	51
For Further Reading	53

Introduction

Sooner or later, people who investigate the Christian faith encounter what may seem to be “deeper” or “more difficult” teachings of the Bible. These teachings are sometimes referred to as “the five points of Calvinism,” but that is really a misnomer. John Calvin did not invent these teachings. They are clearly found on the pages of Holy Scripture. Additionally, Calvin’s teaching was not limited to just five points of doctrine; rather, his writings encompassed all of Christian truth.

A better name for these teachings is “the doctrines of grace,” for they systematically explain the true meaning of grace, that is, what the Bible really teaches about sin and salvation. We will learn about these “doctrines of grace” using a simple memory tool, the acronym F.A.I.T.H.

A Note to Study Group Leaders

For years I have used this material in new member classes, in teaching, and with individuals. Seekers who asked about these biblical teachings were helped. Even those who had been Christians for many years have benefited from a review of the truths explained here. (The pamphlet *F.A.I.T.H. Unfolded* is an excellent abbreviated version of this material. Copies are available from CRC Publications, 1-800-333-8300.)

Here are some other suggested uses:

- Give a copy to someone who shows interest, and follow up with conversation.
- Keep a supply on hand to give to inquirers.
- Give the *F.A.I.T.H. Unfolded* pamphlet to a seeker and then follow up with the book.
- Keep a copy in your church library for reference when someone asks about the ideas explained in this book.

If you are leading a class, the material in this book can be divided into two sessions (chapters 1-6 and 7-10) or three sessions (chapters 1-5; 6-8; 9-10). Or you may choose a slower pace of one or two chapters per session.

Start by giving an overview of the material the first week that you meet. Distribute the books to group members and ask them to read the chapters you will cover in your second session. Ask them to read the discussion questions (included with each chapter) too. Group members may want to write down ideas the discussion questions bring to mind or questions of their own in the margins of their books. As much as possible, encourage group members to ask questions, to express their doubts, and to seek the reassurance that comes from a healthy, Spirit-directed discussion.

As you plan each session, allow plenty of time for group discussion. Participation is key to the success of your group. Don't be afraid of silence, and don't pressure people to speak if they are uncomfortable doing so. Asking discussion questions of your own will help to draw out the thoughts of your group members too.

As you bring the study to a close using chapter 10, be aware that some individuals in your group may have no assurance that they are among the elect of God. This may be quite troubling to them. Be sensitive to their situation and openly invite any group members who are unsure of their salvation to speak with you privately after the session. Prepare yourself beforehand for these conversations by engaging in sincere prayer and gathering relevant Scripture passages to share.

God is pleased when the basics of the Christian faith are unfolded to people who have never heard. May he bless your efforts today.

—*Jim Osterhouse*
Lombard, Illinois

Chapter

Another Way of Saying It

We have learned the doctrines of grace using the acronym F.A.I.T.H.:

- **Fallen Humankind.** People, by nature, are dead in sin and therefore completely unable to save themselves from sin and its consequences.
- **Adopted by God.** In love, God has chosen some people to be members of his family.
- **Intentional Atonement.** Jesus died to save his people from their sins.
- **Transformed by the Holy Spirit.** The Spirit regenerates those who are chosen by God, giving them faith in Jesus.
- **Held by God.** Believers are held safe in God's hands for all eternity.

For centuries a different acronym—T.U.L.I.P.—has been used to teach these truths. I have introduced the F.A.I.T.H. acronym because T.U.L.I.P. is often misunderstood. A learning aid that no longer clarifies is best updated.

Nevertheless, since T.U.L.I.P. is so well-known, we should become acquainted with this “other way of saying it.”

Total Depravity

“T” is for Total Depravity

“U” is for Unconditional Election

“L” is for Limited Atonement

“I” is for Irresistible Grace

“P” is for Perseverance of the Saints

“T” stands for “total depravity,” a phrase that describes the condition of fallen humankind. It speaks of humanity’s sin. But when they hear the phrase “total depravity,” some people mistakenly think the Bible teaches that people are as bad as they possibly can be—utterly depraved. That is not correct. Instead it means that people are so completely affected by their sinful nature that they are totally unable to contribute anything to their own salvation.

Unconditional Election

“T” is for Total Depravity

“U” is for Unconditional Election

“L” is for Limited Atonement

“I” is for Irresistible Grace

“P” is for Perseverance of the Saints

“U” stands for “unconditional election,” which means that God chose certain people before the world was created to be adopted into his family. Unconditional election does not mean that no conditions needed to be met for persons to be chosen by God. Certainly Jesus had to meet all the conditions of the law. He had to fulfil all righteousness in order to bring believers into the presence of the holy God.

The phrase “unconditional election” distinguishes this doctrine from the teaching that election is a *conditional* act by God, that if people meet certain conditions, God will choose them.

What does it mean to meet conditions? Some years back I traded my old Ford LTD for a newer Oldsmobile. I placed some conditions on the sale because I wanted to make sure that the Olds could pull my trailer. I said to the salesman, “I will buy that car *if* you take the heavy-duty hitch off my LTD and

put it on the Olds, *if* you take the extra radiator cooler from the Ford and put it on the Olds, *if* you do this and *if* you do that.” If he met those conditions, then I would purchase the car. That is the sense of conditional election. It would be as if God were to tell us, “You have to meet certain conditions before I will choose you to be one of my children.”

We understand God’s election to be unconditional. God did not say: “I will let you be one of my children *if* you are a very good person, or *if* you are attractive, or *if* you earn a minimum of \$40,000 per year, or *if* you have faith.” And that’s a good thing because there is no person on earth who could meet God’s conditions.

Where did the idea of conditional election come from? It comes from a misunderstanding of Romans 8:29-30:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Those who favor conditional election understand God’s foreknowledge to mean that God knows who would have faith throughout history, and then chooses them because of their faith. These people met the condition of having faith. However, the word “know” in the Bible is often used in the sense of knowing intimately—that is, loving. Genesis 4 tells us that Adam *knew* his wife Eve, and she became pregnant. He loved her in an intimate sense. Similarly, those whom God *foreloved* he predestined. Our election comes simply from God’s love and mercy, not by way of our meeting the condition of faith.

Now, if we are not really ashamed of the Gospel, we must of necessity acknowledge . . . that God by His eternal goodwill (for which there was no other cause than His own purpose), appointed those whom he pleased unto salvation, rejecting all the rest; and that those whom He blessed with this free adoption to be His sons He illumines by His Holy Spirit, that they may receive the life which is offered to them in Christ; while others, continuing of their own will in unbelief, are left destitute of the light of faith, in total darkness.

—John Calvin, “A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God,”
trans. Henry Cole in *Calvin’s Calvinism*, p. 31, © 1987,
a reprint by Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Limited Atonement

“T” is for Total Depravity

“U” is for Unconditional Election

“L” is for Limited Atonement

“I” is for Irresistible Grace

“P” is for Perseverance of the Saints

“L” stands for “limited atonement.” Here, again, the phrase may fail to communicate accurately the teaching of Scripture. Some people understand “limited atonement” to mean that the sacrifice of Jesus is limited in its power, that it is not sufficient to cover the sins of the whole world. In truth, the blood shed by Jesus on the cross *is* sufficient to cover the sins of the world. The Bible plainly teaches that anyone who believes in Jesus will be saved. His sacrifice accomplished its purpose. The limitation of the atonement is in its application. It is limited to those who are chosen by God. Thus, some people prefer the term “particular atonement” or “purposeful atonement.” The atonement is big enough, is sufficient to cover the sins of the world, but it is applied only to those who are born of the Spirit. In other words, it is *sufficient* to cover the sin of all, but *efficient* (effective) only for the elect. It is an intentional atonement.

Irresistible Grace

“T” is for Total Depravity

“U” is for Unconditional Election

“L” is for Limited Atonement

“I” is for Irresistible Grace

“P” is for Perseverance of the Saints

“I” stands for “irresistible grace.” Does God drag people into heaven against their will? Some people characterize irresistible grace in this way. The truth is that God does not work against our will, rather God loves us and draws us to himself. The Holy Spirit regenerates us so that we desire God and God’s will.

Many people have experienced this truth in their lives. They fought God, but God kept after them until they finally said yes. One of the prime examples of this work of the Spirit is British author and professor C. S. Lewis. He kept holding God off, until finally one night he could resist no longer. In his book *Surprised by Joy* Lewis writes that he “knelt and prayed: perhaps that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.” It was not a big, emotional thing; it was simply irresistible. Lewis later used a phrase from the poet

T. S. Eliot describing God as the “hound of heaven.” God going after his people is like a hound on the trail of a fox. God kept pursuing Lewis until he caught him. Lewis said, “I was never so happy as to be caught.”

R. C. Sproul writes, “Regeneration is a supernatural work . . . of recreation by which the dead are raised and brought to . . . a living faith, through which they are saved and adopted into the family of God” (*Grace Unknown*, p. 196).

Perseverance of the Saints

“T” is for Total Depravity

“U” is for Unconditional Election

“L” is for Limited Atonement

“I” is for Irresistible Grace

“P” is for Perseverance of the Saints

“P” stands for “perseverance of the saints.” Perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of the *preservation* of God. Believers persevere in their faith because God preserves his own people. We are held by God, and therefore are assured of our salvation.

Questions

1. Share an acronym, poem, saying, or proverb that helps you remember something. (For example, “Lefty loosy/righty tighty” helps some people remember which way to turn a bottle cap.)
2. Two acronyms (F.A.I.T.H. and T.U.L.I.P.) have been introduced as tools to help you remember the doctrines of grace. Which do you find most helpful? Why?
3. Someone once said of these teachings: “These doctrines are not hard to understand; but they are difficult to accept.” Do you agree? Why or why not?