

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

SOTERIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Salvation

By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, In Christ Alone, To the Glory of God Alone

UNIT 2: THE ETERNAL FOUNDATION

Election and the Covenant of Redemption

Lesson 7

Election and Evangelism

Why the Doctrines of Grace Fuel the Great Commission

Sovereign Grace Does Not Hinder Mission — It Guarantees Its Success

“I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus”

Key Texts: Romans 10:14–17; 2 Timothy 2:10; Acts 18:9–11; 13:48; Matthew 28:18–20; 2 Peter 3:9

“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!’ ... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”

Romans 10:14–15, 17, NASB 1995

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Introduction

The doctrine of election has never lacked for critics, but among all the objections that have been directed against it across the centuries of theological controversy, none has been more persistently raised or more genuinely felt than this one: if God has already determined from eternity who will be saved, then the proclamation of the gospel is, at best, a formality and, at worst, a charade. Why preach to people whose salvation has already been settled in the eternal counsel of God? Why labor in evangelism, why plant churches, why learn languages and cross oceans and suffer hardship for the sake of people whose spiritual destiny is already fixed? And why, on the other side of the equation, does it matter whether those who are non-elect hear the gospel at all, if their rejection of it is the foregone conclusion of a decree that preceded their existence? The objection, in its various forms, amounts to the same charge: election makes mission redundant.

This objection has a surface plausibility that explains its durability. It appears to follow logically from the Reformed account of election: if God has sovereignly, unconditionally, and immutably chosen a specific people for salvation, and if those people will certainly be saved by virtue of that choice, then the human activities of preaching, evangelizing, praying, and persuading seem to add nothing necessary to the outcome. God will save His elect with or without our proclamation; the non-elect will not be saved no matter how earnestly we proclaim. The missionary's labor, on this view, appears superfluous, the playing out of a drama whose script has already been written, in which the actors' performances are irrelevant to the ending.

But this objection, however plausible it appears on the surface, rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of the Reformed doctrine of election, specifically, on the failure to recognize that God's sovereign ordination of ends is inseparable from His sovereign ordination of the means by which those ends are accomplished. The God who decreed that His people would be saved is the same God who decreed that they would be saved through the proclamation of the gospel, through the witness of His church, through the prayers of His people, and through the missionary labor of those He has sent. Election does not make the means redundant; it guarantees that the means will succeed. This is the argument that this lesson will develop with biblical precision, historical illustration, and pastoral warmth.

This is Unit 2's concluding lesson, and its placement is significant. We have studied the pactum salutis (Lesson 4), unconditional election (Lesson 5), and reprobation (Lesson 6). We now arrive at the question that any honest engagement with the doctrines of grace must eventually face: what do these doctrines do to the church's missionary impulse? The answer that this lesson will give, grounded in the biblical texts, illustrated by the history of the greatest missionaries the church has ever produced, and developed through the logic of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human means, is the opposite of what the objection assumes. The doctrines of grace do not hinder mission; they fuel it. Election does not make evangelism unnecessary; it makes it possible to endure. Sovereign grace does not guarantee that mission will be unnecessary; it guarantees that mission will succeed.

This lesson will move through six major sections: the objection stated in its strongest form; the biblical doctrine of ends and means; Paul as the supreme historical illustration; Acts 18 as the narrative model; the free offer of the gospel and its relationship to election; and the pastoral balance, preaching with divine confidence and pleading with human urgency, that the doctrines of grace uniquely produce in the missionary heart. Throughout, the governing conviction is one that Charles Spurgeon stated with characteristic wit and theological precision, and

that the entire apostolic tradition confirms: the doctrines of grace are not the enemy of evangelism; they are its foundation, its fuel, and its guarantee of final success.

I. The Objection Stated and Examined

Does Election Make Evangelism Unnecessary?

A. *The Hyper-Calvinist Error*

The objection that election makes evangelism unnecessary is not merely a theoretical concern raised by Arminians against Reformed theology; it has been an actual error that some within the Reformed tradition itself have committed, with devastating pastoral and missionary consequences. The position known as hyper-Calvinism, a theological development associated primarily with certain English Particular Baptist circles in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and with figures such as John Gill and John Brine in their most extreme expressions, drew precisely the inference that the objection assumes: that since God has sovereignly determined the salvation of the elect, the preacher is not warranted to offer Christ freely and indiscriminately to all hearers, and that the missionary endeavor of going to the unevangelized is not a biblical obligation but a human presumption.

The practical consequences of hyper-Calvinist theology for the church's mission were catastrophic. The late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Particular Baptist churches under the influence of hyper-Calvinist theology largely ceased to engage in evangelism and made no effort toward the evangelization of those who had never heard the gospel. William Carey, when he proposed to a gathering of Baptist ministers in 1786 that the obligation to evangelize the world was still binding on the church, was famously rebuked by one senior minister with the words: "Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your help or mine." The minister who spoke these words had drawn the logical inference that the objection assumes, that sovereign grace makes human means superfluous, and it was precisely this inference that Carey spent his missionary life refuting, not by abandoning the Reformed doctrines of grace, but by demonstrating through the biblical argument and his own missionary practice that the inference was illegitimate.

The hyper-Calvinist error is not the Reformed position; it is a distortion of the Reformed position that the greatest advocates of the doctrines of grace have consistently identified and rejected. John Calvin himself is profoundly mission-oriented in his own ministry and writings, sending missionaries from Geneva into France and supporting the earliest Protestant missionary ventures. The great Puritan divines were earnest and passionate evangelists whose preaching combined the most robust Calvinist theology with the most urgent and affectionate appeals to sinners to repent and believe. Jonathan Edwards was simultaneously the most rigorous Calvinist theologian in American history and the most effective revivalist preacher of his generation. George Whitefield preached the doctrines of grace with an evangelistic fervor that made his open-air proclamations among the most powerful gospel appeals the English-speaking world has ever witnessed. And Charles Spurgeon, whose Metropolitan Tabernacle in London was one of the most evangelistically productive churches of the nineteenth century, preached a thoroughgoing Reformed soteriology from the same pulpit from which he extended the most urgent and earnest invitations to the unsaved that the Victorian church produced.

The hyper-Calvinist inference is logically flawed because it mistakes the relationship between divine sovereignty and human means. The Reformed doctrine is not that God will save His elect regardless of means; it is that God will save His elect through means, and specifically through the ordained means of the gospel proclamation. The

distinction is of the first importance: the hyper-Calvinist treats means as unnecessary because the end is certain; the Reformed account treats means as necessary precisely because the end is certain and the means have been sovereignly ordained as the instrument of its accomplishment. The certainty of the harvest is not a reason for the farmer to stay home; it is a reason for him to plant and water with confidence. The certainty of the elect being saved is not a reason for the evangelist to be silent; it is a reason for her to proclaim with the confidence that her labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

B. The Real Question: Is There a Biblical Warrant for Free and Universal Proclamation?

The more important question is not whether hyper-Calvinism's inference is legitimate, it clearly is not, but whether the Reformed doctrine of election can sustain a genuinely free, universal, and sincere gospel offer. Can the preacher who believes in unconditional election stand before a congregation of unknown spiritual states and genuinely offer Christ to all, invite all to repent and believe, and plead with all as though their eternal destiny hangs on their response to this proclamation, without that offer being made insincere by the knowledge that some in the congregation, by the divine decree, will not and cannot receive it?

The answer, as the next sections of this lesson will develop in detail, is a resounding and exegetically grounded yes. The biblical warrant for the free and universal gospel proclamation is as clear and as unqualified as the biblical testimony to election itself, and, remarkably, it is often the same apostle, in the same letters or the same chapters, who provides both. Paul's letter to the Romans teaches the most rigorous doctrine of unconditional election in the New Testament in chapters 8–9 and immediately provides the most explicit theology of universal gospel proclamation in chapter 10. The same Paul who declares in Ephesians 1 that God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" declares in Ephesians 6 that he prays for "utterances to be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel" (v. 19, NASB 1995). The doctrines of grace and the urgency of the missionary mandate are not in tension in the apostolic mind; they are the two sides of a single unified theological and missional vision.

II. God Ordains Both Ends and Means

The Biblical Doctrine of the Relationship Between Sovereignty and Providence

A. The Logic of Ends and Means in Scripture

The fundamental biblical principle that resolves the apparent tension between election and evangelism is the doctrine that God sovereignly ordains not only the ends He intends to accomplish but also the means by which He intends to accomplish them. This principle is not a subtle theological inference; it is the explicit teaching of Scripture about the relationship between the divine will and the created order of second causes. God does not only decree what will happen; He decrees what will happen through what, through the processes, the instruments, the agents, and the means that He has ordained as the vehicles of His sovereign purpose.

The Scriptures are full of illustrations of this principle. God decreed that Noah's family would be preserved through the flood, and He also decreed that Noah would build an ark (Genesis 6:13–22). The means (the ark) was as sovereignly ordained as the end (the preservation of Noah's family), and Noah's failure to build the ark would have been no less catastrophic for being counteracted by a divine decree that nevertheless ordained the ark as

the means. God decreed that the Israelites would enter Canaan, and He also decreed that they would fight for it. God decreed that Paul's ship would not be lost in the storm off Malta, and He also declared that the sailors must stay on the ship for that preservation to occur (Acts 27:31). The certainty of the divinely decreed end does not eliminate the necessity of the divinely ordained means; it establishes it.

The application to the doctrine of election and evangelism is direct and devastating to the hyper-Calvinist inference. God has decreed that His elect will be saved, and He has also decreed that they will be saved through the proclamation of the gospel, through the response of faith to that proclamation, and through the witness of the church that carries the proclamation to every corner of the earth. "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17, NASB 1995). The decree of election does not bypass this ordained means; it works through it. The elect are not saved despite the absence of gospel proclamation; they are saved through it. The missionary's labor is not superfluous to the accomplishment of God's saving purpose; it is the appointed instrument through which that purpose is accomplished. This is why the Reformed tradition has consistently insisted that the sovereignty of God in salvation is not an argument against earnest evangelism but the only argument for the certainty of its ultimate success.

Paul's own account of this relationship in 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14 provides the clearest single expression of the biblical connection between election and gospel proclamation: "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (NASB 1995). The structure of the passage is unmistakably clear: God chose the Thessalonians from the beginning for salvation (election); and He called them through the proclamation of the gospel (means). The election is prior and certain; the calling through the gospel is the appointed instrument of that election's accomplishment in time. Paul does not treat these as competing accounts of the Thessalonians' conversion; he treats them as two dimensions of the same sovereign grace, with election as the eternal background and gospel proclamation as the temporal foreground.

B. Romans 10:14–17: The Missionary Logic of Sovereign Grace

Romans 10:14–17 is the most concentrated and most rhetorically powerful expression of the relationship between election and evangelism in the entire New Testament, and it emerges from within Paul's most sustained treatment of divine sovereignty in election, the very chapters (Romans 9–11) where the doctrine of unconditional election is most rigorously defended. This is not a coincidence; it is the apostle's own demonstration that the two doctrines belong together, that the same theological vision that produces the most vigorous assertion of divine sovereignty also produces the most urgent missionary theology.

Paul's argument in Romans 10:14–17 takes the form of a reverse chain of necessity: "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!'" (vv. 14–15, NASB 1995). The chain runs backwards from calling on God to believing, from believing to hearing, from hearing to preaching, from preaching to sending. Each link in the chain is a necessary precondition for the previous one, and the direction of logical dependence is from the sending through the preaching through the hearing through the believing to the calling on God in which salvation is received.

The entire chain of Romans 10:14–15 presupposes the reality established by verse 13: “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.” This universal statement of the gospel’s reach, “whoever will call”, is not rendered insincere by the election of some and the non-election of others; it establishes the genuine ground on which every person who calls will be received. The gospel offer is genuinely universal; the salvation it offers is genuinely available to all who call; and the question Paul presses in verses 14–15 is how people who have never heard will be in a position to call. The answer is that they will not be, unless they are sent, preach, and heard. The universal reach of the gospel’s promise (v. 13) requires the universal proclamation of the gospel by sent messengers (vv. 14–15), and the conclusion of verse 17, “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ”, establishes that the proclamation is the divinely appointed instrument through which faith, and therefore salvation, is produced.

The beautiful feet of verse 15, drawn from Isaiah 52:7, the great announcement of the coming Servant-Redeemer’s victory, connect the missionary proclamation of the New Covenant church to the eschatological vision of the Old Testament prophets. The heralds whose feet are called beautiful in Isaiah 52 are announcing the return of the exiles from Babylon; Paul applies the image to the preachers of the gospel who announce the liberation of sinners from the bondage of sin and death. The missionary is not an afterthought to the divine plan; she is the herald of the eschatological victory that God’s sovereign election has decreed and that the gospel proclaims. Her feet are beautiful because they carry the most important message in the history of the universe: that the King has conquered, that the ransom has been paid, and that freedom is being offered to all who will receive it.

III. Paul: The Supreme Historical Illustration

The Greatest Missionary Was the Most Robust Predestinarian

A. The Missionary Whose Theology Fueled His Endurance

If the doctrine of election undermines missionary commitment, then the apostle Paul is the most spectacular counterexample in the history of Christianity. Paul was simultaneously the most theologically rigorous predestinarian in the apostolic church and the most relentlessly active, most widely traveled, most persistently suffering, and most evangelistically fruitful missionary that the New Testament records. The man who wrote Romans 8–9, with its golden chain of foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification, and its uncompromising assertion that election is “not because of works but because of Him who calls” (Romans 9:11), is the same man who traveled to the ends of the known world, endured beatings, imprisonments, shipwrecks, stonings, and sleepless nights, and planted churches in the most hostile and most strategic cities of the Roman Empire. The two things, the thoroughgoing Calvinist theology and the relentless missionary practice, are not in tension in Paul. They are, explicitly and by his own testimony, the reason for each other.

The key text is 2 Timothy 2:10: “For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory” (NASB 1995). The verse is astonishing in its theological structure. Paul has just described his sufferings as a bond-servant of Christ, “I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal” (v. 9), and the reason he gives for enduring those sufferings is not a general concern for the lost but a specific concern for “those who are chosen.” He endures all things “for the sake of those who are chosen.” This is not despite his conviction about election; it is because of it. The existence of the

elect, the people who have been chosen by God and who will certainly be saved, is precisely what makes the suffering of missionary labor worthwhile. They are out there. They must be reached. And the proclamation of the gospel is the means by which the Spirit will bring them in. Paul's doctrine of election is not the reason he might stay home; it is the reason he cannot.

The logic of 2 Timothy 2:10 is worth dwelling on carefully, because it is the precise inverse of the hyper-Calvinist inference. The hyper-Calvinist argues: the elect will be saved anyway, therefore missionary labor is unnecessary. Paul argues: the elect must be reached through the proclamation of the gospel, therefore missionary labor is indispensable and no suffering in its service is too great. For Paul, the sovereignty of God in election is not a reason for passivity but the deepest possible motivation for activity: the elect are being gathered through the proclamation of the gospel, and every hardship endured in the service of that proclamation is endured for the sake of those who are chosen, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. The certainty of their salvation through the appointed means is the ground of Paul's willingness to spend himself utterly in service of those means.

Paul's entire missionary theology can be read as an extended commentary on 2 Timothy 2:10. In 1 Corinthians 9:22–23, he describes his strategy of becoming all things to all people, and explicitly states his purpose: "I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it" (NASB 1995). The urgency is unmistakable: he will use every legitimate means, adapt to every legitimate context, and endure every necessary hardship, in order that "some" might be saved. The "some" is not a resigned concession to limited results; it is the confident expectation of a man who knows that the God who ordained the salvation of the elect also ordained his proclamation as the means of that salvation's accomplishment. He will do all things for the sake of the gospel, trusting that the sovereign God will use all things for the sake of His elect.

B. The Missionary Heroes of the Reformed Tradition

The apostle Paul is not the only evidence that the doctrines of grace produce missionary passion rather than missionary passivity. The history of the church's most heroic missionary endeavors consistently bears out the same pattern: those who believed most deeply in the sovereignty of God in salvation were, almost without exception, those who labored most persistently, most sacrificially, and most effectively in the cause of bringing the gospel to those who had never heard it.

William Carey (1761–1834), the father of the modern Protestant missionary movement, was a thoroughgoing Calvinist whose treatise *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792) is the founding document of the modern missions movement. The very title of his argument, "the Obligations of Christians to Use Means", is the refutation of the hyper-Calvinist error stated in its most direct form. Carey's argument is precisely the argument of this lesson: God has ordained means as well as ends, and the church's obligation is to use the means God has ordained in full confidence that God will use them to accomplish the ends He has decreed. Carey sailed to India in 1793 and labored for seven years before seeing his first convert; he eventually translated the Bible into Bengali, Sanskrit, and dozens of other languages and dialects, and he never wavered in his conviction that the sovereign God of election was the foundation, not the obstacle, of his missionary confidence.

David Brainerd (1718–1747), whose diary Jonathan Edwards edited and published after Brainerd’s death from tuberculosis at the age of twenty-nine, is one of the most dramatic illustrations of the fuel that Calvinist theology provided for missionary endurance. Brainerd labored among the Native Americans of New England and New Jersey under conditions of extraordinary physical and psychological hardship, sustained throughout by the Calvinist conviction that God was sovereign over the salvation of those to whom he ministered. When large numbers of the Crossweeksung community of Delaware Indians were converted in a remarkable movement of the Spirit in 1745, Brainerd attributed the entire event to the sovereign grace of God, a grace that had not been waiting on his ministry but had been appointed to work through it.

Henry Martyn (1781–1812), a brilliant Cambridge mathematician who gave up a promising academic career to serve as a missionary in India and Persia, and who died at thirty-one having translated the New Testament into Hindi, Persian, and Urdu, was a man of profound Calvinist conviction whose missionary correspondence is saturated with the theology of sovereign grace. Adoniram Judson (1788–1850), the first American foreign missionary, labored for six years in Burma before seeing his first convert and endured conditions of suffering, including the death of his wife and children, that would have broken any person whose endurance was grounded in anything less stable than the sovereignty of God. The pattern is consistent and unmistakable: the missionaries who endured the most were those whose confidence in the sovereignty of God was deepest. Sovereign grace is not the enemy of missionary perseverance; it is its only sufficient fuel.

IV. Acts 18:9–11, The Narrative Model

How the Assurance of Election Emboldens the Evangelist

A. God’s Encouragement to Paul in Corinth

Acts 18:9–11 provides a narrative illustration of the principle that the assurance of God’s sovereign election does not produce missionary passivity but missionary boldness. Paul has arrived in Corinth after a series of experiences that would discourage any but the most resolute: he has been driven out of Thessalonica (Acts 17:10), mocked in Athens (17:32–34), and is now in one of the most morally debauched and intellectually sophisticated cities of the Roman Empire, proclaiming a message that the Corinthians have every cultural and intellectual reason to find absurd (1 Corinthians 1:18–25). In this context of vulnerability and apparent futility, the Lord appears to Paul in a vision at night: “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9–10, NASB 1995).

The phrase “I have many people in this city” is the direct expression of divine election applied to the specific missionary context. God does not say “some people in Corinth will respond favorably to your preaching if you persist.” He says “I have many people in this city”, present tense, possessive, certain. These people already belong to God by virtue of His electing purpose, even though they have not yet believed, even though they have not yet heard the gospel, even though they are currently living in the very moral and spiritual condition from which the gospel will rescue them. They are God’s people by election, and Paul’s proclamation is the ordained means by which they will come to be God’s people by faith. The election of these “many people” is precisely what makes Paul’s continued proclamation necessary and guarantees its success.

The effect of this revelation on Paul's ministry is immediate and dramatic: "He settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (v. 11, NASB 1995). The assurance of God's sovereign election produced in Paul not passive waiting for the elect to find their way into the kingdom without his help, but a year and a half of sustained, focused, intensive gospel teaching. He did not reason: "God has many people here; they will be saved without my further effort." He reasoned: "God has many people here; therefore my teaching will not be in vain, and I must not stop." The certainty of the harvest was not a reason to lay down the tools; it was a reason to press them deeper into the soil and work harder and longer than he might otherwise have done.

Acts 18:9–11 also illustrates the relationship between the two encouragements God offers Paul: "I am with you" (the promise of divine presence) and "I have many people in this city" (the promise of divine election's fruit). The two promises belong together and reinforce each other. The divine presence ensures that Paul's labor is not alone; the divine election ensures that it is not futile. Together they constitute the double assurance of the sovereign missionary God: He has gone ahead, chosen His people, and now sends His messenger with the confidence that the message will accomplish precisely what He has ordained for it to accomplish. This is the assurance that sustains the missionary in the hardest field and the longest labor: not the assurance that success is guaranteed by the quality of the proclamation, but the assurance that it is guaranteed by the sovereign choice of the God who has many people in every city the messenger enters.

B. The Pattern Across the Book of Acts

The Acts 18 narrative is not an isolated instance of the connection between divine election and missionary boldness in Luke's account of the early church's mission. The pattern appears throughout Acts, most notably in the sequence of Acts 13:48, which we have encountered repeatedly in previous lessons: "When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." Luke's account of the first systematic Gentile response to the gospel in Pisidian Antioch attributes the believing not to the persuasive skill of Paul's proclamation or to the favorable spiritual disposition of the Gentile audience, but to a prior divine appointment. The proclamation was the occasion; the appointment was the cause; and the two together produced the harvest.

The contrast in Acts 13 between the Gentile believers and the Jewish leaders who stirred up opposition is theologically instructive. Both groups heard the same proclamation; one believed and one did not. Luke does not attribute this difference to the quality of the preaching or to any observable difference in the audiences; he attributes it to the prior divine appointment of the believers to eternal life. This is the same apostolic pattern we have observed in John 6:37–39, in Romans 9:15–16, and in 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14: the differential response to the same gospel proclamation is explained by a prior divine act, and that prior divine act is the ground of the missionary's confidence that the proclamation will not return void. The mission of the church does not create the elect; it gathers them. The mission does not produce the sovereign purpose of God; it executes it. And that distinction is the precise distinction that makes the missionary's labor both urgent and confident rather than frantic and uncertain.

V. The Free and Universal Gospel Offer

Election Does Not Diminish the Sincerity of the Gospel Call

A. The Great Commission and Its Unconditional Scope

One of the most important things to establish in the relationship between election and evangelism is that the doctrine of election does not in any way qualify, limit, or condition the scope of the church's missionary mandate. The Great Commission, as Christ states it in Matthew 28:18–20, is the most comprehensive missionary charge in the New Testament, and it is grounded not in the scope of election but in the authority of the risen Lord: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB 1995).

The scope of the commission is unrestricted: "all the nations," "every creature" (Mark 16:15), "to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). There is no qualifier that limits the mission to "the nations where the elect happen to be located" or to "those who have been appointed to eternal life" or to "communities that the Spirit has prepared to receive the gospel." The commission is unconditional in its scope, urgent in its tone, and grounded in the comprehensive authority of the risen King. The church does not go to the nations because she knows which nations contain the elect; she goes to all nations because the King has commanded it, and the King's command is a sufficient warrant for the mission regardless of what the divine decree may or may not have ordained for the specific communities to which she is sent.

The relationship between the Great Commission and election is not that election determines where the church goes; it is that election guarantees that the church's going will not be in vain. Without the doctrine of election, the Great Commission is an invitation that might, in principle, be universally refused, in which case the church's mission would be a magnificent but ultimately futile act of proclamation into a void of universal rejection. With the doctrine of election, the Great Commission is a commission to gather a people that God has already determined to save through precisely this means, and the certainty of the gathering is as secure as the sovereign purpose that decreed it. The election does not qualify the scope of the mission; it guarantees its ultimate success.

The command of Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (NASB 1995), addresses the same universal scope with an even more expansive phrase: "all creation." The gospel is to be proclaimed to every human being in every corner of the created order, and the preacher who carries this commission has no basis for withholding it from any person on the grounds that she suspects him to be non-elect. She cannot know who is or is not elect; she is commissioned to preach to all. The doctrine of election is, in practice, irrelevant to the scope of the church's proclamation precisely because the church is not sent to the elect specifically but to all nations universally, trusting that the sovereign God who ordained the mission has also ordained the elect who will respond to it within every nation and people and tongue.

B. The Sincerity of the Universal Gospel Call

The Westminster Confession of Faith, in chapter X, section 4, makes the point about the sincerity of the universal call with careful precision: "Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved: much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the laws of that religion they do profess. And, to assert and maintain that they may, is very pernicious, and to be detested." The Confession affirms both that the non-elect receive a genuine call through the ministry of the Word and that they do not truly come to

Christ. The call is genuine; its reception is determined by the effectual calling of the Spirit, which works only in the elect.

The sincerity of the universal gospel call, what the Reformed tradition has called the external call or the general call, as distinguished from the internal or effectual call that is restricted to the elect, is grounded in the genuine sufficiency of Christ's atoning work for all who receive it and the genuine divine desire, expressed in the revealed will, that none should perish. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, NASB 1995). This statement of God's compassionate desire is addressed to the believing community ("toward you"), but its substance, that God does not wish for any to perish, expresses a genuine divine attitude toward the human race that makes the gospel offer to all people without distinction a sincere expression of divine compassion rather than a divine mockery.

The Reformed tradition has consistently maintained both the genuine sincerity of the universal gospel offer and the sovereign efficacy of the particular effectual call, holding them together without collapsing either into the other. The preacher who offers Christ to every hearer is not being dishonest when she says "God loves you and Christ died for sinners", she is expressing the genuine divine compassion of the revealed will, the genuine sufficiency of Christ's atoning work, and the genuine readiness of God to receive all who come to Him through Christ. The fact that the effectual call, which produces the saving response to that offer, is extended only to the elect does not make the offer itself less genuine; it means that the response to the offer depends on something more than the quality of the offer, it depends on the sovereign work of the Spirit who applies it to those for whom it was ordained.

Spurgeon's famous dictum, cited in the outline of this lesson, captures the practical resolution of this tension with characteristic wit and theological precision: "If God had painted a yellow stripe on the back of the elect, I would go around lifting up shirts. But since He has not, I must preach the gospel to every creature." The preacher does not know who is elect; the preacher has been given a commission to offer the gospel to every creature; and the preacher fulfills that commission with the confidence that the sovereign God who has "many people" in every city will use the gospel proclamation to gather them. The yellow stripe has not been painted, and the preacher rejoices in its absence, not because election is uncertain, but because the absence of visible identification is precisely what makes the universal proclamation both necessary and gloriously indiscriminate in its offer.

VI. The Pastoral Balance

Preaching with Divine Confidence and Pleading with Human Urgency

A. The Twofold Posture of the Gospel Preacher

The pastoral balance that the doctrines of grace produce in the effective gospel preacher is not a balance between two competing impulses that must be carefully managed lest one overwhelm the other; it is a balance that flows naturally and necessarily from a proper understanding of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human means. The preacher who has understood that God ordains both ends and means, and that the proclamation of the gospel is the ordained instrument through which the elect are gathered, will inevitably and simultaneously preach with divine confidence (grounded in the sovereignty of the God who has decreed the success of the

mission) and plead with human urgency (grounded in the genuine responsibility of every hearer to respond to the gospel that has been proclaimed to them).

These two postures are not in tension; they are the two sides of the single coin of a properly Reformed missiology. The divine confidence is not the arrogant certainty of someone who thinks she can predict which hearers will respond; it is the settled assurance of someone who knows that the gospel she is proclaiming is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16, NASB 1995) and that the God who ordained the proclamation has also ordained a people in every city and nation who will be brought to saving faith through it. She preaches with confidence not because she is confident in her own ability to persuade but because she is confident in the God who “causes the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:7) and in the promise that His Word will not return to Him empty (Isaiah 55:11).

The human urgency is equally necessary and equally grounded in biblical truth. Every person who hears the gospel bears genuine responsibility for his response to it; the invitation is genuine; the offer is real; the command to repent and believe is addressed with full moral seriousness to every hearer without distinction. The preacher who stands before her congregation and offers Christ does so as a genuine ambassador (2 Corinthians 5:20) of the King whose compassion for the lost is real, whose offer is not conditional on the hearer’s election, and who “now declares to men that all people everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30, NASB 1995). This urgency is not diminished by the doctrine of election; it is intensified by it, because the preacher knows that the proclamation she is offering is the ordinary means by which the elect are reached, and that her faithfulness or negligence in the task has real consequences for real people whose salvation depends, in the ordinary course of God’s providential ordering of means, on whether someone has gone to them and told them.

The classic expression of this dual posture is found in Paul’s own preaching in Acts and his own theological reflection in his letters. In Acts 17:30, he declares with unqualified urgency: “God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent.” The command to repent is addressed to “all people everywhere”, no qualification, no restriction to the elect, no condition on the hearer’s spiritual state. In Romans 9:16, he declares with equal unqualified confidence: “It does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.” Both statements are genuinely Paul’s; both are genuinely biblical; and both are genuinely consistent with each other in the framework of a theology that holds divine sovereignty and human responsibility without collapsing either.

B. Election Guarantees the Mission’s Ultimate Success

The final and most important thing to be said about the relationship between election and evangelism is the one that the outline of this lesson states with the precision of a thesis: without the doctrine of election, evangelism is merely an invitation that might be refused by everyone; with the doctrine of election, evangelism is the appointed means by which God’s sovereign purpose will infallibly be accomplished. This claim deserves careful unpacking, because it is the positive theological case for why the doctrines of grace are not the enemy of mission but its ultimate guarantee.

Without election, the outcome of the missionary enterprise is genuinely uncertain. If salvation depends ultimately on the free decision of the human will, if there is no prior divine determination that specific individuals will believe, and if the Spirit’s work in every heart is genuinely resistible by every hearer, then the missionary’s labor is an invitation into a genuinely open contest whose outcome is determined by the aggregate of billions of individual

human free choices. The gospel might, in principle, be universally rejected; no one might believe; the mission might fail. In a world of thoroughgoing libertarian free will with no prior divine election, the possibility of complete missionary failure, the failure of the gospel to produce a single genuine convert in any corner of the world, is logically conceivable. This is not a comfortable thought for anyone who takes the missionary mandate seriously.

With the doctrine of election, this possibility is foreclosed. The sovereign God who ordained that a people from every tribe and tongue and nation would be gathered to Himself through the proclamation of the gospel (Revelation 5:9; 7:9) has also ordained every missionary, every sermon, every personal witness, and every translated Scripture that will be used as instruments of that gathering. The mission will not fail because it cannot fail: the God who has determined the end has also determined the means, and the means are sufficient and effective for the gathering of every soul the end encompasses. The missionary labors in the confidence that no effort expended in faithful gospel proclamation is wasted, that every seed sown in the soil of sovereign providence will bear the fruit that God has ordained for it, and that the final gathering of the redeemed from every corner of the earth is as certain as the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of the God who decreed it.

This confidence does not produce passivity; it produces endurance. The missionary who knows that the harvest will come, who is not wondering whether God's sovereign purpose will succeed but only when and through what instruments it will succeed in this particular field, can endure the years without visible fruit, the hostility without despair, the suffering without bitterness, and the apparent failure without the loss of faith. This is precisely what Paul describes in 2 Timothy 2:10: he endures all things "for the sake of those who are chosen", for people whose salvation is certain, whose gathering is ordained, and whose coming to faith is the appointed goal of all his labor. The elected people in every city are the reason the missionary goes, the reason she stays, the reason she suffers, and the reason she endures. Sovereign grace does not hinder mission. It guarantees its success and sustains those who pursue it.

"For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory."

2 Timothy 2:10, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Hyper-Calvinism	A theological position, associated primarily with certain English Particular Baptist circles of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (figures such as John Gill and John Brine in their most extreme expressions), that draws the illegitimate inference from the doctrine of election that the church is not warranted to offer Christ freely and indiscriminately to all hearers or to engage in missionary proclamation to the unevangelized. Hyper-Calvinism mistakes the relationship between divine sovereignty and human means, treating the certainty of the elect's salvation as a reason for missionary passivity rather than missionary confidence. The Reformed tradition consistently distinguishes itself from hyper-Calvinism and repudiates the inference it draws.
External Call	The sincere, universal proclamation of the gospel to all who hear it, by which God commands all people everywhere to repent and believe, and genuinely offers salvation to all who will receive it through faith in Christ. Distinguished from the internal or effectual call, which is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit by which He applies the external call to the hearts of the elect, producing the regeneration and faith that result in salvation. The external call is addressed to all; the effectual call reaches only the elect (Westminster Confession X.1–4). The sincerity of the external call is grounded in the genuine sufficiency of Christ's atonement and the genuine divine compassion expressed in the revealed will.
Effectual Call	The sovereign, internal work of the Holy Spirit by which He applies the external gospel proclamation to the hearts of the elect, illuminating their minds, renewing their wills, and overcoming their resistance so that they come freely and willingly to Christ in repentance and faith. Distinguished from the external call by its efficacy (it infallibly produces its intended effect), its restriction (it is extended only to the elect), and its nature (it is an act of sovereign grace, not merely the presentation of a persuasive offer). The effectual call is the Spirit's execution of His covenantal commission in the pactum salutis and the instrument by which the elect's appointment to eternal life (Acts 13:48) is accomplished in time.
Means of Grace	The divinely ordained instruments through which God conveys saving and sanctifying grace to His people: specifically, the Word of God (preached, read, and taught), the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and prayer. The doctrine of means of grace establishes that God's sovereign purpose in salvation is accomplished through, not despite, the ordinary creaturely instruments He has ordained. The preaching of the gospel is the primary means of grace through which the effectual call reaches the elect (Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:21), and the doctrine of election, rightly understood, establishes the necessity of these means rather than their superfluity.
Gospel Offer	The sincere, genuine, and universal invitation of the gospel, by which God offers salvation in Christ to all who will receive it, without restriction based on perceived spiritual capacity or electoral status. The gospel offer is addressed to all hearers of the gospel without exception and is not qualified by the hearer's election or non-election, which is unknown to the human preacher. The sincerity of the offer is grounded in the genuine compassion of the revealed will (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4) and the genuine sufficiency of Christ's atoning work for all who come to Him by faith. The Reformed tradition consistently affirms the free and sincere gospel offer alongside the doctrine of particular election.
Great Commission	The charge given by the risen Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47–48; Acts 1:8) to make disciples of all nations, baptize, and teach. The Great Commission is the primary charter of the church's missionary mandate and is grounded not in the scope of election (which the preacher does not know) but in the comprehensive authority of the risen King over all nations. The commission is universal in its scope ("all the nations," "every creature," "the remotest part of the earth"), unqualified in its urgency, and

	accompanied by the promise of the Lord's presence that makes it both possible and certain of ultimate fulfillment.
Missio Dei	Latin: "mission of God." The theological concept that the mission of the church is grounded in and flows from the prior mission of the triune God Himself, the Father sending the Son, the Son accomplishing redemption and sending the Spirit, the Spirit applying redemption and empowering the church's witness. The missio Dei framework grounds the church's missionary mandate not in human religious enthusiasm or ecclesiastical obligation alone, but in the prior and continuing missionary activity of the sovereign God who is gathering His elect from every tribe and tongue and people and nation through the proclamation of His church.
Particular Redemption	Also called Definite Atonement or Limited Atonement, the third point in the Canons of Dort (TULIP). The doctrine that Christ's atoning death was designed to secure the certain salvation of the elect rather than to provide a merely possible salvation for all people without distinction. Particular redemption is grounded in the covenant of redemption (the Father giving a specific people to the Son) and in the logic of the atonement's efficacy (if Christ died for all, all would be saved; if not all are saved, Christ did not die for all in the same saving sense). The doctrine is consistent with the free gospel offer, since the offer of Christ's saving work is genuine for all who receive it by faith, regardless of whether they were specifically among those for whom it was designed.
Free Offer of the Gospel	The Reformed doctrine that the gospel is to be offered freely, sincerely, and without restriction to every hearer, regardless of their perceived spiritual condition, electoral status, or moral background. The free offer is grounded in the command of God (Acts 17:30; Mark 16:15), the genuine sufficiency of Christ's work for all who come to Him, and the genuine divine compassion that does not wish for any to perish (2 Peter 3:9). The Westminster Shorter Catechism Q.86 describes the gospel as "offerring" Christ and His grace to sinners. The Canons of Dort explicitly state that the gospel promise is to be "offered without distinction or discrimination to all persons and people to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel."
Common Grace	The undeserved, non-saving goodness of God toward all people without distinction, including the non-elect: the gifts of natural life, the restraint of sin, the provision of common blessings (sun, rain, food, civil order), and the extension of the gospel offer to those who will not ultimately receive it. Distinguished from saving or special grace, which is the sovereign, effectual, transforming grace extended to the elect that infallibly produces regeneration, faith, and salvation. Common grace explains why the preacher can offer the gospel with genuine compassion to all hearers, since the compassion reflects a genuine divine good will toward all that coexists with the sovereign decree of particular election.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the doctrines of grace and the missionary mandate of the church are not merely compatible but organically and necessarily connected, that sovereign grace is not a theological system for those who prefer intellectual rigor over evangelistic passion, but the only theological foundation that can sustain missionary labor across years and decades without the support of visible results. The missionary who believes in sovereign election does not need a harvest to keep going, because she knows that the harvest will come; she needs only faithfulness to the means that the sovereign God has ordained. The missionary who does not believe in sovereign election is ultimately dependent on results for her motivation, and when results do not come, as they do not come, often for years, in the hardest fields, she has nothing left to draw on but her own diminishing reserves of human determination.

We must believe, equally, that the free and universal gospel offer is not a theological concession grudgingly made by the Reformed tradition to avoid the charge of making God disingenuous, but a genuine and joyful expression of the compassionate character of the God who desires all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4) and who commands that the gospel be proclaimed to every creature without exception (Mark 16:15). The Calvinist preacher who offers Christ to every hearer is not being strategically vague about the secret decree; she is faithfully expressing the revealed will of a God whose compassion is genuine, whose offer is sincere, and whose command to repent and believe is addressed with full moral seriousness to every person who hears it.

We must also believe that the hyper-Calvinist inference, that sovereign election makes the use of means unnecessary, is not merely exegetically wrong but spiritually dangerous, because it refuses the blessing that God has attached to the means He has ordained. William Carey did not go to India because he had concluded that the doctrine of election required him to; he went because the Great Commission commanded him to, because the sovereignty of God assured him that his labor would not be in vain, and because the God who has people in every nation had ordained that they would be reached through missionaries. To refuse the means on the grounds of confidence in the sovereign purpose is to refuse the very instrument by which the sovereign purpose is executed, and to deny oneself the privilege of being the beautiful feet through which the good news is carried to those who wait to hear it.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

The emotional register that the relationship between election and evangelism should produce in the believer is the one that Paul himself models in 2 Timothy 2:10: endurance for the sake of those who are chosen. The knowledge that there are elect people in every city and nation who have not yet heard the gospel should produce in the believer's heart not a cold theological observation but a burning urgency, the urgency of someone who knows that the harvest is real, that the laborers are few (Matthew 9:37), and that the fields are white with grain that will rot in the ground if no one goes to gather it. The doctrine of election does not cool this urgency; rightly received, it intensifies it, because it establishes that the urgency is not misdirected. There are people out there, in your neighborhood, in your city, in the nations that have never heard, who belong to God by election and who will be brought to faith through proclamation, and the question of whether you will be among those through whose faithful witness the Spirit works is a question of genuine consequence.

Desire, above all, the Paul-like combination of theological conviction and personal sacrifice that the doctrines of grace, properly received, are designed to produce. Paul endured beatings, imprisonments, and sleepless nights not in spite of his doctrine of election but because of it. He could not stop, because the elect were out there and they needed the gospel he had been commissioned to bring them. This is the posture toward which the study of sovereign grace in election should be moving every believer who truly receives it: not into the armchair of theological satisfaction but onto the road of gospel proclamation, willing to spend whatever is necessary, endure whatever is required, and go wherever the commission leads, in the confidence that the sovereign God who has many people in every city will use the means of faithful proclamation to bring them in.

Desire also the freedom from result-dependent anxiety that the doctrines of grace provide. The preacher who measures the success of her proclamation by immediate, visible results is a preacher who will be broken by the hardest fields, where decades of faithful gospel witness produce few visible converts. The preacher who measures success by faithfulness to the divinely ordained means, who knows that the harvest belongs to God and that her responsibility is to plant and water with all the faithfulness and skill and love she can bring, is the preacher who can endure seven years in Bengal like William Carey, two years in Crossweeksung like David Brainerd, and years of apparent fruitlessness in whatever field God has assigned, without the loss of gospel confidence or missionary joy. Sovereign grace liberates the preacher from the tyranny of results and returns her to the freedom of faithfulness.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read 2 Timothy 2:10 slowly and let its logic settle on you: Paul endures all things for the sake of those who are chosen. Ask yourself: do you know any unchurched, unbelieving people in your life whose salvation you are actively and persistently pursuing through prayer, witness, and relationship? Are you enduring anything for their sake? Paul's endurance was extraordinary (beatings, imprisonment, hardship); yours may be more modest (awkward conversations, social discomfort, the discipline of consistent prayer for those who are indifferent). But the principle is the same: the elect must be reached through human witness, and the question is whether you are willing to pay whatever the cost of faithful witness in your specific context requires.
- Study the life of William Carey through his *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792), the founding document of the modern Protestant missionary movement, written by a thoroughgoing Calvinist. Note how Carey's argument for missionary obligation is built on the very logic of this lesson: God has ordained means as well as ends, the Great Commission is binding on the whole church, and the sovereignty of God in salvation is the foundation of missionary confidence rather than an excuse for missionary passivity. Ask: where in your own life has the hyper-Calvinist inference, "God will save His people without my help", functioned as a rationalization for evangelistic negligence?
- Read Acts 18:1–11 as a complete narrative unit, paying attention to the emotional and situational context of Paul's vulnerability in Corinth (the preceding opposition in Thessalonica and Athens, the social isolation of arriving in a new city, the enormity of Corinth's moral and religious darkness) before noting the divine encouragement of verses 9–10. Ask: how does the specific content of God's encouragement ("I have many people in this city") address the specific source of Paul's vulnerability? And how does Paul's response (a year and a half of sustained teaching, v. 11) illustrate the principle that the assurance of divine election produces missionary intensity rather than missionary indolence?

- Evaluate your own church's evangelistic practice against the pastoral balance this lesson describes: preaching with divine confidence (grounded in the sovereignty of God), pleading with human urgency (grounded in the genuine responsibility of every hearer). Does your congregation's evangelism reflect both postures, or is it primarily one without the other? If primarily the urgent pleading without the theological confidence (Arminian evangelism that is passionate but fragile), what would it mean to ground it in the sovereignty of God? If primarily the theological confidence without the urgent pleading (Reformed intellectualism that is correct but cold), what would it mean to feel the urgency of the mission the way Paul felt it in 2 Timothy 2:10?
- Pray specifically and by name for five people in your life who do not yet know Christ. Pray for them with the dual theological reality of this lesson in view: that they are, apart from sovereign grace, as spiritually dead and as incapable of coming to Christ as every unregenerate person; and that the same sovereign God who converted you is entirely capable of converting them, and that He ordinarily does so through faithful witness and prayer. Ask the Spirit to use your witness as the instrument of the effectual call in their hearts, and to give you the courage, the patience, and the endurance to keep pursuing them with the gospel for as long as it takes, for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus.

Key Texts: *Romans 10:14–17; 2 Timothy 2:10; Acts 18:9–11; 13:48; Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14; 2 Peter 3:9; Isaiah 55:11; 1 Corinthians 15:58*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before studying this lesson, how did you personally perceive the relationship between the doctrines of grace and the church's missionary mandate? Did you assume that the two were in tension, or did you already understand them as complementary? If you have spent time in evangelistic or missionary contexts, has your experience confirmed or challenged the claim that sovereign grace fuels rather than hinders mission? Can you identify any specific moments in your own ministry or witness where the doctrine of election provided encouragement rather than paralysis?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Romans 10:13–17 carefully. What is the universal promise that Paul cites in verse 13 (“whoever will call”)? What chain of necessary preconditions does Paul trace in reverse order in verses 14–15? At each step in the chain (calling, believing, hearing, preaching, sending), what is the logical relationship between that step and the one that follows? What does Paul cite from Isaiah 52:7 in verse 15, and what does the image of “beautiful feet” contribute to the theology of missionary proclamation? What conclusion does verse 17 draw, and how does “faith comes from hearing” establish the ordained relationship between the proclamation and the faith that results in salvation?
- Read 2 Timothy 2:8–10. What has Paul endured (v. 9)? What does he give as his reason for enduring it (v. 10)? Note the specific phrase: he endures for “those who are chosen”, not “those who might choose,” not “those who are seeking God,” but those who are already chosen by the sovereign God. What does this phrase reveal about Paul's understanding of the relationship between his missionary suffering and the divine election of specific people? How does this verse function as the precise opposite of the hyper-Calvinist inference (election makes missionary labor unnecessary)?
- Read Acts 18:1–11. What is the broader narrative context of Paul's arrival in Corinth (summarize his preceding experiences in Thessalonica and Athens from Acts 17)? What does the Lord say to Paul in the vision (vv. 9–10), and what are the two specific grounds of encouragement He provides? What is the immediate practical effect of this vision on Paul's ministry in Corinth (v. 11)? How does the content of God's encouragement, specifically, the phrase “I have many people in this city”, function as a direct expression of the doctrine of election applied to the specific missionary context?
- Read Matthew 28:18–20. What is the ground of the Great Commission stated in verse 18 (“all authority has been given to Me”)? What is the scope of the commission (“all the nations”)? What are the three commanded activities (go, baptize, teach)? What promise accompanies the commission (v. 20)? How does the scope of the commission (“all nations”) compare with the scope of election (specific individuals from all nations)? And how does the authority and presence of the risen King (v. 18, 20) provide a ground for the commission that is independent of the preacher's knowledge of who is or is not among the elect?
- Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14. What does Paul state God has done from “the beginning” (v. 13)? What is the stated means or instrument through which this election is accomplished in time (v. 14, “through our gospel”)? What is the goal toward which the calling through the gospel aims (v. 14, “that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”)? How does the sequence in this passage, election (v. 13), followed by calling through the gospel (v. 14), map onto the argument of this lesson that God ordains both ends and means?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that the fundamental error of hyper-Calvinism is the confusion of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human means, treating the certainty of the end as a reason for the superfluity of the means, rather than as a reason for confidence in their necessity and efficacy. Evaluate this argument. Is there any legitimate theological concern behind the hyper-Calvinist inference, i.e., is there a sense in which the certainty of God's sovereign purpose should produce humility about the necessity of human means? Or is the hyper-Calvinist inference simply a logical non sequitur that misunderstands the nature of divine sovereignty? What specific biblical texts most directly refute it?
- The lesson uses the Noah, Canaan, and Acts 27 illustrations to establish the principle that God ordains means as well as ends. Evaluate the strength of these illustrations for the specific case of election and evangelism. Are there disanalogies between these cases and the election/evangelism relationship that might weaken the parallel? For example: in the Noah case, God explicitly told Noah to build the ark; in the election/evangelism case, the Great Commission provides the explicit command. Is the force of the argument dependent on the existence of an explicit divine command to use the means, or is it broader?
- The lesson argues that 2 Timothy 2:10 provides the precise inverse of the hyper-Calvinist inference: where the hyper-Calvinist argues that the elect will be saved anyway and missionary labor is therefore unnecessary, Paul argues that the elect must be reached through proclamation and missionary labor is therefore indispensable. Trace this argument carefully. Does the phrase "for the sake of those who are chosen" in 2 Timothy 2:10 require that the chosen have not yet been reached by the gospel, or could it refer to those already converted for whose ongoing perseverance Paul endures? And how does either reading support the lesson's argument?
- The lesson engages Spurgeon's dictum ("If God had painted a yellow stripe on the back of the elect, I would go around lifting up shirts. But since He has not, I must preach the gospel to every creature"). What is the precise theological point Spurgeon is making? How does the absence of visible identification of the elect function as an argument for universal gospel proclamation? And what does this dictum reveal about Spurgeon's understanding of the relationship between the doctrine of election and the practice of free, universal gospel preaching?
- The lesson describes the "two-sided coin" of effective Reformed missiology: preaching with divine confidence and pleading with human urgency. How does each side of this balance relate to the two wills of God (decretive and revealed) that were discussed in Lesson 6? Specifically: is the "divine confidence" grounded in the decretive will, while the "human urgency" is grounded in the revealed will? And how does this mapping of missionary posture onto the two-wills framework help to explain why both postures are necessary and why neither can be collapsed into the other without distorting the apostolic missionary vision?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the doctrine of election liberates the preacher from result-dependent anxiety and provides a motivation for endurance that outlasts visible fruit. Have you experienced this liberation in your own evangelistic or ministry practice? If your evangelism has been primarily result-dependent, motivated by visible responses and discouraged by apparent failure, what would it mean to reground it in the sovereignty of the God who has many people in every city and who uses faithful proclamation as the instrument of their gathering? What specific practical difference would this theological shift make in the way you engage in witness?

- William Carey's Enquiry is described in the lesson as the founding document of the modern Protestant missionary movement, written by a thoroughgoing Calvinist. The contrast between Carey's missionary passion and the hyper-Calvinist passivity he was opposing is one of the most instructive episodes in the history of the relationship between theology and mission. Research Carey's argument in the Enquiry and his missionary practice in Bengal. How specifically did Carey connect his Calvinist theology to his missionary commitment? And what do you find most compelling about his model for those who share his theological commitments in the present day?
- The lesson argues that the Great Commission's scope ("all nations") is independent of the preacher's knowledge of who is elect. In practice, however, decisions about where to invest missionary resources must be made, and the question of where the Spirit is moving and where there appears to be receptivity to the gospel is a legitimate missiological consideration. How do you hold together (a) the universal scope of the commission, (b) the principle that the Spirit's sovereign work produces the elect's receptivity, and (c) the practical necessity of strategic missional discernment? Does the doctrine of election provide any guidance for missional strategy, or is it theologically neutral with respect to where the church directs its specific missionary efforts?
- The lesson concludes that sovereign grace does not hinder mission, it guarantees its success and sustains those who pursue it. Evaluate this conclusion against the actual practice of your own church or ministry context. Is the church's evangelistic practice fueled by the theology of sovereign grace, or is the theology of sovereign grace treated as an academic matter with no practical implications for evangelism? What would it look like for the doctrines studied in Unit 2, the pactum salutis, election, reprobation, and the missionary implications of election, to be organically connected to a living, urgent, sustained, and joyful practice of gospel proclamation in your specific context?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's prayer time by reading Romans 10:13–17 slowly and meditatively, not as a theological argument to be analyzed but as the apostle's vision of the chain of grace by which a world of sinners is brought to call on the name of the Lord. The chain runs from God's side (the universal promise of verse 13, "whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved") through the human links of sending, preaching, hearing, believing, and calling. You are somewhere in that chain, you have been sent, or you have heard, or you believe, or you have called on the name of the Lord and been saved. Give thanks for the specific links in the chain through which the gospel reached you: the person who sent the missionary, the missionary who preached, the specific sermon or conversation or book through which you heard, and the God whose sovereign effectual call made your hearing produce faith. The chain that brought you to Christ is the same chain that is reaching others right now.

Pray with specific thanksgiving for the beautiful feet, the specific people in your own life who carried the gospel to you. Name them if you can: the parent or grandparent who prayed for you for years, the friend who had the courage to speak the gospel into your life, the pastor whose faithful preaching became the instrument of the Spirit's effectual call, the missionary whose translated Scripture you read. Each of these people was a link in a chain that God had been forging from eternity, the chain that runs from the covenant of redemption through the election of the Father through the accomplished redemption of the Son through the effectual call of the Spirit through the faithful witness of His people to the specific moment when faith came to you through hearing the word of Christ. Thank God for every link.

Pray for the beautiful feet that will carry the gospel to those who have not yet heard. Pray for the missionaries currently serving in hard fields, by name if you know them, by geography if you do not, with the theological confidence of Acts 18:10: God has many people in every city and nation to which they have been sent. Ask God to use their faithful proclamation as the instrument of the effectual call in the hearts of those He has appointed to eternal life in those places. Ask for their endurance, for the willingness to suffer all things for the sake of those who are chosen, the way Paul endured all things for exactly that reason. And ask God to raise up more laborers for the harvest, in the specific awareness that the harvest is real, certain, and sovereignly ordained, and that the only thing lacking is the laborers through whom God has chosen to accomplish it.

Pray for the people in your own life who do not yet know Christ. Not with the anxious urgency of someone who is not sure whether the God of the universe is able to save them without her help, but with the confident urgency of someone who knows that the God of the universe has specifically ordained the gospel proclamation as the means of the elect's gathering and who is therefore accountable for her faithfulness in that proclamation. Name specific people. Ask the Spirit to use your witness, your prayers, your love, and your faithful proclamation of the gospel as the instruments of the effectual call in their lives. And ask for the endurance to keep at it, not for months but for years, if necessary, for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus.

Close with a corporate reading and declaration of Isaiah 55:10–11, the great Old Testament promise that grounds the New Testament confidence in the efficacy of the proclaimed Word: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it" (NASB)

1995). This is the missionary's anchor: the Word of God that goes forth, in the sermon, in the personal conversation, in the translated Scripture, in the written testimony, will not return empty. It will accomplish what God desires. It will succeed in the matter for which He sent it. The beautiful feet that carry it are, in carrying it, the instruments of a purpose that cannot fail. And the God who promises this is the God who has many people in every city and who has sent His church to find them. Go.

"So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."

Isaiah 55:11, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Romans 10:14–17; 2 Timothy 2:10; Acts 18:9–11; 13:48; Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14; 2 Peter 3:9; Isaiah 55:10–11; 1 Corinthians 15:58

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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