

*Introducing Our Faith: The Living God*  
Worksheet for Week 6  
God's Electing<sup>1</sup> Grace and Our Free Will

This week, we turn to questions that many Christians find most vexing. Simply put, does God choose us or we do we choose him? How can our salvation be a gift from God and yet still be our free decision? If God chooses, then does that mean some people are predestined to an eternity without God? This worksheet will introduce you to the issues and provide you with a structured set of daily Bible readings related to these questions.

*The Electing Grace of God*

“God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Ephesians 1:4). In the opening chapter of his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul underscores the biblical witness that the free grace of God is the only basis for renewal, reconciliation, and redemption. The Jews understood that they had done nothing to deserve God's delivering of them from their Egyptian masters. Likewise, the first Christians understood that their own faith in Jesus was a gift from God; that they were adopted as God's children solely because of God's freely given love for them. Unfortunately, this free gift of God has often been misconstrued to mean that God chooses some persons to be saved – even before their birth – and others to be condemned to hell. It isn't very difficult to see how such an understanding could drive some people to see God as an arbitrary monster. Such a picture of God's grace was completely unacceptable to John Wesley. Even John Calvin's beliefs on this are often misconstrued, or carried to an unfortunate extreme.

For the New Testament writers, God's election is not a logical exercise in figuring out exactly how it is that persons are reconciled to God. Rather, it is doxological – praising and thanking God for his covenant faithfulness and love of his people! If you begin to think that the doctrine of election is telling you that God arbitrarily rejects people, ask yourself whether that truly squares with the love of God expressed in Jesus Christ! But God's grace is not cheap; we can turn away from God if that is our choice.

*Our Free Will*

The Bible is quite clear that our faith in God is a gift from God. The Bible is also clear that we are responsible for our choices; that our choice for God or not for God is freely made. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16; see also 3:18). Adam and Eve ate freely. Those who turn away from God now are “without excuse” (see Romans 1:18-23). If we deny the reality of our choices then we make nonsense of verses like, “Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life” (Rev 22:17). In his last sermon to the people of God, Moses urged them to “choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19). The biblical witness is consistent from beginning to end. We are choosing adults and are responsible for our choices, including our decision as to whether to become part of the people of God.

*So which is it? Are we chosen or free? Or both?*

Like so many of God's wonders, in my view, we go wrong when we think that God's ways and all the mysteries of creation must submit to our understanding. The choice here is a false choice – we are chosen **and** we are free. If we overemphasize God's election, we inevitably end up at an arbitrary, even monstrous God, who selects some people to go to heaven and consigns the others to hell. If we overemphasize our own free will, we diminish our dependence on God and the wondrous gift of God's free grace.

So often, these issues seem to revolve around words like “predestination” and “foreknowledge.” We want to figure out which came “first.” But what if time isn't what our common sense tells us it is? What if time is malleable and relative? In class, we'll talk about how our understanding of time can shape our theology. Perhaps the mysteries of time can help us affirm the glories of God's electing grace and our own free choice for God.

---

<sup>1</sup> By “electing,” we mean choosing. God's election of Israel was his choosing of them to be the agents of his renewal of creation. The people of God are God's elect. I use the technical term here because it so often shows up in books and articles about God and salvation.

## Bible Readings for Week 6

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in these readings?

<p><b>Day 1 Romans 9:6-29 God's right to choose! It is God who forms his covenant people.</b></p>	<p><b>Day 2 Romans 8:28-39 Because our salvation is God's work, his purposes will not be thwarted.</b></p>
<p><b>Day 3 Ephesians 1:3-14 Try reading this as a hymn of praise, not a theological textbook.</b></p>	<p><b>Day 4 John 3:1-21 Nicodemus visits Jesus</b></p>
<p><b>Day 5 Philippians 2:1-18 (esp. v. 12-13) Working out our salvation while God works in us.</b></p>	<p><b>Weekly Prayer Concerns</b></p>