

“God Chooses and Sends”—*God’s Grace in Christ*
ECO Essential Tenets Study for BYF - August 9, 2026
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1. Announcements and Prayer

2. Quick review of August 2 lesson on Essential Tenets III.A., God’s Grace in Christ

- The bad news of human fallenness that must be discussed before talking about Good News
- The Good News of God’s saving grace in rescuing, redeeming, and adopting us

3. Today’s lesson now moves to a second distinctive area for Presbyterians: III.B., Section III.B, “Election for Salvation and Service,” *Essentials of the Reformed Tradition*, ECO Essential Tenets

The call of God to the individual Christian is not merely an invitation that each person may accept or reject by his or her own free will. **Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy.** Each of us is chosen in Christ, who is eternally appointed to be head of the body of the elect, our brother and our high priest. He is the one who is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, our divine Helper who is also Bridegroom, sharing our human nature so that we may see His glory. We who receive Him and believe in His name do so not by our own will or our wisdom, but because His glory compels us irresistibly to turn toward Him. By His enticing call on our lives, Jesus enlightens our minds, softens our hearts, and renews our wills, restoring the freedom that we lost in the fall.

We are all sinners who fall short of God’s glory, and we all deserve God’s eternal judgment. Apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ, we are incapable of being in God’s presence, incapable of bearing the weight of His glory. We rejoice that Jesus Christ offers us safe conduct into the heart of God’s consuming and purifying fire, shielding us with His perfect humanity and transforming us by His divine power. Having received such grace, we extend grace to others.

We are not elect for our own benefit alone. God gathers His covenant community to be an instrument of His saving purpose. **Through His regenerating and sanctifying work, the Holy Spirit grants us faith and enables holiness, so that we may be witnesses of God’s gracious presence to those who are lost.** The Spirit gathers us in a community that is built up and equipped to be light, salt, and yeast in the world. Christ sends us into the world to make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that Christ has commanded us. We are now in service to God’s plan for the fullness of time: uniting all things in heaven and earth to Himself. To this end, we preach Christ, calling all persons to repent and believe the gospel. We also care for the natural world, claim all areas of culture in the name of Jesus, serve the poor, feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, and defend the helpless. We do this work not with any thought that we are able to bring in the kingdom, but in the confident hope that God’s kingdom is surely coming, a day when suffering and death will pass away and when God will live among His people.

4. If our human fallenness is as severe as we say the Bible teaches it is, then some things follow...

- Summarizing the problem: Our actions, including our choices, will never be sufficient to meet the need (III.A.), so how can this grace be effective in sinful human lives?
- Acknowledge that there’s a lot in Scripture about our responsibility to choose and serve:
 - Example 1: Israelites in the OT with Moses’s and Joshua’s speeches: Deuteronomy 31-32; Joshua 23-24
 - Example 2: Jesus speaking with Nicodemus (with John’s commentary): John 3:1-21
 - Example 3: Hebrews 12 as the call to perseverance after Hebrews 11’s roll call of faith
- But “free will,” or better, human agency, is not what we often say or think it is
 - Not just my ability to choose, but what I choose to choose; my “chooser” and my “choice” aligned
 - Plus so many influences, compulsions, and forces acting on us, with many unrecognized while happening
 - Plus another set of concerns often unanticipated by those who advocate agency in this: why would I choose to follow Christ and my friend does not? Am I better? Smarter? More faithful? Hard to escape a works orientation
- So God must take direct action through His agency (initiative and choice) that trumps my agency (initiative and choice) because my agency would always move me toward wrong directions

5. Election all over the Scriptures: The “through line” of Scripture, from Abraham to Israel to discipleship

- Start with Abraham in Genesis 12: why him? Why his family?
- Work through descendants in rest of Genesis: why them? They’re pretty flawed
- People of Israel: called out in midst of their deep, grievous failings to be a “kingdom of priests” to the world (see Exodus 19-20), yet fail repeatedly and decisively through OT
- New Testament expands election to include those who follow Christ:
 - John 15:16, “You didn’t choose me, but I chose you...”
 - Romans 8:28-30, “For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them...”
 - Romans 9:1-24, “This message shows that God chooses people according to his own purposes...”
 - Ephesians 1:3-8, “God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family...”
 - 1 Peter 2:9-10, “...for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests...”
- This opens the big question of “why?” Why are we chosen by God? For what? Scripture is pretty clear: chosen for service, not just salvation; “not by works, but for works”
 - Ephesians 2:8-9: Famous statement of “grace through faith, not by works”
 - But Ephesians 2:10 must be then included as to why we are saved: We are God’s “masterpiece,” created “so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago
 - Connects with purpose of Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:17: “God uses it [Scripture inspired by God] to prepare and equip his people to do every good work”

6. So how do we deal with the conundrum of God’s election and human agency? Three “work-arounds”

- First, a philosophical response: recognize God is not in time as we are, so what seems to be a problem for us logically, linearly, and sequentially simply isn’t a problem for God:
 - Psalm 90:4: “For you, a thousand years are as a passing day, as brief as a few night hours”
 - C. S. Lewis: “Our life comes to us moment by moment. One moment disappears before the next comes along: and there is room for very little in each. That is what Time is like. And of course you and I tend to take it for granted that this Time series—this arrangement of past, present, and future—is not simply the way life comes to us but the way all things really exist. We tend to assume that the whole universe and God himself are always moving on from past to future just as we do. But many learned men do not agree with that. Almost certainly God is not in Time. His life does not consist of moments following one another... If you picture Time as a straight line along which we have to travel, then you must picture God as the whole page on which the line is drawn. We come to the parts of the line one by one: we have to leave A behind before we get to B, and cannot reach C until we leave B behind. God, from above or outside or all around, contains the whole line, and sees it all.” (*Mere Christianity*)
- Second, a theological response: recognize that God’s sovereignty provides for your free response to God’s grace, the responses of all who trust in Jesus, and the success of any evangelistic efforts toward anybody at any time
 - Michael Horton: “Election does not exclude anybody from the kingdom of God who wants in. Rather, it includes in God’s kingdom those whose direction is away from the kingdom of God and those who would otherwise remain forever in the kingdom of sin and death.” (*Putting Amazing Back into Grace*)
- Third, a practical Christian living response: recognize that God’s sovereignty in reality addresses and influences every aspect of Christian living
 - Michael Horton: “People ask me: ‘Why pray if God is sovereign?’ I say, ‘Why pray if He isn’t!’” (Beth Case sermon, 7-12-26)

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Look at the bold statement in the first paragraph of the Essential Tenet on election. How does this describe the results of sin we talked about last week? Discuss what you think it means by “true freedom of will.”
- Look at the last sentence of the first paragraph of the Tenet. Talk about how Jesus restores what was lost.
- Someone has said our “free will” is neither all that free nor all that much actual will. What does this mean?
- Talk more about election as the “through line” of Scripture. How does this “through line” provide you with:
1) Encouragement in a hard time? 2) Comfort in a mournful time? 3) Strength to do what you need to do?
- Of the three “work-arounds” the outline gives for the conundrum of election and agency, which one jumps out at you? Why did it have such an impact on how you now think about this issue?

8. Closing Prayer and Next Week: August 16, “God Gathers”, *Covenant Life in the Church* (Beth Case)