

TEACHING THROUGH THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 3: Of God's Eternal Decree

LESSON 006

TEACHER NOTES

REVIEW FROM PREVIOUS LESSON

God has eternally and sovereignly ordained everything that comes to pass without being the author of sin or destroying human freedom. Out of His unmerited grace, He unconditionally elected some to everlasting life while passing over others to face the just consequences of their own sins. This is meant to give us deep comfort and assurance, reminding us that our salvation rests entirely and securely in God's hands rather than our own.

The Means of Salvation

TEACHING NOTE

Just as God has specifically chosen His elect, so He has ordered the specific historical means He will use to accomplish that salvation. Christ did not die in order to make salvation possible, but in order to actually save specific men and women. What God has willed, He brings about.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10:14-17

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6. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, fore-ordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

TEACHING CONTENT

- **God Uses Means:** It belongs to the character of God to use means. He doesn't just make nuts, He makes the tree, the squirrels, and the forest for the nuts to exist logically and naturally within. He is a master craftsman who desires things to be in context so that they can be sustained and beautiful. As a result what He has willed from eternity past He has ordained all of the means for that to actually come to fruition in the course of history. It was always His plan that He should bring about our salvation through Jesus Christ. He knew we would be weak and wanting, so He sent His Spirit to work in us and preserve us. God brings about our redemption, justification, adoption, sanctification, and preservation because all of us NEED all of those divine blessings for salvation. (Acts 27:22–31, Genesis 50:20, Acts 2:23, Philippians 2:12–13, Genesis 1:11–12)
- **No Mistakes:** The God who has the hairs on our heads numbered doesn't miss anything. Anyone He has ordained from eternity will be saved in the course of history through ordinary means and anyone who is not elect will not receive that blessing. No matter how many times you go to church, sit under the Word, partake of the sacraments, salvation belongs to the Lord and He alone works the things necessary in the heart to save men from their sins. Remember, Christ did not die in order to make salvation possible, but in order to actually save His elect. Without that work there is no salvation and so exposure to the same means does not guarantee salvation. Yet, we should still expect God to meet us through the ordinary means as they are His specific channels to bless us and effect His desired end. (Matthew 10:29–31, John 6:37–39, 2 Corinthians 2:15–16, Matt 7:21–23)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does God save people?

Through means. He brings to bear all of the ordinary things in a situation that usually save people and through His sovereign power they work. In other words, He uses the preaching of pastors, the shepherding of elders, the invitations of friends, the testimony of fathers and mothers, the reading of the Word and prayer and the Spirit applies those things to the heart and makes them effectual. The Spirit works to quicken the heart, but the Spirit uses means, people aren't usually saved by bolts of lightning from the sky, but by God providentially bringing about the ordinary things that He uses to save them.

2. Why doesn't hearing preaching and going to church have the same effect on everyone?

In order for the ordinary means to have any effectiveness the individual concerned needs to be effectually called by God and it needs to be God's will to bring about their conversion at that stage in their lives. Without the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart to open the eyes and give new life even the correct ordinary means won't have any lasting impact.

3. How would you respond to someone who says "God is sovereign, so anyone He wants to save WILL BE SAVED, so I don't need to share my faith with anyone."

God is sovereign and has commanded you to share your faith, "...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..." (1 Peter 3:15). Moreover, God in His sovereignty has ordained that people are ordinarily saved through means and so He has willed to use your prayers, your conversations, the testimony of your life, and your invitations to church as part of His larger plan to gather His sheep to Himself. And it is also part of His plan to transform you more and more into the image of Christ.

4. If all of this is true, why does God not take believers to glory immediately when they are saved?

Because He has willed to use them as tools and means in the salvation of others! God's plan is not just to save individuals but to unite a people to Himself in Christ such that they have communion with one another in Him. As such, He has made this beautiful plan to use ordinary believers living ordinary lives to bring about the extraordinary end of filling up the New Heavens and New Earth with righteous believers.

5. How should the biblical truth that Christ died to *actually* save His people, rather than merely make salvation a general possibility, bring us comfort?

It means that it rests ENTIRELY upon Him. That He has accomplished it and will bring to fruition the purpose He shed His blood for. There is no doubt. No possibility for any of the elect to be missed, lost, or forgotten about. Our faith is weak, we are weak, but He is strong.

Passed By Unto Death

TEACHING NOTE

God doesn't have to show mercy to anyone, but when He does it is His own free, unmerited, and gracious decision not based on anything in the creature. God's choice to save is sovereign, unearned favor and mercy; His choice to not save is righteous justice and judicial wrath. He does not treat the non-elect with malice, but with exact and fair holiness in view of their guilt. But both choices are fundamentally good because God is Good. This means that for those ordained to Hell he first passes them over and chooses not to extend His grace and then in the course of time men and women are not condemned generally as sinners but specifically for their exact sins, both inherited and actual.

For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory... Romans 9:15–23

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7. The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.

TEACHING CONTENT

God is Sovereign: Reprobation, or God passing by, means that God has willed not to extend mercy and grace to those whom He passed by. Fundamental to understanding this is remembering that God is absolutely sovereign and bound by nothing external to Himself. He does not pass by some because He saw that they would be particularly wicked, or that they would refuse His grace, or for any other reason except that He chose to pass them by. His choice is rooted in His own sovereign character. (Proverbs 16:4, Romans 9:15-22, 1 Peter 2:8)

Passing By: For God to pass by a creature means that He is willing, from eternity past, not to extend the mercy of Christ's death to them. This does not mean they will never hear the gospel, but that the Holy Spirit will never give them the ears to hear it, the heart to believe it, and the lips to confess it. The gospel will remain a dead and lifeless thing for them because God has refused to give to them grace to understand. This does not mean the gospel is a dead and lifeless thing, but they themselves are unable to hear it rightly. For this to make sense you have to remember that none of us deserve mercy. We all deserve death, but God showing mercy to some does not oblige Him to show mercy to all. Grace is gracious not universal. (Matthew 11:25-26, Matthew 13:11-15, Romans 11:7-8)

Actively Condemning: God sovereignly ordains the judgment and justice of Hell. No one is in Hell without God willing it, but because of the way God created and sustained the world, there is no one in Hell who doesn't deserve to be there. We are free, rational creatures and those whom God chooses to pass by do, in the course of the history, actually choose sin. So to say that God ordains them to judgment does not mean that God is morally culpable in damning them, because God is not the author of their sins. God does not force anyone to sin against their will, but rather ordains that man will freely choose to sin based on their internal character and logic. This also means that there is a great and beautiful justice in that men and women are not condemned generally as sinners but specifically for their exact sins, both inherited and actual. Without a savior they were born dead in sin, but throughout the course of their life they actively chose to commit more sins. It is on the basis of that sin that they are condemned. (Romans 2:5-8, Romans 9:22-24, James 1:13-14, Jude 1:4)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between God “passing by” someone and God “condemning” someone?

Passing by is God choosing, based on nothing foreseen in the creature, to not extend mercy to them.
Condemning is judging them on the basis of their individual real and inherited sins.

2. Why is it impossible to accuse God of being “unfair” or “unjust” when He withholds saving mercy from some?

Because no one deserves grace! All grace is gracious, unmerited, unearned, and freely given. God is not obligated to save any, which is why it is so miraculously kind that He saved some!

3. When the non-elect reject the gospel, why do they do so? Are they forced against their will?

No, they are not forced against their will. They do reject the gospel because they do not want the gospel or to submit to God.

4. Why do we preach the gospel to anyone who can hear it if only the elect are made able to believe?

Because God saves people through means. If we were only to preach the gospel to those who would be saved it would require us to have a definite revelation from God about who would be saved. But what God wills is that the seed be scattered far and wide so that He can give growth where He wills. It is a beautiful thing that we can be used by the living God for the advance of His kingdom.

5. How does this doctrine eliminate every ground for Christian boasting?

Neither salvation nor damnation rests on anything we could do. We are not better than the damned, God just chose to love us. Because it rests fully and completely on His sovereign choice, what is there to boast about? What did you do except receive freely given grace?

6. What is the ultimate purpose of both the salvation of the elect and the condemnation of the reprobate?

The glory of God. Saving some magnifies God's grace, goodness, and mercy. Damning the rest shows forth God's holiness, justice, and power. God is God and we are not so everything He does is good.

Predestination - A Balm, not a Cudgel

TEACHING NOTE

The Westminster Standards are pastoral. They were written by pastors and theologians that cared deeply about the truth and about their flocks and so 3.8 is more of a statement about how a doctrine ought to be handled rather than about the doctrine itself. Predestination is difficult and complicated, and so we need to handle it with special care. It is true and biblical, so we can't abandon it, and moreover, when predestination is handled rightly, it brings about assurance and praise to God.

*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed
belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.
Deuteronomy 29:29*

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8. The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.

TEACHING CONTENT

High Mystery: People have a problem with the doctrine of predestination, because they think it gets rid of their free will and makes them pawns being moved around the board unjustly. It strikes directly at the pride of man. Even those saved by Christ struggle with understanding it because it is a high mystery, directly relating to the heart and mind and plan of God, who is beyond our comprehension. So while it is an essential article of our faith and can be taught profitably to children, it is also a matter that requires maturity and wisdom in teaching and preaching it. (Rom 11:33, Isaiah 55:8-9)

Assurance of Salvation: One of the great blessings of the doctrine of predestination is our ability to have assurance of salvation. When Christ works in our hearts, when we are bearing fruit in keeping with repentance, growing in grace, and living out our faith. Predestination reminds us plainly that it is NOT our own doing. We are saved by grace, through faith, in Christ not on the basis of any works done by us, but by His sovereign election from eternity past. When we stumble and fall, the same is true, our salvation rests entirely and completely on God's sovereign mercy and election from eternity past. The blood of Christ is sufficient because the Lord will sustain the elect in it! (2 Peter 1:10, Romans 8:29-33, Philippians 1:6)

Praise to God: When handled and understood rightly, predestination directly assaults human pride and directs all glory to God alone. It reminds us of how small we are and how worthy of praise God is. (Eph 1:5-6, 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Confession says that this “high mystery of predestination” should be handled with “special prudence and care.” Why is this doctrine different than others?

Because it affords the believer an opportunity for pride, even though they were chosen, based on nothing foreseen in them, they were still chosen. Think of the Jews of old living awful lives but claiming to be Sons of Abraham. But also this doctrine is most offensive to the unbeliever, and when handled wrongly it will drive men away rather than invite them into God's mercy.

2. Why is the certainty of all these things so comforting?

Because we know that the promises rest upon God and God alone. It is necessary that we respond in faith and walk in good works, but ultimately we are claimed, converted, and sustained in salvation merely because of God's good pleasure which will never and can never change. Our salvation does not depend upon us, but upon the character of God.

3. WCF 3.8 notes that this doctrine should lead to “humility” and “diligence.” How does absolute predestination promote humility and combat spiritual complacency?

It promotes humility because we realize we did nothing to earn or prompt God's choice; it was entirely His grace. It combats complacency because true salvation WILL produce good works in us. So we simultaneously know deeply that it does not depend upon us, and yet we can know the truth of God's work in our lives through the fruit that He produces in us.

4. How should we approach doctrines that are difficult for us to understand?

There is a pattern to the Christian life. First, we trust God, we confess the truth, and then we grow in understanding of it. There are many things in scripture that even after thousands of years in heaven we will still be growing in our understanding of.

5. How does the truth of election lead us to praise God?

God is god and we are not. But our God, unlike us, is merciful, just, good, and kind. When we look at our state rightly and look at what He has freely chosen to do for us through Christ, there can be no other response but praise.

References — Chapter 3

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Glossary — Chapter 3

A note on these definitions: this glossary was compiled with the help of AI, drawing on a number of sources. I am not the author of these definitions and do not claim them as my own work. They are offered as a study aid; Scripture and the Westminster Standards remain the authority.

Absolute —God is most absolute in that He depends upon nothing outside Himself and is bound by nothing but His own perfect nature. He is not conditioned, limited, or determined by any external thing, for all things derive from Him while He derives from none. His being and His decrees rest entirely upon His own free and sovereign will.

Actual Sin —The particular sins a person commits in thought, word, and deed, as distinct from the original sin inherited from Adam. Every actual sin flows from our corrupted nature, and every one is a real transgression of God's law for which we are personally responsible. The non-elect are condemned not generally as sinners but specifically for their own sins, both inherited and actual.

Adoption —An act of God's free grace, whereby believers are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of, the sons of God.

Arminianism —The teaching of the followers of Jacobus Arminius, a Dutch theologian, who held that God elects people based on His foreknowledge of their faith, that Christ died to make salvation possible for all, that God's saving grace can be finally resisted, and that true believers can fall away. The Synod of Dort answered these views in 1619, and the Westminster Confession teaches the opposite on each point: salvation is entirely of God's free grace.

Assurance of Salvation —The subjective certainty, wrought by the Holy Spirit, that a believer is in a state of grace and eternally elected to life. According to the Westminster Standards, this assurance is not a matter of guessing at the secret will of God, but is drawn from the objective promises of scripture, the witness of the Holy Spirit, and the observable fruit of one's effectual calling (faith, repentance, and sincere obedience).

Atonement —Christ's work on the cross to pay for sin and reconcile sinners to God; in Reformed theology, specifically and effectively accomplished for the elect.

Author of Sin —The one who originates sin and bears the guilt of it. The Confession insists that although God ordains whatsoever comes to pass, He neither is nor can be “the author or approver of sin.” The sinfulness of every sin “proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God.” God ordains that sin will come to pass, but man freely chooses it and is fully responsible for it.

Calvinism —A system of Christian theology that seeks to summarize the teaching of Scripture concerning God’s sovereignty in salvation and all of life. It emphasizes that salvation is entirely of God’s grace, from election before the foundation of the world to the perseverance of the saints, often summarized in the Five Points of Calvinism (TULIP).

Canons of Dort —Five doctrinal points formulated at the Synod of Dort (1618–1619) in response to Arminianism, defining the Five Points of Calvinism and forming one of the Three Forms of Unity.

Communion of Saints —The spiritual fellowship between all believers, both living and dead, united in Christ and sharing in His gifts, graces, and life.

Confession —The public declaration or formal written summary of biblical doctrines and convictions held by believers and the church.

Conversion —The turning of a sinner from sin to God in repentance and faith. Conversion is the visible fruit of God’s invisible work of regeneration and effectual calling. We truly turn, yet we turn only because God first turns us. It is God’s work in us, accomplished ordinarily through the means of His Word.

Covenant of Redemption —The eternal agreement within God in which the Father gave a people to the Son, and the Son undertook to become their Mediator and redeem them, with the Spirit applying that redemption. Salvation was not an emergency plan but was settled in God’s eternal counsel before the world began (Ephesians 1:4; John 17:4–6).

Decree —God’s eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, by which He has freely and unchangeably ordained whatsoever comes to pass. The decree is not a reaction to anything in time but the plan by which all of time unfolds. It includes not only the ends God intends but every means by which He brings them about, and it never makes God the author of sin or does violence to the will of the creature.

Doctrine —The body of authoritative biblical teachings and foundational principles of the Christian faith.

Doctrines of Grace —Another name for the Five Points of Calvinism (TULIP), emphasizing salvation as entirely God’s gracious work.

Effectual Calling —God’s powerful summons by the Holy Spirit that brings the elect from spiritual death to spiritual life, enlightening their minds and enabling them to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered in the gospel.

Elder —A man ordained to the office of spiritual oversight, teaching, and governance of the congregation, divided into two types: teaching elders (ministers) and ruling elders.

Election —God’s sovereign choice from eternity to save certain individuals, not based on anything foreseen in them but solely on His good pleasure and free grace.

Foreknowledge —God's perfect knowledge of all things before they come to pass. God knows "whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions," yet He has not decreed anything "because he foresaw it as future." God does not look ahead to see what His creatures will do and then decide; rather, the future is certain because He has decreed it. God does not foreknow because things will happen; things will happen because God has foreordained them.

Foreordination —God's eternal appointment of what will come to pass, both the ends and the means. The Confession teaches that God has "fore-ordained all the means" by which He brings His elect to glory. To ordain is not merely to foresee or permit, but to determine with purpose. What God has foreordained is certain, and it comes to pass in the course of history through ordinary means and genuine human choices.

Free Will —The natural liberty God has given to man's will, so that it is never forced by God or by nature to do good or evil, but chooses according to its own desires. God's decree does not take this liberty away. Our ability to choose what is spiritually good, however, depends on our condition: Adam was able not to sin, fallen man is not able not to sin, and the believer is freed by grace to will and do what is good. We always choose freely, but we choose according to what we are.

Good Works —Works done in obedience to God's commandments, flowing from true faith, and aimed at God's glory. Good works are never the cause or condition of our election or justification, since God chose us "without any foresight of faith or good works." Yet they are the necessary fruit and evidence of true faith. We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for them.

Grace —God's unmerited favor toward sinners; His free gift of salvation and divine enablement that cannot be earned or deserved.

Hardening —God's righteous judgment on the wicked in which He withholds His softening grace, removes restraints, and gives them over to their own sinful desires. God does not put new evil into anyone's heart; the wicked "harden themselves, even under those means which God useth for the softening of others." Pharaoh is the great example: God hardened his heart, and Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Hardening is always just, for it is a judgment upon sin already loved.

Heaven —The dwelling place of God, where Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father. The Confession teaches that at death the souls of the righteous, "being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies." At the last day, the redeemed will dwell with God in body and soul forever.

Hell —The place of everlasting punishment, where the wicked who know not God and obey not the gospel are cast into eternal torment and punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. Hell is not a place of chaos outside of God's rule but the righteous expression of His justice against sin. There is no one in hell who does not deserve to be there, and there is no one in heaven who does.

High Mystery —The Confession's name for the doctrine of predestination, a profound truth of God that reaches beyond our full understanding and must be "handled with special prudence and care." It is not for idle speculation, but rightly taught it gives "matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation" to all who sincerely obey the gospel.

Holy Spirit —The third person of the Trinity, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son, who applies redemption through regeneration, indwells believers, and sanctifies them progressively.

Irresistible Grace —God's saving grace that effectively and sovereignly overcomes all human resistance in those whom He has chosen to save, drawing them freely to Christ.

Justification —An act of God's free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Limited Atonement —The doctrine that Christ's death specifically and effectively secured salvation for the elect, rather than merely making salvation a hypothetical possibility for all.

Merit —What a person deserves or earns by his own works. Before God, sinners merit nothing but wrath, and even our best works cannot earn God's favor, since they are already owed to Him and are stained with sin. That is why salvation is by grace: God's unmerited favor given freely in Christ. The only merit that saves is the merit of Christ's perfect obedience and sacrifice, credited to us by faith.

New Heavens and New Earth —The eternal, renewed creation where believers will dwell bodily with God in perfect righteousness, with sin and death completely removed.

Ordinary Means of Grace —The primary outward instruments ordained by God—principally the Word, sacraments, and prayer—through which the Holy Spirit works salvation and spiritual growth in believers.

Ordo Salutis —Latin for “the order of salvation,” the order in which the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of Christ's redemption to a sinner. The Confession traces this chain in Chapter 3: the elect are redeemed by Christ, “effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit,” and “justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation.” Every link is God's work, and none of His people is lost along the way.

Original Sin —The guilt of Adam's first sin together with the corrupted nature that every person inherits from him. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. Original sin is the root from which all actual sins grow, and it is why every person needs not only forgiveness but a new heart.

Passed Over for Death —Also termed reprobation or preterition, this refers to God's sovereign decision, according to His unsearchable counsel, to pass by the non-elect in the distribution of saving grace and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sins. In Westminster theology, this act manifests God's absolute sovereignty and holy justice, ensuring that while salvation is an act of pure mercy, condemnation is a righteous judgment for human rebellion.

Perseverance of the Saints —The doctrine that all who are truly regenerated and saved by God will continue in faith to the end and never finally fall away, kept securely by God's power.

Praise to God —The ultimate end and purpose of all of God's decrees, particularly the predestination of the elect to everlasting life. This doctrine is designed to strip human beings of all pride and boasting, leading them instead to a state of profound gratitude, worship, and admiration of God's free grace, mercy, and unchangeable love in Christ Jesus.

Predestination —God's eternal decree concerning the everlasting destiny of men and angels. The Confession teaches that “some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death.” Predestination is one part of God's larger decree of all things. It includes election, God's free choice of some to salvation in Christ, and reprobation, His just passing by of others.

Preservation —Despite centuries of hand-copying across thousands of manuscripts (transmission), God in His providence has kept His Word pure and intact. Minor variations exist between manuscripts, but none affect any doctrine of the faith. The church today possesses an abundance of manuscript evidence, far more than any other ancient document, giving us every confidence that we know what the original texts said. God did not inspire His Word only to lose it. He who gave us Scripture has faithfully kept it.

Redemption —The act by which Christ purchased His people out of bondage to sin, death, and Satan by paying the price of His own blood. To redeem is to buy back. The Confession teaches that the elect, “being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ,” and that none are redeemed by Christ but the elect only. Christ did not die to make redemption possible, but to actually redeem His people.

Repentance —An evangelical grace wherein a sinner, with true grief and hatred of sin, turns from sin to God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.

Revelation —God’s direct act of making His character, will, and redemptive purpose known to mankind, culminated in the written Scriptures. See also Natural Revelation and Special Revelation.

Sacrament —A holy sign and seal of the covenant of grace, instituted by Christ, to represent Christ and His benefits and to confirm our interest in Him. The sacraments also mark the difference between those who belong to the church and the rest of the world. There are two sacraments of the New Testament: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. They are made effective not by any power in them, but by the work of the Spirit and the blessing of Christ.

Sanctification —The work of God’s free grace, whereby believers are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

Sanctified Wisdom —Scripture does not answer every practical question the church will face. For matters the Bible leaves open, church officers are called to apply their knowledge of the Word, their God-given wisdom, and their care for their congregation to make faithful decisions. These decisions are not binding declarations and must always remain subject to Scripture.

Sola Gratia —The Reformation doctrine that salvation is entirely by God’s free grace, without any human merit or contribution.

Soli Deo Gloria —The Reformation principle that all of creation, salvation, and human life exist ultimately to glorify God alone.

Soteriology —The theological study of salvation: its planning from eternity (election), accomplishment in history (atonement), application in time (calling, regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification), and final completion (glorification).

Sovereignty —God’s absolute, supreme, and unchallengeable authority and dominion over the entire universe.

Spirit —A being without body or material parts, immaterial and invisible. To confess God as “a most pure spirit” affirms that He has no physical form and is not composed of parts, but is simple, whole, and undivided in His being. As spirit, He is present everywhere and is perceived not by the senses but known through His revelation.

Synod of Dort —The 1618–1619 international Reformed assembly that rejected Arminianism and formulated the Canons of Dort.

The Fall —The first sin of Adam and Eve, when they ate of the forbidden tree and broke the covenant of works. Because Adam stood as the representative of all mankind, the guilt of that sin is imputed to his posterity and the corruption of it is passed on to every person born by ordinary generation. Creation itself was subjected to the curse. The fall did not take God by surprise; it was ordained for His holy ends, yet it was entirely man's doing.

TULIP —The acronym for the Five Points of Calvinism: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints.

Union with Christ —The spiritual and vital bond uniting the believer to Jesus Christ, from which all saving blessings flow.

Westminster Confession of Faith —The confession of faith written by the Westminster Assembly in the 1640s and published in 1647. It is a summary of the system of doctrine taught in Scripture, organized in thirty-three chapters, and it serves, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as the doctrinal standard of Presbyterian churches such as the PCA. It is a subordinate standard, always under the authority of Scripture.

Westminster Standards —The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, and the Shorter Catechism together, produced by the Westminster Assembly in the 1640s. They are the doctrinal standards of Presbyterian churches such as the PCA. They are subordinate standards, always under Scripture, but they are a faithful summary of the system of doctrine taught in Scripture.

Wrath of God —God's holy, settled, and just opposition to sin. God's wrath is not a sudden mood or loss of temper but the steady response of His unchanging holiness to evil. The same God who loves what is good necessarily opposes what is evil. For believers, God's wrath has been fully borne by Christ; for the unrepentant, it remains.



LESSON CONTENT



MONERGISM STUDY GUIDE