

How to Teach the Doctrines of Grace  
A study guide for teachers

by

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Based on:

The Bible (ESV)

The Westminster Confession

[Unlocking Grace](#) by Roger Smalling

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## [How to use this teacher's guide](#)

This manual is arranged to make teaching the doctrines of grace as easy on the teacher as possible. It allows a Sunday School teacher or home group leader to introduce these concepts without extensive theological training or even much preparation time.

This guide is a translation from a Spanish text that follows an acrostic, *Si, Jesús*. It could be arranged according to the famous *tulip* acrostic in English but that would require extensive rewriting. This arrangement allows for chapters on a couple of key points, namely *sovereignty of God* and *justification* that fit poorly into the *tulip* acrostic.

It also follows the textbook, **UNLOCKING GRACE**, available in electronic form from [Smalling's web site](#).

The texts in red are for the teacher only. They include illustrations, suggestions on how to teach a particular point and answers to questions. The student's manual, to be given out at the beginning of the course, is nothing more than the teacher's manual with the answers and suggestions to the teacher removed.

Underlined texts in red are blank lines in the student's manual. This is where students fill in the blanks. Where there are a series of these, the teacher may assign them as a group exercise if he wishes. In places where bullet points exist, the students are expected to take notes as the teacher explains them.

In a more academic setting, the teacher is free to distribute supplemental handouts as reading assignments from Smalling's essays such as **EFFECTUAL CALL, THE PROBLEM OF EVA, SANCTIFICATION** or others.

## Lesson One: Sovereignty of God

### **Purpose**

Define the sovereignty of God, prove it biblically and show why it is the foundation for a strong Christian faith.

### **What does *sovereign* mean?**

This word means *total control*. As regards God, the Scriptures teach that all of reality is a product of divine decrees made before the creation of the world.

The entire reformed system of soteriology is based on the concept that God is sovereign in salvation. It is essential the teacher take time with this concept because many Christians assume *sovereignty* simply means God is great and can do a lot of things. If students fail to grasp the absolute nature of sovereignty, they may reject the sovereignty of grace later and therefore reject election and preservation.

### **Why do we say that the sovereignty of God is the foundation for Christian faith?**

- Only a sovereign God can guarantee his promises.

Explain that even our salvation must be put in doubt if something exists outside of his control. Even if a single atom of the universe were outside God's control, hypothetically speaking, this one atom could result in causing God to fail in his promise of salvation.

- The sovereignty of God is the only grounds for giving him glory.

If it is not God who accomplishes the work of salvation in us, then he does not deserve all the glory either. If we save ourselves in part, then we deserve a corresponding part of the glory.

- It is the only grounds for prayer. Why pray to a God who is not sovereign?

Is it possible that *sovereignty* may have a limit? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_x\_\_\_\_\_

The teacher must be aware that the students may suppose that *sovereign* simply means that God is great and can do a lot of things but is limited in his dealings with man. It is essential that the teacher clarify that *sovereign* includes everything.

- The term *sovereignty* is an absolute, like *infinity* or *eternity*. We cannot go to the store and ask for a six foot role of infinity. Nor can we say, "I'll meet you at the restaurant at half past eternity." Any attempt to limit these, destroys their

meaning. So with sovereignty. A partial sovereignty is a contradiction in terms. Either God is 100 percent sovereign or he is not sovereign at all by definition.

- The reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of God is not a mere tradition. We emphasize it because the Bible does.

### **The apostle's prayer: Acts 4:23-32**

I have found this text to be the easiest and most convincing way to introduce the sovereignty of God. It contains most of the key evidences and cuts short philosophical objections because the students are confronting the biblical text.

#### **First evidence**

What is the name the apostles called God in this prayer? Sovereign Lord

According to Jude 4, what is the a good way to detect false teachers who profess to be Christians? What is it they deny? They deny that God is sovereign.

If the teacher desires, he may go into the Greek term for *sovereign* here which is DESPOTES. This means one with absolute authority, from which we derive the word *despot*, although in the first century, this term lacked the negative connotation it does today. DESPOTES occurs 10 times in the New Testament, five referring to God and five to human masters.

The corresponding Old Testament Hebrew term is ADONAI, which means *owner* or *master* and occurs about 290 times. Thus, the term Sovereign Lord, though translated variously, occurs about 300 times in the Bible. If God's *name* is Sovereign, then we may assume that his *person* is sovereign.

Therefore, the first evidence for the sovereignty of God is that the term *sovereign* is part of *his name*.

#### **Second evidence**

In Acts 4:24, the apostles implied that God is sovereign. What was the reason? Because God created everything

- What does God own according to Job 41:11? Everything under heaven.
- Of what is God the owner according to Psalm 24:1? The world
- What does God own according to Ezekiel 18:4? All souls

Therefore the second evidence for the sovereignty of God is that *God created and owns everything*.

### Third evidence

Note to teacher: This point is a bit abstract and difficult but essential. Here the teacher must get across the idea of *immutable decrees*; God's decrees made in eternity cannot be changed. This is different from commandments like the Ten Commandments. Show that he allows his commands to be broken but does not allow his decrees to be thwarted. The textbook has a couple of good graphics to illustrate this. You may mention that Arminian theology errs here by putting our salvation in the wrong circle. Our salvation is based on an eternal decree, not on our ability to keep God's commands.

In Acts 4:27-28, what made it possible that the enemies of Jesus do what they did? For the answer, compare this text with Psalm 33:11 and Proverbs 19:21. God so decreed it.

According to Hebrews 6:17, God wanted to show the heirs of his promise the immutability of his decree.

*Immutable* means "unchangeable." Scripture expresses God's unchangeable nature in other ways than the word *immutable*. Examples are: James 1:17; Malachi 3:6; Numbers 23:19;

You may explain here that the term *immutable* is often expressed by the word *counsel*, as in Ephesians 1:11 (Greek- **boucle**). The same Greek word is used in Acts 4:28 and is translated *plan*.

*My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose, Is 46:10*

How does the concept of immutable decrees prove the sovereignty of God? If his decrees are unchangeable, this means nothing exists that could change them. Therefore God's will is sovereign.

Other texts on immutable decrees the teacher may use are: Is 14:27; Mt 10:29-30; Lu 22:22

Therefore, the third evidence for the sovereignty of God is that God's decrees are unchangeable; immutable.

### Fourth evidence

What did the apostles ask God to do? Miracles

Therefore, the fourth evidence for the sovereignty of God is that he has the power to do miracles.

Note: This ends the evidences gleaned from the apostle's prayer.

### **Fifth evidence: Incommunicable attributes**

Explain that *incommunicable* means attributes that cannot be communicated to a finite being.

Some Christians think of God as a big human. This error is called *anthropomorphism*. Some feel God is like a benign heavenly grandfather who wants everybody to have a good time and would never harm anyone. Unless the teacher succeeds in annihilating such notions in students, they will experience difficulty in grasping certain doctrines like election or even justification. Understanding the three principle incommunicable attributes of God helps erase humanistic concepts from the mind.

What is the attribute of God described in Revelation 1:8? Omnipotence; almighty

What attribute of God is described in 1John 3:20? Omniscience; knows all

What attribute of God is described in Psalm 139:8? Omnipresence; present everywhere

Explain that if anything were to happen outside of God's control, it could only be because of a lack of one of these attributes. If anything took place outside of his will, it would be either that he is not almighty and therefore incapable of stopping it, or he did not know about it or was absent at the time. In any of these cases, he would not be the God of the Bible. Even if God's sovereignty were not expressly declared in Scripture, we would could deduce it just from the incommunicable attributes alone.

Are these attributes implied in the apostle's prayer? If so, in what ways? The teacher can skip this one if he wishes, or assign it as a group exercise. This may stimulate thought and discussion especially for students new to these concepts.

Therefore, the fifth evidence for the sovereignty of God is the incommunicable attributes.

### **The problem of evil: Acts 4:27-28**

If God is sovereign, why does he permit evil? This text shows the righteousness of God in permitting evil and offers to Christians an answer that can be used to defend their faith relative to this specific issue.

You might want to explain here that some have taught that God does the good things and the devil does all the bad things. Such simplistic theology is false and should not be taught even to children, since it implies that God is not sovereign over the devil. If that were the case, then God would not be sovereign at all and we would have no security in Christ.

According to Acts 4:27-28, what determined that Pontius Pilate, the gentiles and the people of Israel were going to do? God's predestined decree

Did God force those people to do anything they did not want to do? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No  
\_\_\_\_\_x\_\_\_\_\_

Did God force these people to do anything they did not want to do? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No  
\_\_\_\_\_x\_\_\_\_\_

Did the enemies of Jesus act according to their own desires? Yes \_\_\_x\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Did the actions of those wicked people result in any good? If the answer is yes, what was that result? Our salvation through the sacrifice of Christ.

Was the good that resulted greater than the evil done? Yes \_\_\_x\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Based on the previous questions, what can we conclude about the way God uses evil?  
Evil is a tool in God's arsenal to allow him to accomplish his holy purposes.

The meaning of *your hand and your plan* in verse 28: Optional

The term *plan* in Greek is ***boulé*** and means “purpose” or “intention.” It is used as “purpose” in Ephesians 1:11. With what doctrine is it associated in that text?  
Predestination

Therefore, the term, *your hand and your plan* means God exercised his power to guarantee that his irresistible will come to pass, using the intentions and motivations of wicked men to do it.

The objection that God is not good if he permits evil can be refuted in this way: The objection assumes that good cannot come out of evil. The cross refutes that. Even events in ordinary life refutes it. We have all experienced circumstance in which some good results from a bad event.

The teacher may assign additional reading on this subject such as Smalling's [Sovereignty and Suffering](#) and [How Could a Good God Permit Evil?](#) This latter contains philosophical arguments to use if the students are interested, although I prefer to stick to Scripture in a class setting.

### **What is providence?**

Providence refers to the outworking of God's government and control over all creation. Although the term *sovereign* covers the *fact* of total control, the word *providence* emphasizes the *means* by which he controls.

God normally expresses his sovereign control *indirectly*. He works through circumstances and people to accomplish his decrees. This is sometimes called *the doctrine of means*, that is, he uses means to the end rather than acting directly.



When he acts directly, without means, we call these *creative miracles*. These are rare, such as the resurrection of Jesus, certain miracles of healing or Jesus turning water into wine.

You may use these examples of God using means to the end:

- God opened the Red Sea by a strong east wind that blew all night.
- God used Esther to save the Jew from extinction.
- He used Joshua to conquer the promised land.

**Note:** It may be necessary to clarify that the concept of God as simply “permitting” evil is inadequate. It implies God is passive in some things and not in others. This is unscriptural. God is active in everything. His action in the use of evil is by a limiting of its extent. Evil people go only so far. God controls the circumstances around it. Examples you may use of this are: Unbelief of Jews ordained by God. Ro 11:11; The King of Assyria: Is 10: 5-15; Betrayal of Joseph: Ge 45:5,8; 50:20; Absalom’s incest: 2Sa. 12:12,Cf 2Sa.16:21-22. You may refer to WCF Chapter Five, Article IV that has a good explanation to refute the idea of a mere “permission.”

**From this lesson we learn...**

- *Sovereign* is an absolute term meaning *total control*.
- God is sovereign because the term *sovereign* is part of certain of his names.
- God is sovereign because he is creator, owner and sustainer of all creation.
- God is sovereign because his decrees are unchangeable.
- God is sovereign because he is able to do miracles.
- God is sovereign because his three incommunicable attributes allow for nothing less.
- God allows evil in order to produce a greater good. He uses even wicked people to accomplish benevolent purposes.
- The apostles understood this principle and expressed it in their prayers.
- *Providence* refers to God’s government over all things. God is active in everything and passive in nothing.

**Homework reading**

Chapters One and Two in **UNLOCKING GRACE**; Chapters Three and Five of **WCF**; Romans 3 in the New Testament. (Note: The reading assignment is a bit heavy for this

first lesson only because the student needs to be prepared for the next lesson as well as review Lesson One.)

## Lesson Two: Total inability

### **Purpose**

Define *grace* more clearly by showing that man is incapable of contributing anything to his salvation, whether by word, will or works.

### **Importance**

Our view of saving grace will affect our self-concept, prayer life, ability to trust God's promises of God, the way we evangelize and everything else involved in our theology and walk with God.

In Christianity two concepts about grace are in conflict. Everyone grants that the word *grace* means *unmerited favor*. The conflict revolves around the idea of how that favor is obtained.

One viewpoint claims that saving grace is the result of a cooperative work between God and man. The other asserts that saving grace is a sovereign work of God, independent of any foreseen quality or merit that a person may have.

Only one of these viewpoints can be correct. The answer has to do with the question of whether a sinner is able to cooperate with God on his own initiative, without grace.

### **First evidence: The moral condition of fallen man: Romans 3:9-20**

Answer the following questions about those who are not justified by faith in Christ.

- How many righteous exist? None
- How many understand? None
- How many seek after God? None
- How many do good? None
- How many fear God? None

**Discussion:** We have all met unbelievers who do good works. Some unbelievers say they have been seeking after God. How do we reconcile this with Romans 3?

The teacher may refer here to the WCF Chapter 6, Article 7, and show students that although the unregenerate are capable of doing works that are good in and of themselves, God does not count them as good since they proceed from a sinful nature. Such good works of unsaved people are generated out of the same platform of autonomy from God as are the bad ones and therefore are tainted with the sin of Adam, which was a declaration of autonomy.

You may point out from Romans 10:3 that those who claim they are seeking after God are, in fact, seeking to establish their own righteousness. They want the satisfaction God gives but on their own terms.

I have found it intriguing in my experience with some who say they are seeking God, how much they argue when I tell them how to find him. If unbelievers were truly seeking God or interested in pleasing him, they would obey the first command that God gives, which is to repent and trust in his son.

Nevertheless, we must be aware that some people may be in the process of being drawn to God by his Spirit, as stated in John 6:44. Those will respond quickly to the gospel.

Therefore, the first evidence for the inability of man is his moral condition as described in [Romans Chapter Three](#).

### **Second evidence: Original sin, Romans 5**

C.S. Lewis, the great Christian apologist, said that the doctrine of original sin is the second most unpopular one after the doctrine of hell. It does not seem fair. In fact, it is fair if we had a representative to start with, Adam, who was better than we, having been created innocent.

In Romans 5:12-20, we find four things humanity inherits from the fall of Adam. What are these and in which verses are they found? **The teacher may divide the students into small groups to study this out if he wishes.**

- Sin V.12
- Death V.12
- Judgment V.16
- Condemnation V.18

### **The representative principle**

Read Romans 5:17. Does this appear just? **Explain that Adam was the federal head of the human race and its representative. We were part of Adam like cells in his body. If we object to this, then it would be equally logical to object to Christ as our *second Adam*, which is to say our representative. We were not personally present when Adam fell, nor were we personally present at Calvary when Christ obtained salvation for us.**

Grace is not *fair*. It is *holy*. Grace is so far superior to mere fairness that the term *fair* does not deserve to be mentioned in the same sentence with *grace*.

In Romans 5:15, what is meant by the phrase, *the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many*.

The value of grace is greater than the guilt of our sins. We gain more than Adam had before the fall.

Adam was innocent before the fall. What do believers in Christ inherit, according to verse 19? How does this relate to 2Corinthians 5:21? *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

You may explain here the difference between innocence and righteousness. The one is passive, a state of not sinning. The other is active, including positive conduct. Believers do not receive the innocence of Adam. They receive the righteousness of Christ.

Therefore, the second evidence for the inability of man is [the fall of Adam \(original sin\)](#) and the corruption we inherit.

### **Third evidence: How a person is drawn to Christ, John 6:44, 65**

- What does Jesus say about the innate ability of man to come to him? [No one can come to him unless they are drawn by the Father.](#)
- What is the result when a person is drawn to Christ? [He is resurrected in the last day, that is, saved.](#)
- In verse 65, what is the origin of saving faith? [It is a gift of God the Father.](#)

Therefore, the third evidence for the inability of man is that sinners cannot put their faith in Christ without [a special drawing of the Father.](#)

### **Fourth evidence: The condition of the unregenerate mind**

Assign this as a group exercise if you wish.

- Rom 8:7 [Hostile against God and cannot submit to his law.](#)
- 1Cor 2:14 [They cannot perceive the things of God.](#)
- 2Cor 4:4 [Blinded by Satan](#)
- Eph 4:18 [Darkened understanding.](#)
- 2Tim 2:25 [Captive by Satan and unable to repent.](#) [Note: The teacher may mention here that even the ability to repent is granted by God as a work of grace.]

Therefore, the fourth evidence for the inability of man is that the mind of sinners is blinded by [Satan](#), is hostile to God and unable to repent without special divine assistance.

**From this lesson we learn...**

- Because of the fall of Adam, we inherit a sinful nature incapable of commending itself to God.
- Romans Chapter Three is a good description of the more inability of man.
- Jesus taught that a person cannot come to Christ without a special drawing of the Father.
- Numerous Bible texts show that the mind of sinners is enslaved by Satan and sin to the point that he cannot free himself without God's intervention.

### **True and false quiz**

Put T for True or F for False.

1. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ Saving grace is granted when a sinner does enough good works to show his sincerity.
2. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ The word *grace* means "unmerited favor."
3. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ Saving grace is the result of a cooperative effort between God and man.
4. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ Jesus taught that God the Father waits patiently until the elect decide to come to Christ by their own wills.
5. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ Repentance is a gift of the grace of God.

### **Homework reading**

Chapter Three in **UNLOCKING GRACE**; Chapters Eleven and Fourteen in the **WFC**;  
Romans 5 in the New Testament

## Lesson Three: Justification by faith

### **Purpose**

Show that justification by faith alone in Christ alone is the gospel and nothing else is.

### **Definition**

**Justification:** The legal declaration from God that a person is righteous relative to the divine law. The basis of that declaration is the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to the person by faith alone.

- It is a legal declaration from God.
- It is according to God's moral law.
- Its basis is the perfect righteousness of Christ.
- This righteousness is imputed to the believer as his own.
- The means is by faith alone.

Does the term *justification* mean “made righteous” or “declared righteous?” See Luke 7:29; 16:15; 1Timothy 3:16 **Note: The teacher may assign this as a group exercise.**

*Justification* means declared righteous.

*Justification* does not mean be made righteous.

### **The importance of defining correctly the gospel: Galatians 1:6-9**

Explain that Paul was tolerant and gentle about many matters, especially secondary questions of conscience as in Romans 14; food, religious festivities, etc. But what it came to altering the definition of the gospel, he was a roaring lion and absolutely intolerant. Paul's anger show through clearly in this text.

Read the Galatians text here. Point out that Paul uses the word *gospel* and from then on, talks about justification. Therefore, justification is the gospel. The words “salvation” and “gospel” are synonyms in Paul's mind.

The teacher is free to exegete the text as he wishes. My own follows below.

Verse 6 — *so quickly deserting* A strong human disposition exists to deviate from the message of the gospel. The problem is rooted in a desire to add something to it. In the case of the Galatians, it was legalism. In others, it may be our own perseverance in doing good works.

Verse 7 — Only one gospel. Anything other than what Paul teaches is a different gospel. Paul uses sharp terms against this.

Verses 8,9 — *accursed* The Greek word is ***anathema***. It assumes those who preach another gospel do not belong to God.

Here you may take advantage of the opportunity to deal with the error of catholic-protestant ecumenism. Explain that that a profession of faith in Christ is not a sufficient grounds for fellowship with other groups. Along with that must come a profession of and teaching of the gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ alone as proclaimed by Paul. That gospel is repudiated by Rome. The judiazers were also professing Christians, yet Paul did not consider them such. Paul applies the term *anathema* to anyone who teaches a different gospel, regardless of their outward profession.

### **The problem to resolve**

Read Romans 1:16-20, 2:5,8; 4:15

According to these verses, from what is the gospel designed to save us? The wrath of God. Jesus came to save us from God!

Here you may take some minutes to mention that the biblical teaching on the wrath of God seems lost in evangelical circles today, giving place to false gospels such as the prosperity gospel or self-esteem teaching. Jesus came to save us from God's holy justice, not from our poverty of lack of self-esteem.

The problem to resolve in the gospel is how to get the righteousness necessary to escape the wrath of God.

### **Continued validity of the moral law**

#### **Defining moral terms**

What is the frame of reference as to the meaning of the word *righteousness*? Deut 4:8; Rom 2:13

What is the frame of reference as to the meaning of the word *sin*? 1John 3:4

What is the frame of reference as to the meaning of the word *judgment*? Romans 2:12  
The law

Summarize this point by explaining that the only reference point in the Bible as to moral terms is the moral law.

According to Romans 8:4, does God require that the righteousness of the law be fulfilled in Christians? Yes   x   No        The question is *how* it is fulfilled.



Does the moral law apply to the entire world or only to believers? Romans 3:19 [To all.](#)  
[No one is exempt from obedience to God's moral law.](#)

### **Revelatory function**

What does the law reveal about God in Romans 3:1-4 [His righteousness](#)

What does the law reveal about man in Romans 3:19,20 [His unrighteousness](#)

What is revealed to us by the law, according to Romans 3:20 and 7:7? [Knowledge of sin](#)

### **The source of righteousness**

According to Romans 3:22, what is the source of righteousness? [God](#)

By means of what does righteousness come? [By faith](#)

To whom does it come? [To those who believe](#)

According to Philippians 3:9, how is this same concept expressed as in Romans 3:22?  
[The righteousness of God which is by faith](#)

### **Romans 4- The concept of righteousness *counted* to the believer**

(The theological term for this is *imputation*. It means “attribute to the account of a person that which belongs to another.” See **UNLOCKING GRACE**, chapter three for a fuller explanation.)

### **Group exercise**

Look throughout Romans 4 and find uses of the word *counted*.

[Verses 3,5,9,10,11,22,23,24](#)

*...just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: Rom 4:6*

*blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.” Rom 4:8*

### **Reconciliation by mutual imputation: 2Corinthians 5:21**

(This doctrine is called *commutation*. It means the exchange of one thing for another between two parties. The result of commutation is called *reconciliation*. A further discussion of reconciliation by Paul is found in Romans Chapter 5 and Colossians Chapter 2.)

What was attributed to Christ according to 2Corinthians 5:21? [Our sins](#)

What was attributed to our account? [The righteousness of Christ](#)

## The two parts of justification

- Forgiveness of sins
- Imputation of the righteousness of Christ

You may need to explain to the students that this is a logical order but not chronological because both aspects occur simultaneously when people put their faith in Christ.

## Important questions

### According to Romans 8:30...

For whom is reserved the gift of justification? Those predestined

What is the final result? Glorification

What precedes justification? The call

### According to Romans 8:33,34...

What is God's attitude toward those who are justified? He accepts no accusations.

Who does God justify according to these verses? His elect

What does Christ continue doing on behalf of those justified? Intercedes for them.

What other doctrines are associated with these verse on justification?

The teacher may take as much time as he wishes to show the connection between justification and other doctrines related to salvation. Some of these are: The sacrifice of Christ; condemnation for those not justified; the resurrection of Christ; the continued intercession of Christ; preservation of those justified.

## Saving faith versus faith that does not save

What is the definition of faith according to Romans 4:21? Faith is the conviction that God will fulfill his promises.

Explain that genuine faith is inseparable from the promises of God; therefore it is inseparable from the word of God. On this grounds we reject the catholic concept of faith as a mystical or emotional experience for which we are not responsible unless God grants it. The seeking of spiritual experiences apart from the word of God is idolatry. See Romans 10:17.

## Faith and works

### Titus 2:11-15

According to verse 11, what is it that brings salvation? The grace of God

According to verse 12, what does grace produce in us after we are saved? It teaches us to deny ungodliness.

According to verse 14, for what do those who are saved have zeal? Good works

### **The problem of false faith: James 2:18-25**

According to verse 18, how does genuine saving faith manifest itself? In good works

Do demons have a kind of faith? Yes, but it is not the kind that results in salvation.

How is faith made perfect according verse 22? By good works

Explain that working for the Lord is the best form for growing in faith because in doing that we discover God working with us.

Based on these verses, we can explain the fundamental difference between Catholicism and the Bible as to salvation and its relationship to works.

Catholic: Faith + works= salvation

Biblical: Faith= salvation + works

### **Matthew 7:21-23**

What is the central problem in the lives of these supposed believers? Workers of lawlessness (sin)

Based on these verses we can explain that some people are practicing religion, including the evangelical one, to try to balance out their bad deeds instead of simply repenting. Such persons are lost even if they are miracle workers.

Do these verses say that Jesus takes away their salvation? No. He said "I never knew you."

### **What about *born again*?**

If justification is the gospel, how does regeneration fit in? Is it included in justification?

Regeneration is a theological term used in the Titus text and expressed elsewhere in the New Testament as *born again*<sup>1</sup> or *born of the spirit*.<sup>2</sup>

### **Titus 3:4-8**

On which doctrine does Paul base our possession of eternal life? On justification, V.8

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:1-8. Note that Jesus attributes regeneration to a sovereign work of the Spirit.

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 4:29

You may explain here that some denominations hold that the reason we have eternal life is because we are born again. This is an error but not a fatal one. We have eternal life because we are justified.

Which comes first: Regeneration or justification? Regeneration comes first.

Important: Justification is always associate with faith in the New Testament. Regeneration is never associated with faith.

From the above considerations, reformed theologians hold that regeneration is a sovereign and preparatory work of the Holy Spirit to make justification by faith possible.

Therefore, contrary to the belief of many, the message “you must be born again,” is **not** the gospel. Justification by faith is the gospel. Likewise, it is an error to say, “if you have faith, you will be born again.” Faith will get you justified but at that point, regeneration will have already taken place.

Regeneration is therefore not included in justification but simply precedes it. The correct order of events is *regeneration* → *faith* → *justification*.

### **From this lesson we learn...**

- The problem to resolve in the gospel is how to obtain the righteousness necessary to escape divine justice.
- The moral law is the only frame of reference for defining what is the righteousness we need.
- God requires that the perfect righteousness of the law be fulfilled in us.
- God counts the righteousness of Christ to believers as their own.
- God has reconciled us to himself by counting the guilt of our sins to Christ and the righteousness of Christ to us.
- Faith is the conviction that God is able to fulfill his promises. It is not a mystical or emotional experience.
- Nay all that is called faith is saving faith.
- Obedience, manifested by good works, is the inevitable result of biblical faith.
- Regeneration, born again, is a sovereign preparatory work of the Spirit preceding justification by faith.

### **True and false quiz**

1. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ God accepts as legally righteous those who trust in Christ.

2. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ God sometimes accepts accusations against justified people.
3. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ In Paul's mind, justification and salvation are synonyms.
4. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ The apostle Paul was tolerant toward those who had another perspective of the gospel message than his.
5. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ Human conscience is an appropriate frame of reference for defining moral terms.
6. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ Jesus intercedes for all, the elect and the non elect equally.
7. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ Justification by faith alone in Christ alone is the gospel.
8. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ Crediting the righteousness of Christ to the believer is the basis of our security of salvation.
9. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ The biblical evidence that a person has saving faith is the ability to manifest spiritual gifts.
10. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ Biblical faith results in salvation plus good works.

### **Homework reading**

Chapter Four in **UNLOCKING GRACE**; Chapter Three in the **WCF**; Romans 9 in the New Testament

## Lesson Four: Election and predestination

### **Purpose**

Show that God is sovereign in salvation as in everything else. This grants a solid sense of security to those know they have been saved by grace.

### **Definitions**

These two words, *election* and *predestination* are similar and overlap in parts of the New Testament.

*Election* refers to God's eternal decree to save certain people by grace, without regard to any foreseen virtues in them.

*Predestination* refers to the God's providence over circumstances to guarantee the fulfillment of his eternal decrees regarding his elect.

*...who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 2Tim. 1:9*

Three chapters in particular in the New Testament mention election and predestination with great clarity: Romans 9; Ephesians 1; John 17.

### **Romans 9**

#### **First illustration: Jacob and Esau, verses 6-13**

In choosing between Jacob and Esau, did God take into consideration their respective good or bad works? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No x

According to verse 13, does God's love extend equally to the elect and the non elect? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No x

Does Paul recognize any unfairness in God's sovereign election? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No x

What explanation does God offer in verse 15 as to why he has mercy on some and not others? There is no explanation because God is under no obligation to justify his decrees to anyone.

According to verse 16, what does God NOT take into account in choosing his elect? He does not take into account any foreseen will or works of man.

### **Second illustration: Pharaoh, verses 17,18**

According to verse 17, why did God arrange for Pharaoh to come to power? To give God the opportunity to demonstrate his power to judge.

What is the conclusion Paul draws from the two previous illustrations, according to verse 18? God has mercy on those whom he chooses to have mercy and hardens others.

People frequently complain about the doctrine of election by saying, "That does not seem fair!" In verses 19 and 20, does Paul anticipate that objection? Yes \_\_\_x\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

How does the above objection actually confirm what Paul is teaching? It proves Paul was indeed teaching sovereign election because he would not have anticipated the objection otherwise. Therefore, the objection itself is proof of sovereign election.

### **Third illustration: The potter, verses 19-22**

What are the two reasons for which God created humanity? To demonstrate his mercy on some and his justice on others.

We can explain here that world history is a story about God, not about humanity. The human race exists to glorify God and this will happen in one of two ways...by mercy or by judgment. Nobody receives injustice.

### **Ephesians 1**

According to verse 4, when did God choose us and what was the purpose behind his choice? Before the foundation of the world, that we might be holy and without blame.

In the light of verse 4, which of the two statements is correct? Mark the correct one:

\_\_\_\_\_ God chose some because he foresaw they would be holy and without blame

\_\_\_x\_\_\_ God chose some to make them holy and without blame.

According to verse 5, what is the immediate benefit for believers of predestination? Adoption as his children

According to verse 6, what benefit does God himself receive from predestinating us? The praise of the glory of his grace.

According to verse 7, what are the results of God's decree of predestination? Redemption by Christ's blood and forgiveness of sins.

According to verse 11, does God predestine people arbitrarily? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_x\_\_\_

## John 17

In this chapter, John does not use the words *predestination* or *election*. Instead, he uses the phrase *those you have given me*.

According to verse 6, to whom does Jesus manifest the name of the Father? Those the Father has given to him.

In verse 9, for whom does Jesus pray and for what does he not pray? He prays for those the Father gives him and does not pray for the world.

In verses 11, 12 and 15, what does Jesus pray to the Father to do with those who the Father has given to him? That the Father preserve them.

Based on verse 26, describe the kind of love the Father has toward those he has given to Jesus. The Father loves them with the same love with which he loves Jesus.

### Connections between faith and election

Is faith the cause of election or is election the cause of faith? See Acts 13:48; Titus 1:1 Faith is granted to the elect.

What was the cause of the faith of believers in Achaia, Acts 18:27? Grace

According to John 6:44, 64 what or who is the cause of saving faith? God the Father

### Effectual call: How God applies the decree of election

*Irresistible grace* or *effectual call* are terms theologians use for the work of the Holy Spirit in drawing the elect to Christ through the gospel.

#### Two kinds of call: General and special

*General* is the gospel preached to everyone, without regard to who may be elect.

*Special* is the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the elect to produce regeneration, faith and justification, in that order.

We see the differences between general and special call in verses like Mathew 22:13; Acts 2:39; 1Corinthians 1:22-24.

#### The chain of salvation: Romans 8:30

How many of the predestined are called? All

How many of the called are justified? All

How many of the justified are glorified? All



### According to 2Timothy 1:9

What does not count relative to our election? Our works

What two things does this verse mention as the basis of our election? God's purpose; grace

### 1Thessalonians 5:23,24; Jude 1; 1Corinthians 1:2

According to these verses, what does God promise to those who are called? Sanctification

### From this lesson we learn...

- *Election* is the eternal decree of God to save certain people. *Predestination* is the God's sovereign control over everything to guarantee that his decree of election is accomplished.
- God gives faith to elect that they might be saved.
- With the three illustrations in Romans 9, Paul demonstrates that the decree of election has nothing to do with foreseen good works or good will in the elect.
- God promises final sanctification to the elect.

### John 17

- According to John 17, God the Father sent Jesus to save out of the world those he had given him. Jesus intercedes for those only, not for the world. The Father loves them with the love with which he loves Jesus.
- Although the gospel should be preached to all, only the elect receive a special call from God.
- In theology, this special call is called *effectual call* or *irresistible grace*.

### True and false quiz

1. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ God grants saving faith to the elect.
2. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ God chooses those who he knows beforehand have good will.
3. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ The word *election* refers to the God's sovereign decree to save by grace certain chosen people.
4. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ God chose us because he foresaw that we would be holy and blameless.
5. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ The term *general call* refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in calling the elect.

6. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ The term *special call* refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing the elect to faith in Christ through the gospel.
7. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ The immediate result of the work of the Holy Spirit in effectual call is justification.

### Homework reading

Chapter Five in **UNLOCKING GRACE**; Chapter Eight in the **WCF**; Romans 8:32-34 in the New Testament

## Lesson Five: Sacrifice of Christ

### Purpose

To show that the benefits of the sacrifice of Christ apply to the elect and those only, thus guaranteeing an infallible salvation.

In theology, this doctrine is called *particular redemption* because the cross was intended to save certain individuals in particular — the elect — not humanity in general.

Sometimes it is called *limited atonement* because the sacrifice of Christ is limited to the elect. Some theologians dislike this term because all doctrines of atonement are limited in some way. The term *limited* fails to express the reformed intent in defining Christ's sacrifice in its power and intent.

### The great guarantee of Romans 8:32-34

#### First evidence

According to these verses, is it possible for anyone for whom Christ died to perish? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_x\_\_\_

In verse 32, what did God do to ensure the elect would receive all the benefits of salvation? He did not spare his son.

In verse 33, who does God justify? The elect

In verse 33, what does God **not** do against his elect? God accepts no accusations against them.

In verse 34, why are the elect not condemned? Christ died and intercedes for them.

Therefore, the first evidence for particular redemption is that those for whom Christ died cannot be **condemned**.

**Who did Jesus come to save?**

## Second evidence

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus came to save only those whom the Father had given him. This explains for whom he died.

According to John 6:39, who did Jesus come to save? Those the Father gave to him.

According to John 18:9, did Jesus accomplish that purpose? Yes \_\_\_x\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

For whom did Jesus give his life, according to John 10:15? His sheep You may explain here that the text does not say it was also for goats.

For whom did Jesus pray, according to John 17:9 and for whom did he not pray? Not for the world, but for those the Father gave him. Explain that Jesus prayed only for those the Father gave him because those were the only ones he came to save.

Therefore, the second evidence for particular redemption is that Christ came to save those the Father gave him.

## The priesthood of Jesus: Hebrews 9:11-15

### Third evidence

The priesthood in the Old Testament had two functions: Sacrifice and intercession. The priest intercede only for those for whom the he offered sacrifice and no others. This fore type is fulfilled in the ministry of Christ who is both the sacrifice and the priest who offers it.

According to verse 13, for whom were the Old Testament sacrifices offered? For Jews alone or for others Only for the Jews. The teacher may explain these fore types show the limited nature of the sacrifice. It was for a particular people, not general, therefore limited in its intent.

According to verse 15, who receives the promise of an eternal inheritance and why? The called, because Christ died for them.

Therefore, the third evidence for particular redemption is that Christ is the priesthood of Jesus.

### Fourth evidence

#### For whom did he come?

According to Matthew 1:21, Jesus come his people.

According to John 10:15, Jesus laid down his life for the sheep.

According to Ephesians 5:25, Jesus give himself for the church.

According to Hebrews 9:15, Christ's death redeems those who are called.

Therefore, the fourth evidence for particular redemption is that Christ came to save certain specific people, not all.

### **Discussion: Sufficient for all, intended for some**

In this section, the teacher may use an illustration of one sort or another to show that if the whole world were elect, there would be enough grace in the cross to save everyone. My favorite illustration is that of a baker in a village with 100 houses. He bakes 100 loaves of bread. We may suppose he intends to distribute one loaf per house. This is, however, a supposition only. It could be that he wants to keep a certain amount for his own household and distribute to a few others. Or, maybe take them elsewhere. The mere fact of sufficiency for all proves nothing of his intentions. To know his intentions, we would have to ask him.

The same with the benefits of Christ's sacrifice. His word tells us his intention in the cross. Sufficiency of the cross for all proves nothing about for whom the sacrifice was made. We must go to the word of God, as above, to answer that question.

### **Discussion: Do we preach the power of the cross or its extent?**

This is a good place to encourage students to preach the power of the cross rather than for whom he died. Both experience and the Scriptures show it is better to proclaim the power of the cross than its extent.

### **What about the love of God?**

Does God love everyone equally or does he have a special love for the elect? Compare the following texts:

In John 17:26, what is the relationship between the love of the Father for Jesus and his love for the elect? The same. *Beloved* here translates **agapao**, a word never associated in the Bible with unbelievers but with his elect only.

In Titus 3:4, the phrase *lovingkindness* is a single word in Greek, **filantropía**, and means "benevolence." Note that the word is not **ágape**, reserved for only for believers.

What are the two words in Colossians 3:12 associated with the elect? Holy and beloved.

Does there exist in Ephesians 1:5,6 any connection between the divine love and predestination? Yes   x   No       

### **From this lesson we learn...**

- The cross guarantees the salvation of the elect and of them only.

- God accepts no accusations against the elect because Christ died for them.
- Christ did two things to ensure the salvation of his elect: He died for them and lives to intercede for them.
- Jesus is the high priest of the elect and intercedes for them that the Father may preserve them.
- The Father loves the elect with the same love with which he loves Jesus.
- Jesus died to save his people, his sheep and his church.

### **True and false quiz**

1. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ The sacrifice of Christ guarantees the salvation of the elect and those only.
2. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ God accepts accusations against his elect because sometimes they behave badly.
3. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ The death of Christ makes the justification of the elect inevitable.
4. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ Christ interceded for the whole world.
5. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ God loves the elect with the same love with which he loves Jesus.

### **Homework reading**

Chapter Six in **UNLOCKING GRACE**; Chapter Twenty-Five in the **WCF**

## Lesson Six: Unity and universality of the church

### **Purpose**

This lesson contains ecclesiological elements that relate directly to the doctrines of grace. For a more complete study of biblical ecclesiology, see Smalling's teacher's guide, [Biblical Church Government](#).

The reformers realized that Rome taught membership in the Catholic Church is a condition of salvation. According to catholic theology, the church administers salvation through its sacraments to its members.

This caused a challenge to the reformers since the Bible teaches salvation is by grace alone and takes place before becoming a member of a church. Moreover, the Bible indicates that some church members may not be saved. This produced a series of questions: What is the church and what is the work entrusted to it?

**What is the church according to Hebrews 2:47?** [The church is a society of the saved.](#)

[Explain that if this is the case, then the church cannot be the means of salvation but simply the place to receive those who have been saved by grace. Therefore, the church is incapable of saving people by means of its sacraments.](#)

### **Is the church a visible institution?**

Is the concept of a visible local church found in 1Corinthians 1:2? The church is in the city of Corinth and visible to the human eye.

In which part of 1Corinthians 1:2 do we see the universality of church? [All those in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.](#)

Therefore, the local expression of the church is called [the visible church](#).

The universal existence of the church is called [the invisible church](#).

Who is the head of the church according to Ephesians 1:22,23 and 5:23? [Christ alone.](#)

[In this part, explain that the reformers declared that the pope is in no sense of the word the head of the church. This declaration unleashed persecution.](#)

### **The difference between represent and replace**

According to the church of Rome, the pope *replaces* Christ and thus has the authority to dispense grace. In biblical theology, the church *represents* Christ but does not replace him.

According to John 14:16 and 26, what replaces Christ in the earth? [The Holy Spirit](#)

Is the invisible church limited only to those currently alive on earth? Hebrews 11:39,40  
[Believers of all ages and places are members of the body of Christ and of the church.](#)

**What are the characteristics of the true church?**

### **Faithful proclamation of the biblical gospel**

According to Galatians 1:6-9, what is God's attitude toward those who preach a different gospel than that which Paul proclaimed? [Anathema; cursed of God.](#)

### **Faithful administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper**

According to Matthew 26:26-28 and Paul's instructions to the Corinthians in 1Corinthians 11:17-34, is the Lord's Supper optional or mandatory in the church?  
[Mandatory](#)

According to Matthew 28:19,20 is baptism optional or mandatory in the church?  
[Mandatory](#)

### **Church discipline**

According to 1Corinthians Chapter 5, what are the limits of tolerance that Paul imposes inside the church with regard to the conduct of its members? How should they treat unrepentant members? [Excommunication; refuse association with them.](#)

**From this lesson we learn...**

- The church is a society of those who have been saved by grace.
- Christ alone is head of the church and the pope is not the head in any sense of the word.
- The visible church is a society of people who meet in a specific locality for worship. The invisible church is made up of those who have been saved in every place and epoch of history.
- The church represents Christ but does not replace him. The Holy Spirit is the replacement of Christ on earth.
- According to the reformers, the characteristics of a true church are: The faithful proclamation of the gospel, the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper and church discipline.

**True and false quiz**

1. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ Membership in a local church that preaches the gospel guarantees salvation.
2. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ The church replaces Christ on earth.
3. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ The term *body of Christ* refers to all those who are members of a local church.
4. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ The local church may be considered Christian even if it preaches a distorted gospel.

### **Homework reading**

Chapter Seven in **UNLOCKING GRACE**; Chapter Eighteen in the **WCF**; Romans 8, John 17 and Hebrews 7



## Lesson Seven: Security of the elect

### **Purpose**

Show that God preserves his elect from falling away into final apostasy and explain the means by which he does this.

The question as to whether Christians can or cannot lose their salvation has caused controversy. The reformed answer should be abundantly clear from the previous lessons. God is sovereign in salvation and therefore justifies and preserves his elect.

Those who question the security of the believer show a lack of understanding of the gospel in its depths, although they themselves may be saved.

This teaching is commonly called *preservation of the elect*. The term *security* is used here because it fits better with the original Spanish acrostic in the manual from which this is translated.

Several questions are involved with this issue:

- Who does the preserving and how?
- Can this teaching be construed in any way to involved a license to sin?
- Does God remove our free will after we are saved?

### **Who preserves?**

According to 1Peter 1:5, what keeps us? The power of God

In Jude 1, where does God put the believer to ensure preservation? In Christ

In Jude 24 and 25, from what does God preserve us? From falling

In 2Timothy 4:18, Paul is confident that the Lord will rescue him from one thing and will preserve him for something else. What are those things? Rescued from every evil work and preserved for God's heavenly kingdom.

In Psalm 97:10, what is it the Lord preserves? The lives of his saints

According to Hebrews 7:22,25, what is the guarantee that the believers will be heirs of the covenant of grace and why? Jesus Christ himself is the guarantor because he has the ability to save them completely.

### **Does there exist a license to sin?**

According to 1John 3:3, what is it that genuine Christians desire? Their purification

According to 1John 3:9, what is impossible for those in whom Christ dwells? To practice a life of sin.

In 1John 5:17, what characterizes those born of God and why? They do not practice a life of sin because Jesus preserves them from that.

According to Galatians 5:13, what is Paul's warning to those who understand their freedom in grace? Not use their freedom as an excuse for carnality.

### **What about those who fall away?**

What does John conclude about those who leave the Christian faith and the church, according to 1John 2:19? They were never a part of us.

According to 2Corinthians 13:5, did Paul believe that every member of the church was saved? No

### **Does God remove the free will of believers?**

What does God do to ensure that the wills of the believers will be in line with his own will, according to Philippians 2:12,13 ? God works in them to will his good pleasure.

According to the above verses, does God force Christians against their will? Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
No x

### **What does God do exactly to preserve his elect?**

#### **Positive**

What is the principle means God uses for the growth of his children according to 1Peter 2:2? The "milk" of the word of God.

What should Christians do to receive a greater measure of grace, according to Hebrews 4:16? Pray

What is one of the means God gives Christians to bless them according to 1Corinthians 10:16,17? The sacraments, in particular the Lord's Supper.

What is another means of blessing according to 1John 1:7? Fellowship with one another, that is, the church.

#### **Negative**

What happens to believers who become negligent in their spiritual growth, according to Hebrews 12:7-11? God disciplines them.

According to 2Timothy 4:2, what is the role of God's ministers in the life of other Christians? Reprove, rebuke, exhort

## **The covenant of grace**

It is important to note that the covenant of grace made with Abraham is part of God's immutable decrees. This, by itself, is a strong reason for believing in the preservation of the elect.

According to Galatians 3:16-17, what is the basis of the covenant? [God's promise](#)

What is excluded as a basis for God's faithfulness to the covenant? [The law](#)

## **Teachings connected to the theme of preservation**

- Sovereignty of God: If God is sovereign over all, then he is sovereign in the question of preserving his people.
- Total inability: If man is incapable of saving himself, then likewise he is unable to preserve himself as well.
- Justification by grace alone: If the righteousness of Christ was imputed to us regardless of our merits, then it cannot be removed because of our faults.
- Election by grace: If God's decree to save us was made in eternity before the time began, then nothing in the current time continuum can change that now.
- Sacrifice of Christ: If the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient to cover all the sins of all the elect, then none of the sins of the elect can be the cause of their loss of salvation. No mortal sins exist for a Christian.
- Effectual call: The special call of God the Father to bring people to Christ invariably results in their eternal salvation.

## **From this lesson we learn...**

- It is God's power that preserves the elect by uniting us to Jesus Christ.
- Genuine Christians do not desire a license to sin.
- Jesus Christ himself will undertake to see that his people do not fall into a life of sin.
- God works through the wills of believers to do his own will.
- The inevitable proof of salvation is obedience to God.

- God uses a variety of means to preserve his people: The Scriptures, prayer and the church with its admonitions and discipline.

### **True and false quiz**

1. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ It is the power of God that preserves us from falling.
2. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ The proof of genuine salvation is obedience to the Lord.
3. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ The doctrine of the security of the elect means that they are free to sin because they cannot lose their salvation.
4. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ The doctrine of preservation stimulates genuine Christians to purify themselves.
5. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ Christ preserves those who are truly born again from returning to a life of sin.
6. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ The evidence of genuine salvation is when a person does miracles and prophecies.
7. \_\_\_F\_\_\_ Although we are incapable of saving ourselves, we are indeed capable of preserving ourselves.
8. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ The proof that a professing Christian is not, in fact, regenerate is when he leaves the church and returns to a life of sin.
9. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ God is sovereign in salvation as he is in everything else.
10. \_\_\_T\_\_\_ The covenant with Abraham is part of the divine immutable decrees and therefore constitutes a strong comfort for Christians.

### **Homework reading**

Chapter Eight in **UNLOCKING GRACE**; Chapter Seven in the **WCF**; Genesis 17 and Galatians 3

## Lesson Eight: Covenant, the golden chain

### **Purpose**

Show that the doctrines of grace are a result of a covenant God made with Abraham and fulfilled in Christ.

### **Why is this important?**

Why are these doctrines of grace arranged as they are and not in some other way? Do they have something in common?

These doctrines are joined like keys on a chain. The chain that holds them in common is called a *covenant*, which in turn is consequence of the character of God. Once we understand this, we how they are intimately interconnected.

### **What is a covenant?**

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. A business contract is a kind of covenant. Normally contracts are agreements between equals with a view to mutual benefits.

Not so with the covenant of grace. God and man are not equals and man is in a morally helpless state incapable of contributing anything. This kind of covenant is more like the adoption of child in which the benefactor provides for the beneficiary who in turn has nothing to give in return. This is the Christian covenant.

Christians use the term *covenant* instead of *contract*, to make the distinction that God and man are not equal partners.

For advanced students, the teacher may mention Greek terms used in these two kinds of covenants: **subtheme**= an agreement between equals. **Diatheke**= a legal arrangement between parties who are not equals. This last one is the New Testament term. In fact, the term New Testament, which incorporates the word **diatheke**, occurs six times in the New Testament.

### **What are the elements of a covenant?**

- Identification of the participants
- The benefits
- The conditions to fulfill
- The time limit
- How the agreement is validated.

## The Christian covenant: Genesis 17 and Galatians 3

In theology, this is called *the covenant with Abraham* or *the Abrahamic Covenant*. This was inaugurated in Genesis 17 and fulfilled in Christ in Galatians 3.

### Group exercise

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#### Genesis 17

- Who are the participants? V.1 God, Abraham and his descendants.
- What are the conditions? V.1 Perfect obedience to God
- What are the benefits? V.7 The Lord will be their God.
- The time limit V.7 Perpetual
- Validation V.10,11 Circumcision

It may be advisable here for the teacher to mention that the covenant with Abraham is in fact a continuation of the covenant with Adam. The participants are the same, God and man, the condition of perfect obedience and benefits of divine blessings are also the same.

#### Galatians 3

Find in this chapter the same Abrahamic covenant elements as in Genesis 17 above.

- Who are the participants? V.1,7 God, Abraham and his descendants.
- What are the conditions? V.9 Perfect obedience to God
- What are the benefits? V.8,14 The Lord will be their God.
- The time limit V.15 Perpetual
- Validation V.23,24 Christ, by his death
- What did Paul call the covenant with Abraham in verse 8? The gospel [Greek=*euangelion*]

Based on this comparison between Genesis 17 and Galatians 3, can we say that the covenant with Abraham is the Christian covenant of grace? Yes   x   No \_\_\_\_\_

Explain here what it is that makes the covenant of Abraham the covenant of grace. It is Christ himself, who fulfilled the condition of perfect obedience as our substitute and attributed the benefits to our account by faith. The requirement of perfect obedience is fulfilled, not set aside.

The teacher can take the liberty here, if he wishes, to attack dispensationalism. Show that Paul insisted in all his writings that the gospel is nothing new and does not replace any Old Testament covenant. Such covenants are fulfilled in Christ who satisfied all the demands of the covenant of works in our favor.

### **End of group exercise**

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### **The doctrines of grace in the covenant of grace**

Let's examine each of the doctrines studied so far to see how they relate to the covenant.

#### **Sovereignty of God**

According to Hebrews 6:13,14,17, how does the covenant reflect the sovereignty of God?  
No authority greater than God exists on which to base the covenant.

#### **Total inability**

According to Galatians 3:13,13; 4:7, what is the moral state of man and how does the covenant meet that need? We were under the curse of the law and slaves of sin. Therefore we needed the sacrifice of Christ to fulfill the condition of the covenant.

#### **Justification by faith**

According to Genesis 15:6 and Galatians 3, what is the connection between the covenant and justification? The condition today for us is the same as it was for Abraham... faith.

#### **Election by grace**

Does there exist any connection between election and grace in Romans 11:5? Yes  No

#### **Sacrifice of Christ**

What took place in Hebrews 9:13-15 to make the covenant an effective means for obtaining eternal life? Christ's sacrifice earned for him the right to be the mediator of the covenant.

#### **Security of the elect**

According to Hebrews 6:13-20, why do we have security of salvation in the covenant? The covenant is immutable and Jesus is the forerunner without guarantees the benefits of the covenant for those called to it.

**From this lesson we learn...**

1. The doctrines of grace are the consequence of the divine a divine covenant established with Abraham and fulfilled in Christ.
2. This covenant requires perfection as a condition for receiving the benefits.
3. Christ fulfilled the condition of perfection in his life and by his sacrifice. For this reason he is guarantor for those who trust him and they remain participants in the covenant forever.

### **True and false quiz**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ The covenant of grace is an agreement between God and man as equals
2. \_\_\_\_\_ The covenant of Abraham is the Christian covenant
3. \_\_\_\_\_ God is faithful to his covenant with us because he know that we will be good.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ God is faithful to his covenant with us because he is faithful to his own immutable oath.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ We are in the covenant partly by faith in Christ and partly by our obedience to the divine law.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Another term for the covenant of grace is *the gospel*.



## Conclusion

### **From these studies we learn...**

- God is sovereign in salvation just as he is in everything else.
- Fallen man is unable to will or do anything to contribute to his own salvation or to prepare himself to be saved.
- God chose from fallen humanity individuals from all ethnic groups to be recipients of his saving grace. He did this without regard to foreseen supposed good will or good works in them.
- The sacrifice of Christ on the cross guarantees the salvation of all the elect and of those only.
- The church universal consists in all the elect from everywhere and all ages of history.
- God preserves the elect from falling away from the Christian faith. He does this by various means, including paternal discipline, exhortations, the word of God, prayer and the teachings and admonitions of the church.

## Appendix: The doctrines of grace in church history

The following is an outline of the influence and existence of the doctrines of grace throughout church history. This serves to counter the falsehood that these doctrines are merely inventions of sixteenth century reformers.

### **Early church fathers: 100-400 A.D.**

The fathers of the first four centuries taught these doctrines. In his book **THE CAUSE OF GOD AND TRUTH**, John Gill proves this. In this classic of reformed theology, Gill quotes extensively from those early writers, proving they would be classified as *reformed* if they were alive today.

### **Augustine and Pelagius: C. 400 A.D.**

Pelagius, a British monk, invented new doctrines emphasizing the will of man as the cause of salvation. Augustine took him to task in a series of treatises on grace. These include **GRACE AND FREE WILL** and **PREDESTINATION OF THE SAINTS**.

### **Council of Orange: 529 A.D.**

This council in Orange, France, met to decide on the validity of Augustine's teachings. The **CANONS OF ORANGE** clearly support Augustine's theology of grace and rejects Pelagianism, although the Catholic Church in practice still follows the line of thinking proposed by Pelagius.

### **From Augustine to Calvin: 400-1550 A.D.**

Theologians during the middle ages who held to what we call today reformed theology were often labeled as *Augustinians* or sometimes *Johannine* scholars because John was one of the Bible writers who taught these doctrines.

### **Thomas Aquinas: 1225 A.D.**

In his monumental work **SUMMA TEOLÓGICA** (Summary of Theology), Aquinas describes and defends predestination and associated doctrines.

### **John Calvin: 1509-1564**

Converted through reading Augustine, Calvin wrote the first protestant systematic theology text, **THE INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION**, the most thorough exposition of the reformed faith ever written.

### **Martin Luther: 1484-1546**

Considered the father of the reformation. Luther eventually evolved to a Calvinist position theologically. This is clear from what he himself designated as his *opus magnum*, **THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL**.

### **The Arminian Controversy: From the sixteenth century to the present**

Jacobus Arminius was a Dutch theologian, died 1609, who invented a system of theology similar to Pelagius, challenging the teachings of the reformation. His followers expressed his views in five points called the Remonstrances (theological errors.) These five points are:

1. Freedom of the will: Man's will is sovereign in salvation
2. Conditional election: Election is based on foreseen faith and good works
3. Universal atonement: Christ died with the intention of saving everybody.
4. Resistible grace: Man has the power to successfully resist God's saving grace.
5. Loss of salvation: Christians can lose their salvation through mortal sin.

### **Synod de Dort: 1618**

This synod was convened in Holland to consider whether Arminianism is a legitimate alternative to reformed theology. After fifteen months of debate, the Synod declared Arminianism to be unscriptural.

The Canons of Dort were written by the reformed delegates later and are known today as the five points of Calvinism. Calvin himself is not the author of the *tulip* acrostic below. This acrostic was invented later by a British theology student.

- 1.Total depravity: Man's will and nature is bound in sin and unable prepare himself for salvation.
- 2.Unconditional election: Election is based on God's sovereign choice.
- 3.Irresistible grace: God works in the elect so that they come to Christ willingly despite previous resistance.
- 4.Limited atonement: Christ died to save the elect and those only.
- 5.Perseverance of the elect: God sees to it that the elect will persevere.

### **The Westminster Assembly: 1643-1648**

An assembly of 151 theologians of the British isles convened to formulate the doctrinal standards of the reformation. This resulted in the Standards of Westminster, used today by Presbyterians and by the principle Baptist denominations, with some revisions. This

includes the **WESTMINSTER CONFSSION** and the **LARGER** and **SHORTER CATECHISMS**.

### **Baptist confessions**

British Baptists adopted the **WESTMINSTER CONFSSION** in 1689 but changed the chapters on baptism and church government, calling it **THE LONDON CONFSSION**. American Baptists accepted it in 1742 and labeled it the **PHILADELPHIA CONFSSION**.

### **Resurgence of Arminianism: John Wesley, 1703-1791**

The dynamic British evangelist John Wesley, founder of Methodism, boasted that he had never read a theology textbook. This is obvious from his ignorance of theology as expressed in his resurrection of Arminianism. He committed the typical logic errors of Arminianism previously refuted at Dort in 1618.

From Wesley's movement were born others such as the Nazarene denomination and from them, Pentecostals and Charismatics.

Arminians who take the time to study these issues objectively often become Calvinists. It is rare to hear of a Calvinist becoming Arminian. Arminians rarely debate Calvinists today because they come up short.

### **Chronology of the doctrines of grace in church history**

100-400 A.D. Comments by early church fathers in their writings express these doctrines. Irenaeus, Polycarp, Chrysostom, etc. Puritan writer John Gill writes **CAUSE OF GOD AND TRUTH**, 1735, documenting this.

C.400 A.D.- Pelagius-Augustinian controversy. Augustine writes dissertations on grace **AGAINST PELAGIUS** and **ENCHIRIDION** manual of doctrine.

529 A.D.- Council of Orange. Augustinian theology vindicated. Strong statements favoring sovereign grace.

Dark Ages- 500-1500 A.D. Scholars holding to doctrines of grace sometimes called Augustinians, or Johannines.

Thomas Aquinas, C.1300, **SUMMA THEOLOGICA** contains elements of sovereign grace doctrines.

1517- Luther begins reformation. Erasmus-Luther dispute over free will. His *Opus Magnum* **THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL** refutes Erasmus.

1559-Calvin publishes **INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION**

1560-1609 James Arminius and the Arminian controversy

1618- Synod of Dort/ Arminianism refuted/ Five Points of Calvinism established. **CANONS OF DORT**.

1643-1648- Westminster Assembly writes **WESTMINSTER STANDARDS**. End of Reformation period.

1689- Baptists adopt Westminster Confession, with changes, **LONDON BAPTIST CONFESSION**

1703-1791- John Wesley and the resurgence of Arminianism. Leads to Methodism, Nazarene, Pentecostalism and others.

1823- Southern Baptist Convention adopts the **WESTMINSTER CONFESSION** at Philadelphia, with changes, the **PHILADELPHIA CONFESSION**.