

Clear About the Gospel Bible Study
Theological Focus 1: Election & Agency
BYF 9-20-26 - Dr. Clay Brown, MDPC Adult Discipleship Pastor

TEACHING OUTLINE

1. Start with announcements and prayer. (5 minutes)

2. Define “election” and review the highlights of the Scripture passages, in addition to last session’s Ephesians 1.1-14, that reference God’s activity. (10 minutes)

- Election: “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.” (ECO Essential Tenets III.B)
- Election is the “through line” in Scripture’s Big Story; examples include:
 - Abraham and Sarah in Gen 12-25, and their descendants’s narrative in Genesis
 - Moses in Exo 3.1—4.17; Israelites in Exo 19.1-6 chosen to be a “kingdom of priests”
 - Covenant with David regarding his “house”, 2 Sam 7.1-17
 - Jesus in calls to be his disciples: Mt 4.18-22; Mk 1.16-20; Lk 5.1-11
 - Jesus’s explicit teaching: Mt 22.1-14, 24.15-25; Jn 6.35-46, 10.1-10,22-30, 15.9-17
 - Paul’s explicit teaching: Rom 8-11, specifically 8.28-30, 9.1-24; Eph 1:3-14

3. Define “agency” and review briefly the highlights of the Scripture passages that reference human responsibility and choice. (10 minutes)

- Agency: “Human agency is the capacity of individuals to make independent choices, act intentionally, and shape their own actions and world... In philosophy, it links to free will and moral responsibility, while in theology, it relates to how human choices interact with divine sovereignty” (Chrome, AI overview, 8-10-26)
- Examples of human choice and action include:
 - Calls by Moses and Joshua to uphold covenant with God: Deut 4.1-31; Josh 24.11-28
 - Book of Judges’s description of generation of Israelites falling away: Judg 2.6-19
 - Prophetic calls to repentance and obedience: Isa 1.14-20; Amos 5.18-24; Micah 6.3-8
 - Jesus: Mt 5.17—7.27 (Sermon on the Mount); Lk 9.21-26, 10.25-37, 18,18-30; Jn 15.9-17
 - Paul and others: Rom 12.1-21; Phil 2.12-18; Heb 12.1-13

4. Discuss the struggle many Christians have with how election and agency intersect. (10 minutes)

- Often on historical/denominational lines in Protestantism: Presbyterians/Reformed/Lutheran on one side, Baptist/Methodist/free churches on the other, and many groups mixed bags
- Theologically described as Calvinism (in tradition of John Calvin) and Arminianism (in tradition of Jacobus Arminius, such as John Wesley)
- Today: great weight given culturally to nearly unlimited individual choice and autonomy called “expressive individualism” (re: Charles Taylor), with strong pressure to affirm for self and others

- Difficult for many to affirm God's sovereignty in salvation and service, as our decisions to choose, follow, and obey have been given much emphasis
- Concerns about election contradicting with agency: questions about God, humans, and Time

5. Discuss how election and agency may be seen as complementary ways in which God's sovereignty is revealed. (10 minutes)

- Election rightly understood: never stops anyone from professing Christ who wants to (category of people who trust Christ and aren't accepted does not exist: no one ever trusts on their own)
- Instead makes it possible for you to profess Christ as Lord, given sinful fallenness; if you have the desire to trust and follow Jesus as Lord, that's a sign the Holy Spirit working in/with you
- So we choose to follow Christ as disciples because our "chooser" has been transformed by God
- God not in Time, but outside of Time and over all of Time; therefore concerns for logic, linearity, and sequence not issues for God; knows all, sees all, has freedom to act upon all in His "Now"
- Old saying: on doorway as you enter heaven, reads "Whosoever will may come;" on other side of doorway as you pass through, reads "You did not choose Me, but I chose you"

6. Close with prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. ECO's Essential Tenets define election: "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." Discuss the connections between the first sentence and the second sentence and why they're important.
2. Ephesians 1.3-14, studied the last session, strongly affirms the doctrine of God's election of humans into salvation and service. What other passages also contain this affirmation? (The outline for this lesson will be helpful if you can't think of many.) What do you observe about these passages?
3. Of the scripture passages identified in the previous question, which one stands out to you as the most readily understood passage? Which one causes you some theological "heartburn"? Discuss.
4. There are also many passages in the Bible affirming human agency. What is agency? (Check the outline for a definition.) What are some passages affirming it? What do you observe about them?
5. We struggle with the relationship between God's election and human agency in today's world. In which direction do you think we lean culturally? Why? Please give some examples.
6. How does a rightly understood perspective on election answer the question about someone wanting to follow Christ, but being unable to do so because he or she is not among the elect? What does election do rather than prevent people from trusting and following Jesus? Why is this especially good news?
7. If God is outside of Time, then how does this help us with reconciling election and agency?
8. There is an old "preacher story" that on the doorway as you enter heaven, it reads "Whosoever will may come." But after you enter, you turn and see, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you." How does this story help you better understand how election and agency complement each other?