How Did We Get Here?

Lesson 4 · Grace, Free Will, and Predestination — Student Notes

Based on the 17-slide Lesson 4 animated draft. Each section follows the presentation order. Scripture references are provided for further reading.

Slide 1 Grace, Free Will, and Predestination

This lesson follows Lesson 3's question about salvation: if salvation is by grace, how does God's grace relate to human belief and responsibility? Our recurring question is whether saving grace enables faith or ensures it.

Read: Acts 16:30–31; Ephesians 2:8–9

Notes:

Slide 2 What Does Scripture Teach?

Begin with Jesus: no one comes to Christ unless drawn by the Father, yet people are addressed as responsible for refusing him. Paul describes salvation as a gift, not an achievement. These texts give the terms of the debate without by themselves settling every later interpretation.

Read: John 6:44; John 5:40; Ephesians 2:1–10; Romans 9:16

Notes:

Slide 3 Augustine and Pelagius

Pelagius emphasized divine commands and human moral capacity; Augustine argued that sin damages the human will so deeply that grace must first enable any saving response. Their disagreement centered on original sin and whether unaided humanity can turn to God. Augustine (354–430); Pelagius (c. 354–after 418).

Read: Romans 5:12–19; John 6:44; Ezekiel 18:30–32

Notes:

Slide 4 The Council of Orange (529)

Orange rejected the notion that the beginning of saving faith arises independently of grace. It taught that even our first turning toward God depends upon God's prior action. Its teaching does not simply equal every later Calvinist position on predestination.

Read: John 6:44; Philippians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 4:7

Notes:

Slide 5 Martin Luther (1483–1546)

In The Bondage of the Will (1525), Luther maintained that fallen people make real choices but cannot, by unaided effort, generate saving faith. God's Word and Spirit produce faith. Later confessional Lutheranism also affirms that saving grace may be resisted.

Read: John 8:34–36; Ephesians 2:1–9; Romans 8:7–8

Notes:

Slide 6 John Calvin (1509–1564)

Calvin agreed that sinners cannot turn themselves to God, and taught that God's inward effectual calling brings the elect willingly to faith. This doctrine does not describe conversion as coercion; it describes a change in the person's heart and desires.

Read: John 6:37, 44; Ezekiel 36:26–27; Romans 8:29–30

Notes:

Slide 7 Election and Reprobation

Calvin argued that election and reprobation belong to God's eternal decree. Romans 9 is central to his case, particularly mercy, hardening, and the potter-and-clay image. Other Christians read Romans 9–11 primarily against the history of Israel and the Gentiles, and question whether it proves the eternal condemnation of particular individuals.

Read: Romans 9:10–23; Romans 11:25–32; 1 Peter 2:8

Notes:

Slide 8 Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609)

Arminius agreed that fallen people cannot initiate salvation without grace. He argued that God's preceding grace enables repentance and faith yet may be resisted; election is related to foreknown, grace-enabled faith. Arminianism is therefore not the same as Pelagianism.

Read: John 12:32; Acts 7:51; 1 Timothy 2:4

Notes:

Slide 9 The Synod of Dort (1618–1619)

After Arminius's death, the Remonstrants summarized their objections to strict Reformed predestination. The Synod of Dort rejected their position and articulated the Reformed response concerning election, corruption, Christ's work, grace, and perseverance.

Read: Romans 8:29–30; Ephesians 1:3–11; John 10:27–29

Notes:

Slide 10 Calvinism and Arminianism

Both traditions maintain that salvation begins with God's grace and is not earned. In classic Reformed theology God's effectual saving grace brings about faith; in classical Arminianism prevenient grace makes faith genuinely possible without ensuring the response. Ask: "Does grace enable faith or ensure faith?"

Read: Ephesians 2:8–9; John 6:44; Acts 7:51

Notes:

Slide 11 Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

Edwards distinguished natural ability (the faculties to think and choose) from moral inability (the unwillingness of a sin-inclined heart). In Freedom of the Will (1754), he argued that people choose according to their prevailing inclinations. Grace transforms the heart, so coming to Christ becomes a willing act.

Read: John 3:19–20; Romans 8:7–8; Ezekiel 36:26

Notes:

Slide 12 J. I. Packer (1926–2020)

Packer described divine sovereignty and human responsibility as an antinomy: both are taught in Scripture although we cannot fully explain their relationship. Unlike Edwards's philosophical account, Packer asks readers to retain both teachings without requiring a complete resolution.

Read: Acts 2:23; Acts 4:27–28; John 6:37

Notes:

Slide 13 Where Christians Stand Today

Reformed thinkers discussed include Packer, Sproul, Piper, Mohler, and Schreiner. Arminian/Wesleyan voices include Olson and Walls. Lutheran, Catholic, and Provisionist approaches are not simply halfway positions: they differ over grace, freedom, and the need for a prior inward transformation. Leighton Flowers represents Provisionism, not all Southern Baptists.

Read: Ephesians 2:8–9; John 6:44; 1 Timothy 2:4

Notes:

Slide 14 God's Desire and God's Decree

Scripture expresses God's desire for repentance, proclaims his sovereign purposes, and shows divine purpose and human guilt together in Christ's crucifixion. These examples support a distinction between what God approves and what he ordains; they do not alone prove every theory of reprobation.

Read: 1 Timothy 2:4; Ezekiel 18:23; 2 Peter 3:9; Ephesians 1:11; Isaiah 46:10; Acts 2:23; Acts 4:27–28

Notes:

Slide 15 What Does Scripture Clearly Teach?

Four anchors deserve emphasis: humanity needs God’s saving action; salvation is gracious, not merited; people are commanded to repent and believe; and people remain accountable for their actions. The challenge is holding the full range of texts together rather than treating one verse as the entire doctrine.

Read: Ephesians 2:1–9; John 6:44; Mark 1:15; Acts 17:30; Romans 9:14–23

Notes:

Slide 16 What Scripture Leaves Us Debating

Major interpretive questions remain: does grace merely enable faith or effectively secure it? Is election principally individual, corporate, or both? How do God’s revealed saving desire, his decree, and human responsibility relate? Distinguish biblical assertions from subsequent theological explanations.

Read: Romans 9–11; Ephesians 1:3–11; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9

Notes:

Slide 17 What Must I Do to Be Saved?

Return to the jailer’s question and the apostolic answer: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” The long historical debate asks how God makes that response possible and what his grace accomplishes; it must not obscure the gospel invitation itself.

Read: Acts 16:30–31; John 3:16; Romans 10:9–13

Notes:
