

WHY ARE SOME SAVED AND NOT OTHERS?

Introduction

God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. As much as God would have us know in this life of the spiritual He discloses to us in His Word. Yet, not all of God's will and purposes are revealed to us here in time. In the Formula of Concord we speak of the "secret, concealed, inscrutable foreknowledge of God." Paul writes, "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?'" Paul's quoting in Rom 11:33-34 of Is. 40:13-14 reminds us that in both Old and New Testament times this is a fact. While there is no doubt that God has revealed more to us in this New Testament age than in the Old, yet there is still the "secret, concealed, inscrutable" which God alone knows.

There are questions then which will only be answered when we get to heaven. In the meantime we go by what He has revealed in His Word. And how vitally important that is in the face of all the nonsense and doubt of man. As we search the Scriptures we remember that of first importance is the Christ revealed there as the loving Savior of this lost world. John 5:39 In our digging into the Word we remind ourselves also of our fallibility and limit of understanding. As we consider the question, 'Why are some saved and not others?' we ask the Spirit to grant us understanding.

Our Christian Religion is one of Blessed Paradoxes

The word 'paradox' comes from two Greek words that mean 'alongside' and 'to think'. This word means something that is outside of our thinking, and it may contradict human reasoning. With our limited human reasoning ability there are many things in our Christian faith that are beyond our understanding. It is not so much that these are contrary to reason as above reason. If you think about the reach of your arm, there are things that are naturally out of your reach. Or think about the ceiling limits of an apartment. There is of course more above the ceiling of your apartment, though you cannot go through the ceiling to reach there. It is impenetrable. You know there is something up there, though you cannot reach it. So that which is above you is unknown to you. In our Christian religion it is faith that is the touchstone and allows us to go above the natural ceiling of reason or the normal grasp of a man. For instance, "he(God) has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." Ecc. 3:11 We know that time is a limit and that there is eternity beyond what we can know from our senses. God has given us this knowledge. But we cannot know the extent from beginning to end.

Reason fails to understand again and again the things of God. This is because reason was not made to. Think about creation. God simply said and it was done. He started with nothing and made everything out of nothing. Reason says 'how can that be, for all that I have seen has been started with something and proceeded slowly to enlarge.' And truly astounding it is that God says and it is! Or think about our God Who is three in one. 'One' our reason can grasp as it can 'three', but three in one is beyond it, a mystery. As

Paul says in describing the work of Christ, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion." I Tim. 3:16 And what about our Christ who is seated at the right hand of the Father (Eph. 1:20) and yet with us always (Mt. 28:20)? Reason exclaims that this cannot be for a body is in one locality not two. And how can holy, righteous God accept such sinful misfits as us? It is in Christ. And on and on the paradoxes go with answers centering in the Lord Jesus and His love imparted to us through the Word.

We grasp the mysteries and paradoxes of our Christian religion by faith. And faith is not merely knowing, but knowing and accepting. And beyond that it is trusting, relying upon and having confidence in. Perhaps in Eden we could have understood, but not now with our sin corrupted mind. Even without the corruption the mind falls short of knowing. I do not know what will happen tomorrow. I do not know what is around the corner of the building. In our human condition such we have to see to know and grasp. The mind of God however is beyond our puny understanding as the gigantic universe is beyond a pinhead. Even if we were not sin-fettered we would have to grasp that we are not God. Even the angels do not know what God knows. They are His servants to whom He discloses what He will.

What the Answer to the Question is not.

Some say that the answer to why some are not saved is that they were condemned in eternity just as the elect were chosen in eternity. This is a neat bit of reasoning, but contrary to what the Word teaches. In Eph. 1:3-6 it is clearly taught that God chose or predestined some to eternal life. The Word never says that God did the same for many to eternal damnation. Some try to prove the reasonableness of this false teaching with Rom 9:22-23. The "vessels of mercy... he has prepared beforehand for glory." But the "vessels of wrath" are simply "made for destruction." This is not beforehand. They are 'self' made for destruction. They fit the mold but God did not choose them for destruction.

Some have even taught that God elected, chose for eternity those who He foresaw would believe and persevere and on and on it goes as reason grasps for straws.

Some say that those who are saved resist less or cooperate more or are inclined to believe. Paul resisted all he could. As he wrote to the Ephesians, we are dead in our trespasses and sins. Eph. 2:1 When can a dead man cooperate? Even a light reading of Scripture sees that man is not inclined to believe. And this is verified as we look at our own human nature. There is no factor in man that disposes him to believe while in other men that factor is absent.

Some even are so blatant as to claim that there is some good in some men that disposes God to save them as opposed to others. Read Rom. 3:10-18 to dispel that folly. While Bildad had some things wrong, he did have this right. "How then can man be righteous before God? How can he who is born of woman be clean? Behold, even the moon is not

bright and the stars are not clean in his sight; how much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man, who is a worm?" Job. 25:4-6 Man, whoever he is, is sinful by nature

And cannot be saved except by the grace of God. All of us are consigned together in the muck of sin by our own inclination, intent, purposes and actions.

Man Rejects / God Converts

How these two statements fit together is beyond our logic. We accept simply what the Word teaches.

It is totally man's fault that he rejects the grace of God. Consider just a few passages.

- Jn. 3:19 "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. " It is not just doing evil, but loving darkness. The problem and fault is deep within man. We seek to cover up our sin, to dress it up so to speak that it doesn't look so dreadful. And we seek to deny that it is sin, calling it by another name like 'differences' or 'other ways of doing things' or maybe 'shortcomings.' But whatever wording man may use, the deeds are evil.
- Mt. 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" Despite God's repeated reaching out to His people they pushed Him away in His prophets and then in His Son. And these were the people who had "the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ"! Rom. 9:4-5
- Acts 7:51 "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you." And these were God's people not heathen that Stephen was speaking to and for this he was made the first of the martyrs.
- I Cor. 2:14 "The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." Without the earnest of the Holy Spirit there cannot be understanding in faith. He is the guarantee of salvation within us as He works with our spirit. But unregenerate man only rejects.
- Eph. 4:18 "They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart." This vile power within man originated in Eden in the rejection of God and it has been passed down from generation to generation to all mankind. We have in a hymn "from sire to son the bane descends and over all the curse impends."

As opposed to this power to reject in man there is the power of God in His divine favor in Christ Jesus. He draws men to Him.

- Phil. 2:13 “for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” From the previous passages it should be apparent that this salvation and the following sanctification can only be done by God in man.
 - Eph. 2:1 “And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins.” God gives life in conversion, a new life that could not exist otherwise.
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- James 1:18 “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.”
 - 1 Pet. 1:3-4 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”
 - 1 Cor. 12:3 “... no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.” We say in the explanation to the third article of the Apostles Creed that the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts and ... on it goes. God does the converting.

Just Look

Just look at the time of the worldwide flood in Noah’s day. The people had ample time to repent, but they would not such that when the floodwaters came there were only eight believers. This points up man’s power to reject and God’s reaching out. Man’s heart did not change either after the flood and after the flood the imagination of his heart was evil. Gen. 6:5, 8:21

Just look how God loved Israel. God loved them through all the periods of their history: patriarchs, Moses and Joshua, judges, united and divided kingdoms, exile and return. All day long God held out His hand, but Israel turned away again and again. These people had all the advantages and they in the end said ‘Crucify him’ of the Savior.

Just look how we are told in Revelation that the judgments fall to bring about repentance, but “nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their immorality or their thefts” 9:21, “... and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.” 16:9

Just look how we see this all in the world around us. And sin naturally draws down upon itself judgment, as garbage draws flies and disease. “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.” 1 Jn. 2:16 Little wonder that man rejects.

And the clincher has to be when we honestly look at ourselves personally. We add our own testimony to the fact of a black heart in man.

The Mysterious Mix in this Time of Grace

The willfulness of wicked man and the overwhelming love of God exist together in this time we live in, but they don't really mix. One is the cause of eternal damnation and the other is the cause of eternal salvation. In Acts 13:46 Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly saying, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.' Notice that the people 'thrust' it from them.

It is little wonder that this happens to His apostles, as it happened to our Lord Himself. Read Lk. 4:14-30 and see how they also thrust the love of God from them. Here is the willfulness of wicked man shown even when the Lord of life comes to them. It is man's fault he is damned. Look at these Galileans and what they would do.

In Is. 55:8-9 we are reminded that God knows and we do not. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." This chapter begins with the glorious Gospel proclamation and invitation, "Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Vv. 1-2 This is the same Gospel that was held out to the people all the day long. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." 1:18 And against this we have the backdrop of the people who reject, "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged." 1:4 Man has the power to reject and does. God has the power to convert and does. And He knows what He is doing.

We just thank the Lord every day that we are wonder of wonders lost in the ocean of His love, overwhelming, amazing grace that found me when I sought Him not.

Three Passages that Give us the Reality of the Present Situation

As far as we can know, God gives us a picture of the reality of this time in several passages. Beyond these we cannot go into the "secret, concealed, inscrutable."

Romans 1:20-22 "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened." With the vastness of the starry sky and the complexity of the earth we see the power of one who made it all. Man's mind

comprehends that someone had to have started this all and true reason says it could not have been puny man. Evil corruption of the mind through the sinful flesh and the devil denies the eternal God and settles for an imitation. And when we look at all the pitiful imitations they are truly the products of futile thinking and senseless minds that are darkened. Whose fault is it then that man does not believe? God has put before man ample evidence through a natural knowledge that He has been present and is present. But man puts on a blindfold. He is without excuse when he turns to the image of a creature rather than the Creator. Man willingly accepts the lie in place of the truth about God. And still to this world God sends men like Paul who are eager to preach the Gospel, as God also would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth through that revealed in the Word. I Tim. 2:4

Acts 14:16-18 "In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. With these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them." Paul and Barnabas at Lystra find that man likes to have a god in his own image, so the people try to worship the two missionaries. God does good to all. This is further evidence that He not only exists but that part of His character or nature is goodness and kindness. Our Lord who is the embodiment of goodness on earth taught, "... he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." Mt. 5:45 God giving food and gladness even to the evil of this earth shows how He is loving and would embrace all in His love also in Christ Jesus. But man's corrupted mind likes a god that he can control. What better god then than a man who can be dealt with as men see fit. Basically it is a matter of making man into god. Ah, but how fickle man is, because before long instead of worship of Paul as a god they stone him in Lystra. Man rejects even as God sends His emissaries of grace.

Acts 17:24-27 "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, and that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him." Some could say that at Lystra it was the uneducated and ignorant who chose to worship the false. On the Areopagus it was the educated and those who used their minds greatly who chose to worship the false. Paul points out that the evidence of God's giving of life and His governing of this world is ample evidence to seek after a god who is greater than one that could be invented from man's mind. Man should not be satisfied with the imitations which very obviously to reason cannot give life, let alone govern all this vast world. God wants to be found "that they might feel after him and find him." And He is patient, "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." 2 Pet. 3:9

Appendix

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We, as Lutherans, have always taught this paradox. Following are some readings on this subject.

- I p.1f. Strassburg Formula, Theologians – Moerlin, Chemnitz, Selnecker, Kirchner, Apology in Book of Concord
- II p.4f. Election by WELS/ Am. Lutherans
- III p.6f. Election by LCMS/ Am. Lutherans
- IV p.9 Hoenecke 19th Century Am. Lutheran
- V. p. 10 Formula of Concord /Triglotta

*The Testimony of the Strassburg Formula of Concord, Moerlin, I
Chemnitz, the Apology of the Book of Concord, Selnecker, and
Kirchner*

(From *Conversion and Election* by F. Pieper [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1913], pp. 57-60.)

In the *Strassburg Form of Concord*, of 1563, we read: "However, why this grace, or this gift of faith, is not bestowed on all by God, while He calls all to Himself, and, according to His infinite goodness, calls them with serious intent, this is a mystery that is hidden from us and known to God alone. It cannot be searched out by any man's reason, and must be reverently contemplated and worshiped, as is written: 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!' Rom. 11. And Christ thanks God the Father because He has hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes, Matt. 11. Still we are not to become offended at these hidden ways of the divine will when we are troubled in conscience, but we must look at the will of God that has been revealed in Christ, who calls all sinners to Himself." (See Loescher, *Hist. Mot.*, II, p. 288.)

Joachim Moerlin: "It has been revealed to us that God will save only those who believe in Christ, and that unbelief is of our own doing. However, the judgments of God, viz., why He converts Paul, but does not convert Caiaphas, why He restores fallen Peter while He leaves Judas to despair, are hidden from us." (See *Schluesselburg, Catalogus Haereticorum*, V, p. 228.)

[Martin] Chemnitz: "What is the reason why Judas is not received, and does not obtain forgiveness of sin when he repents of what he has done? What is there lacking in his contrition and repentance that shuts him out from grace? He had not faith in Christ, he did not believe that God is gracious and forgives sin. That is the damaging fault in him. For where there is no faith, there is no grace of God nor forgiveness of sin. Now, our Catechism says in the Third Article of our Christian Creed that no man can by his own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him, but the Holy Ghost must induce him to believe; for faith is a gift of God. How, then, does it come that God does not implant such faith in the heart of Judas, so as to enable him also to believe that Christ could help him? At this point we must turn back with our questioning and say (Rom. 11): 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!'

We cannot and may not search out this matter, and we must not stray too far in such musings, but engage in all these matters in such a way as not to rush headlong into the sin of tempting God, lest God withdraw His hand from us and suffer us to sink and perish. For if we do this, we shall fall into sin upon sin, and shall become merged in sin so deeply, that it becomes impossible for us to return, and we cannot regain our former standing, as happened to Judas.” (*Sermons on the Lord's Passion*, IV, pp. 17 f.)

Apology of the Book of Concord (Chemnitz, Selnecker, Kirchner): “Nor does the Christian Book of Concord deny that there is in God reprobation, or that God casts some away. Hence the Book of Concord does not go counter to the dictum of Luther, in his treatise *De Servo Arbitrio* against Erasmus, that this is the acme of faith, to believe that this same God who saves so few persons is nevertheless the most gracious God, and to be careful not to ascribe to God the real cause of such casting away and condemnation of men, which is the purport of the teaching of our adversaries, and to hold that, when this question is mooted, all men must put their finger on their lips, and, first, say with the Apostle Paul (Rom. 11): *Propter incredulitatem defracti sunt*; and, Rom. 6: ‘The wages of sin is death.’ In the second place, when this question is raised, why our Lord God does not convert all men by His Holy Spirit, and make them believers, which He could easily do, we must again say with the Apostle: *Quam incomprehensibilia sunt iudicia ejus et impervestigabiles viae ejus!* But we must by no means charge God with having willfully and really caused the casting away and damnation of those who do not repent. However, if they urge this point, *viz.*: If you accept the choosing of the elect, you must also accept this other fact, *viz.*, that in God Himself there is from eternity a cause why men are cast away, even regardless of their sin, etc., we reply that we are in no wise minded to make God the cause of reprobation (which really has its origin, not in God, but in sin), nor shall we ascribe to God the real cause of the damnation of the wicked, but we shall take our stand on the saying of the Prophet Hosea, chap. 13, where God says: ‘O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.’ Nor shall we try – as we heard Luther saying above – to search out our heavenly Father as far as He is a hidden God and has not revealed Himself. For, though we try, the matter exceeds our ability, and we cannot comprehend it; the more we engage in such questioning, the further we get away from God, and the more we begin to doubt His gracious will regarding ourselves. Thus, the Book of Concord does not deny either that God does not operate in all men alike; for in all ages there have been many whom He did not call publicly through the office of the ministry. But our adversaries shall never succeed in convincing us that for this reason we must conclude,

as they do, that God is the real cause of the casting away of these people, and that in His bare counsel He has decreed to reprobate and cast them away eternally, even regardless of sin. For when we approach this depth of the mysteries of God, it is sufficient if with the Apostle Paul in Rom. 11 we say: 'His judgments are unsearchable,' and, I Cor. 15: 'Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' All that is beyond this will be revealed to us by our Savior Christ Himself in the life everlasting." (*Apol. of the Book of Cone.* Dresden, 1584, fol. 206 f.)

[*Nicolaus Selnecker*]: Though God could make willing all who are unwilling, yet He does not do this; and He has the most righteous and wise reasons why He does not do this, which reasons it does not behoove us to search out. We rather owe Him most cordial thanks because by the preaching of the Gospel He has called us to the communion of the life everlasting, and has enlightened our hearts by faith." (*In omnes Epp. D. Pauli apost. Commentar.* Leipzig, 1595, fol. 213.)

Timotheus Kirchner: "Since faith in Christ, now, is a special gift of God, why does He not bestow it on all? We reply: We should reserve the discussion of this question until life eternal, and should meanwhile rest satisfied that God will not have us seek out His secret judgments (Rom. 11): 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments!'" (*Enchiridion*, p. 143.)

APPENDIX

Of course, if I want to enjoy my election contained in the doctrine of the special decree, I must step in through the door of God's gracious will towards all mankind. We do not want to set aside God's general decree. The expression, that the general decree is the basis of the special, is acceptable when rightly understood, but I do not accept that expression when used to signify that the special and the general decree are one and the same. Scripture speaks, besides the general will of God, of the predestination of individuals in *nineteen passages*. But God does the same work on the lost that He does on the elect; He makes no difference. Between the general and the special will there is no chasm. (*Adolph Hoenecke, comments made at the Milwaukee Free Conference in 1903; quoted in J. L. Neve, A History of Lutheranism in America, edited by John M. Drickamer and C. George Fry [Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1979], p. 152*)

Translator's Preface

This article was originally published in 1910 in Vol. 7 of the *Theologische Quartalschrift*. As the article itself implies, the writers of these theses intended them to be a clear statement on the teaching of election for the Wisconsin Synod. Of course, disputes over this particular doctrine plagued the early years of the American Lutheran Church, so the desire for an accurate exposition of the Biblical doctrine of election is certainly understandable.

I.

The teaching of election to everlasting life is not the same as that in [Ezekiel 33:11](#), [II Peter 3:9](#), [I Timothy 2:4](#), and other places where God's revealed will of universal grace is clearly written in many places in the Scriptures. For that reason, the teaching of election is a matter of faith for all Christians.

II.

Election consists in this—that God out of perpetual compassion and because of the previously procured merit of Christ and his prepared intention before the laying of the foundations of the world chose and ordained us, whom he blessed at that time with all kinds of spiritual blessings in heavenly goodness previously procured through Christ. He chose and appointed us to obedience, to the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, and to adoption to himself in the sanctification of the Spirit and in the faith of the truth, so that we might receive salvation.

Therein the phrase *eo ipso* was included, to call us through the Gospel, justify us through faith, seal us with the Holy Ghost, sanctify us in the faith, preserve us until the end, and lead us to everlasting life and glory.

In this intention, provision, election, and prescribing, God made us his own possession so securely that we will certainly be saved and we will not be able to be led astray in the end. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

III.

This everlasting intention, provision, election and prescribing, God also faithfully carries out at that time for us, and by this he allowed us to know the secret of his will, called us with a holy calling, gave us a new birth into a living hope, made us righteous and acceptable through faith, and sealed us with the Holy Ghost. By this he sanctifies us through the Holy Ghost and keeps us in faith through his power unto everlasting life.

IV.

All of this (namely the everlasting intention, provision, election, and prescribing of God for our righteousness, and his faithful fulfillment of everything for us) is not in any way a result of good in or with us, neither an alleged unintentional opposition from us, nor our foreseen faith or perseverance in faith, but entirely the opposite: The eternal election of God, as it is described above, and its fulfillment at that time, is by pure grace in Christ, who is the reason for everything spiritually good in us: namely for everything that is not opposed to God, for all faith and all perseverance in faith, and also alone for our entire salvation and everything that belongs to it. This election powerfully creates, works, promotes, and perfects, as it is written in [Hosea 13:9](#), "Israel, you bring disaster upon yourself, because your salvation stands alone in me."

V.

As the eternal election of God itself [in one sense] concerns only us Christians, and [in another sense] concerns everyone, so also the doctrine of election speaks only about Christians and concerns only the pious children of God, who stand in faith and in sanctification, and who with

fear and trembling produce their salvation, but yet it concerns everybody somewhat as well. This doctrine is given to us:

1. For comfort against all trials—that we should recognize namely from the holy Gospel, which is given to us in the external Word, Baptism, and Holy Communion, and which does not lie, that we, not by chance, but by the eternal intention, provision, election, and prescribing of God, came to the Gospel as to the method through which God wants to and will fulfill for us our eternal election. Upon this our salvation is so firmly grounded that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.
2. For humility—that we recognize more and more thoroughly that we have been brought to the Gospel, to Christ, to adoption and to the inheritance of everlasting life (and until now have been preserved in these things) without all of our worthiness, merit, or assistance, yea despite all of our unworthiness, guilt, and opposition, by the pure grace of the God of compassion—and that we more and more ardently learn to praise God for his grace.¹
3. For holy zeal—that we all the more eagerly procure our salvation with fear and trembling, striving after that which is on high, making use of the Gospel for our edification, pursuing sanctification and the fear of God, taking off the old man and putting on the new, striving after eternal life with patience in good works, and also making our calling and election certain.

VI.

This doctrine of election stands as a security for the simple faith along with the teaching of the sincerity of God's will that all people be saved. It also stands as a security for the teaching of the converting and soul-saving power of the Word and the Sacraments, along with the teaching of temporary believers, and of the righteous condemnation of unbelievers. All of these teachings are in divine harmony. This doctrine of election along with these other teachings likewise comes from the same God, who does not contradict himself, and who is clearly revealed in Holy Scripture. Our present intellect however is not able to recognize this harmony of teaching, since this harmony has not been revealed to it. Therefore the doctrine of election was not allowed to be made for the objective of intellectual speculation, be it that one outside the Gospel seeks to discover the hidden council and will of God, which is unfathomable, concerning his own or another man's election or non-election—or that one wants to place this teaching in rational harmony with the teaching of the temporary believers or of the teaching of God's will that all people be saved or of the condemnation of the unbelievers—which itself cannot be accomplished without contradiction of Scripture in one or another of these teachings.

Comment: The above representation of the doctrine of election was given at the particular request of the president of our synod. We give this over to the public with his consent, so that it can be used wherever a need for it exists.

1. The unbeliever applies this teaching to himself, as he does the entire Gospel as a whole, so that from this teaching he infers his damnation. This he does simply through his unbelief. That is the law message of the conscience, but that message receives this false form as a result of unbelief, so that it is mixed in with the doctrine of election. In this respect, damnation is entirely a natural human condition, and his thinking is correct, and the Scriptures support it in [Romans 9:17-21](#). But one should keep this out of the doctrine of election because the Scriptures do not speak of these things as the same teaching.

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XXV The Doctrine of Election, or Predestination

Fred Kramer

Pages 534-538

THESIS IV

Holy Scripture does not solve the discrepancy which exists for the human mind between the doctrine of universal grace and the doctrines of election and of salvation by grace alone. Therefore we confess that we are here confronted with a mystery for the solution of which we must await the light of eternity.

Man hears that there is an election from all eternity in Christ unto salvation. He hears that salvation is solely by grace. Man's works are ruled out. He hears that there is no predestination to damnation, but that God would have all men to be saved, that it is man's perverse will which brings about his damnation. And at once the human mind protests. All this is not logical. It cannot be. There is a discrepancy here. Universal grace, man reasons, and the doctrine that man is saved only by grace cannot both be true. If universal grace be true, then "only by grace" must fall; if "only by grace" be true, then universal grace must fall.

This reasoning of the human mind has for many centuries divided the Christian Church. There are those who declare themselves willing to accept the doctrine of universal grace and confess that Christ died for all men and that God desires earnestly that all men should be saved. They also accept the Scriptural teaching that those who are lost are lost by their own fault, their willful, stubborn unbelief. However, in what they may regard a justifiable effort to harmonize Christian doctrine with human reason and logic, they teach that all who are saved are saved because God saw in them something that favorably distinguished them from others, perhaps some lesser guilt or some greater willingness to accept the Gospel or the omission or oppression of willful resistance. So Melancthon wrote: "Since the promises of the God are universal and there are not contradictory wills in God, there must necessarily be in us a cause of the distinction, why Saul was rejected,

David accepted, that is, there must be a difference in the behavior (conduct, actio) of the two" (Loci, ed. Detzer I, 74). Because these errorists ascribe to man a faculty to apply himself to the grace of God and thus to work together with God in their conversion, they are called synergists.

In their effort to save the day for human reason, these synergists have subverted the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, since they teach man to trust in himself, in some good quality within himself rather than in the grace of God. If this doctrine is carried out to its full consequences, Christianity ceases, for Christianity is essentially the doctrine of the free grace of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:28-28).

We reject the synergistic solution of the question Cur alii, alii non? Why some, not others? as contrary to Scripture and subversive of the Christian faith.

Another solution of this difficulty has been proposed. It is the solution of Calvinism already referred to. Calvinists reason, "Man is saved purely by God's grace. Yet many people are lost. The reason why they are lost must therefore be that God did not want them to be saved, His grace did not include them because He had decreed from eternity to surrender them to eternal damnation. Even if the Gospel is preached to them, God has not the purpose of converting them, since He has predestinated them to eternal death."

This Calvinistic teaching, indeed, also presents a solution for the human mind, even as does the teaching of the synergists on this point. But it is a solution which is diametrically opposed to God's Word, which, as we saw, teaches that God has elected no one unto damnation, but that He earnestly desires the salvation of all men.

Where, then, is the solution of the difficulty if neither the solution offered by the synergists, who deny the "only by grace," nor that offered by the Calvinists, who deny universal grace, is the correct one?

Our answer is: "Holy Scripture does not solve the discrepancy which exists for the human mind between the doctrine of universal grace and the doctrines of election and of salvation only by grace." This claim is literally true. Holy Scripture makes no attempt to remove this difficulty for the human mind. It constantly teaches side by side both universal grace and salvation only by grace.

And lest we grow too insistent in demanding a solution of the difficulty, Holy Scripture warns us against that very effort. In the last verses of Rom. 11, at the end of a long dissertation on the doctrine of the election of grace, Paul exclaims: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed to Him again? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

The true Lutheran Church in obedience to this warning of Holy refuses to try to harmonize the doctrine of universal grace and of election and salvation by grace alone. The true Lutheran Church lets both these doctrines stand side and teaches them both with equal emphasis, fully conscious of the fact that according to the judgment of our corrupt reason these doctrines cannot both be true. We believe them both, and we teach them both because god's Word teaches them both.

And we believe and teach them all the more gladly because we know from experience that sinful human beings need both these doctrines to set their troubled consciences at rest. Were we to sacrifice the doctrine of universal race, as Calvinists have done. we could never for one moment be sure that we are among God's elect. Then we would always be haunted by that dreadful fear that we might be predestined to damnation, or, as milder Calvinists have put it, among those whom God's mercy passed by. No, our hope of salvation rests upon the rock of universal grace. I know that God wants me saved, because He wants all men saved.

Again, were we in the interest of human reason to sacrifice the doctrines of election and of salvation by grace alone we could never be sure of our salvation. We would always be looking for something in ourselves on account of which God might have elected and saved us. We would be looking into our own sinful hearts and lives and would find there, not assurance, but doubt and despair. The aroused conscience needs both of these seemingly contradictory doctrines, universal grace and by grace alone.

Therefore, as Scripture so constantly and so clearly teaches both these doctrines, so do we joyfully accept and teach them both, fully conscious of the fact that to our reason they may sem inharmonious and contradictory, but conscious also of the fact that they fill our souls' deepest need for the comfort of God's universal, all-sufficient grace.

And the harmonizing of these two doctrines? We are not worried about that. Though we cannot now see how they harmonize with each other, we leave that to God. We are sure that we shall behold their perfect harmony, which now escapes us, in the light of eternity, when we, who now see and know in part, shall know as also we are known, because we shall see our gracious God and Savior face to face.

"In these and similar questions Paul (Rom. 11 :22ff.) fixes a certain limit to us how far we should go, namely, that in the one part we should recognize God's judgment (for He commands us to consider in those who perish the just judgment of God and the penalties of sins). For they are well-deserved penalties of sins when God so punishes a land or nation for despising His Word that the punishment extends also to their posterity, as is to be seen in the Jews. And thereby (by the punishments) God in some lands and persons exhibits His severity to those that are His (in order to indicate) what we all would have deserved and would be worthy and worth, since we act wickedly in opposition to God's Word (are ungrateful for the revealed Word and live unworthily of the Gospel) and often grieve the Holy Ghost sorely, in order that we may live in the fear of God and

acknowledge and praise God's goodness, to the exclusion of, and contrary to, our merit in and with us, to whom He gives His Word, and with whom He leaves it, and whom He does not harden and reject.

"For inasmuch as our nature has been corrupted by sin and is worthy of, and subject to, God's wrath and condemnation, God owes to us neither the Word, the Spirit, nor grace; and when He bestows these gifts out of grace, we often thrust them from us and make ourselves unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46). And this His righteous, well-deserved judgment He displays in some countries, nations, and persons in order that when we are placed alongside of them and compared with them (and found to be most similar to them), we may learn the more diligently to recognize and praise God's pure (immense), unmerited grace in the vessels of mercy." (Triglot, pp. 1081-1083.)

A. Hoenecke's Four Points I V

- A. A. The Scriptures not only teach that the number of the elect is small, but also that the elect are individual, completely definite persons.
 - B. B. It is to be observed further that it wasn't first in time that God made this decree to choose some out of the fallen human race. Rather, his election is an eternal election.
 - C. C. This eternal election of God stands unshakably firm. Those whom God has chosen are inevitably saved; in contrast, no one is saved who does not belong to the number of the elect.
 - D. D. Finally, God's Word also teaches us that God has elected his own not only to salvation, but in general he has elected them to be his temple, so that they should belong to him and be his possession already in this life. We see therefore: God has not chosen his elect immediately from hell into heaven, from damnation to salvation, but he has chosen them in Christ and through Christ. He has chosen them and thus wants them in time to travel on the path ordained by him, in Christ, to salvation.¹¹¹
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of Concord teaches the following regarding predestination: "If we wish to think or speak correctly and profitably concerning eternal election, or the predestination and ordination of the children of God to eternal life, we should accustom ourselves not to speculate concerning the bare, secret, concealed, inscrutable foreknowledge of God, but how the counsel, purpose, and ordination of God in Christ Jesus, who is the true Book of Life, is revealed to us through the Word, namely, that the entire doctrine concerning the purpose, counsel, will, and ordination of God pertaining to our redemption, call, justification, and salvation should be taken together, as Paul treats and has explained this article Rm 8:29ff.; Eph 1:4ff., as also Christ in the parable, Mt 22:1ff., namely, that God in His purpose and counsel ordained:

1. 1. That the human race is truly redeemed and reconciled with God through Christ, who, by His faultless obedience, suffering, and death, has merited for us the righteousness which avails before God, and eternal life.
2. 2. That such merit and benefits of Christ shall be presented, offered, and distributed to us through His Word and Sacraments.
3. 3. That by His Holy Ghost, through the Word, when it is preached, heard, and pondered, he will be efficacious and active in us, convert hearts to true repentance, and preserve them in the true faith.
4. 4. That He will justify all those who in true repentance receive Christ by a true faith, and will receive them into grace, the adoption of sons, and the inheritance of eternal life.
5. 5. That He will also sanctify in love those who are thus justified, as St. Paul says. Eph. 1:4.
6. 6. That He also will protect them in their great weakness against the devil, the world, and the flesh, and rule and lead them in His ways, raise them again when they stumble, comfort them under the cross and in temptation, and preserve them.
7. 7. That He will also strengthen, increase, and support to the end the good work which He has begun in them, if they adhere to God's Word, pray diligently, abide in God's goodness, and faithfully use the gifts received.
8. 8. That finally He will eternally save and glorify in life eternal those whom He has elected, called, and justified.

And in this His counsel, purpose, and ordination God has prepared salvation not only in general, but has in grace considered and chosen to salvation each and every person of the elect who are to be saved through Christ, also ordained that in the way just mentioned He will, by His grace, gifts, and efficacy, bring them thereto, aid, promote, strengthen, and preserve them" (FOC, *Triglot*, 1068-1069).