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A STUDY GROUP EXAMINES THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION
AND ITS RELATION TO THE MINISTRY
OF WORD AND SACRAMENTS

A Major Applied Project Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

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ABSTRACT

Rokke, Ralph M. **A Study Group Examines the Doctrine of Election and Its Relation to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments.** Does a pastor's view of the doctrine of election influence his ministry? Two different forms of the doctrine of election have long been taught among Lutherans. The first form leads pastors to preach the Gospel and to administer the sacraments trusting that God works through them to save sinners. The second form, the *intuitu fidei* form, encourages pastors to believe that sinners have free wills and that it is a pastor's job to persuade sinners to become Christians.

PREFACE

The following Major Applied Project (MAP) completes the requirements of the writer for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. This MAP is entitled, A Study Group Examines the Doctrine of Election and Its Relation to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments.

Although the doctrine of election was a matter of intense interest in the Lutheran Church in the late 1800's, it has been of little interest to most in the church in recent years, and so it is natural to ask: Why choose this topic? Why do a Doctor of Ministry project on the doctrine of election in the 1990's? There are several reasons.

First, the writer is a pastor in a church body which is undergoing painful, doctrinal controversies related to the doctrine of election and to its implications for ministry. That church body is the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC).

Among the questions being vigorously debated in the AFLC are the following: Does prevenient grace free the will of unregenerate sinners so that they can freely choose to stop opposing God, and so that they can allow themselves to be directed by converting grace? Is salvation the product of God's grace alone, or does the assenting will of a sinner also contribute something to it?

Does a person who was baptized as a child and who remains in his

baptismal grace still need to be converted? Should pastors, evangelists, and Bible teachers urge people to receive Christ and be converted, even though those people have remained in baptismal grace? Are the sacraments means of grace which define the work of the office of the ministry, or is the real work of ministry persuading sinners to make free will decisions to receive Christ?

These are the theological questions swirling in the writer's church body. All of the questions relate to the doctrine of election, and many of them were debated more than one hundred years ago during the Election Controversy. Therefore, for this writer and for his church body, what was old is new again.

The second reason of the writer for choosing the topic of election is that he has personally experienced a considerable degree of opposition to his ministry for the sake of the doctrine which he holds. The writer holds to the first form of the doctrine of election and to the theological understanding of the office of the ministry which is consistent with it.

That means that the writer believes that God elected certain sinners unto salvation, before the creation of the world, based upon the good pleasure of His own will and upon the merits of Jesus Christ, and not upon anything foreseen in the sinners themselves. The writer also believes that salvation is *sola gratia*, by God's grace alone, and that the office of the ministry is the work of rightly preaching God's Word and rightly administering the sacraments. Through the Word and sacraments, God saves sinners.

The writer has opposed teaching in the AFLC which is synergistic. The synergistic teaching maintains that God elected particular sinners unto salvation because He foresaw that they would freely choose to trust in Christ. The synergistic view also suggests that the most important work of ministers is to persuade people's free wills to choose to believe in Christ. It suggests that in salvation a decision made by human will is more valuable than sacraments instituted by Christ. The writer rejects those ideas.

For holding such views and for expressing them strongly, the writer has been treated harshly by some in the AFLC. Nevertheless, by God's grace, he continues to serve as pastor of Faith Free Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, and seeks to conduct an evangelical ministry.

The doctrine to which this writer holds is that of the Formula of Concord. It is the theology which affirms that salvation is entirely a gift of God's grace alone, and that all of the glory for salvation belongs to God alone. The writer desires to confess this theology of Scripture and of the Lutheran Confessions with boldness and clarity, and that is another reason for his choice to do a MAP on the doctrine of election.

A third reason is that the doctrine of election is a blessed truth of God's Word, which brings much joy and assurance to Christians. Election is a part of the Gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ. As such, it is a never-ending source of joy to the people of God. The doctrine of election is an inherently valuable study for Christians.

For these three reasons, then, the writer chose election as the topic for his MAP. The writer hopes that this MAP will be a blessing to all who read it.

The MAP consists of three parts. Part I is a research paper examining what Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions teach about the doctrine of election. Part I also explores what various theologians have taught about election, and it looks at the relationship of the doctrine of election to other articles of doctrine. Part I traces how each of the two different forms of the doctrine of election, which have long been taught in the Lutheran Church, influences the practice of parish ministry. The research in Part I provides the exegetical and historical foundation for Parts II and III.

Part II consists of five studies on the doctrine of election. These studies were designed to be used with a study group of lay people in the writer's parish. The five studies were written for the purpose of seeing what the consequences would be of educating a group of lay people about the two different forms of the doctrine of election. It was the writer's conviction that when the doctrine of election is rightly taught in the church, then it is a great blessing to God's people.

Part III, in the writer's opinion, shows that that thesis is correct. Part III is a report concerning a study group on the doctrine of election which was conducted in the writer's church in Minneapolis. Part III describes how the study group was assembled, who took part in it, how the sessions were conducted, what educational

goals were pursued in each session, what feedback was received from the participants after the sessions were completed, and what the writer concluded about the project. Part III shows that studying the doctrine of election was indeed a blessing to the study group participants.

The writer received the help of many people in producing this MAP and would like to express appreciation. First, he acknowledges the loving and prayerful support of his wife, Kathleen, and daughters, Jennifer and Shari. Secondly, he acknowledges the gracious support and cooperation of his congregation, Faith Free Lutheran Church of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Thirdly, he expresses appreciation to each person who took part in the study group at Faith.

Finally, the writer acknowledges gratefully the guidance and encouragement received from several faculty members at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Dr. Thomas Manteufel served as academic advisor for the MAP. Professor John Oberdeck served as assigned reader, and Dr. Arthur Bacon, the Director of the Doctor of Ministry program, was always helpful and encouraging. To all, sincere thanks.

PART I. EXEGETICAL, HISTORICAL AND SYSTEMATIC CONSIDERATIONS
ON THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION AND ITS RELATION TO
THE MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENTS

CHAPTER I

THE THESIS: THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION INFLUENCES

THE WORK OF MINISTRY

The thesis of this paper is that a pastor's understanding of the doctrine of election greatly influences how he conducts his ministry. It either increases a pastor's respect for the doctrine that salvation is a gift of God's grace alone, given through the Word and the sacraments, or else it encourages a pastor to focus on human decisions as the final and decisive factors in any individual's salvation.

Rightly understood, the doctrine of election supports a ministry of Word and sacrament based upon the grace of God alone. Wrongly understood, it supports a ministry which seeks human cooperation in the work of salvation.

Early in the history of Lutheranism, there began to be a divergence among Lutherans in understanding of the doctrine of election. The divergence did not appear significant at first, but it increased over time. By the late 1800's two very different forms of the doctrine of election were being taught in Lutheran churches in America, and the two forms were leading to very different understandings of other doctrines and of the work of ministry.

In the 1870's and 1880's a sharp controversy over the two competing forms of the doctrine of election erupted in America. This painful struggle was called The Predestination Controversy or The Election Controversy. American Lutheranism was deeply divided, and

the divisions still exist as the church stands on the threshold of the twenty-first century.

The Predestination Controversy made it clear that two different forms of the doctrine of election were being taught in the Lutheran Church. According to the first form, God, before the creation of the world, foresaw man's fall into sin and planned for the sacrificial death of Christ as the grounds for saving sinners.

God also elected, or chose, particular sinners, whose existence He foresaw and whom He foreknew with a Father's love, to come to salvation through faith in Christ. In this view of the doctrine of election, God's election of sinners unto salvation causes the sinners subsequently to come to saving faith in Christ and to persevere in it.

The first form of the doctrine of election was that taught by Martin Luther and by Martin Chemnitz. It was also the form set forth in the Formula of Concord, the last great confessional writing of the Lutheran Church.

The second form of the doctrine of election likewise teaches that God foresaw the fall of man into sin before creation. It also teaches that God planned for the atoning death and resurrection of Christ for the salvation of sinners, but then it teaches that God looked ahead, through the ages of history, to foresee which sinners would come to faith in Christ as their Savior. According to the second form of the doctrine of election, God elected unto salvation all the sinners whom He foresaw as coming to faith in Christ.

This view is commonly called the *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election. That phrase means "in view of faith." This

view teaches that God elected or chose particular persons to be saved **in view of their faith**. In other words, God elected them because He foresaw that they would come to faith in Christ.

According to this view, the foreseen faith of particular sinners caused God to elect them to salvation. The *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election says that foreseen faith preceded election in the mind of God.

The second form of the doctrine of election began to develop in the Lutheran Church early in its history. Some form of it was taught by most of the Lutheran theologians of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Those early exponents of the second form, however, usually did not teach it with the strong synergistic implications which its later nineteenth century exponents attached to it.

The early teachers of the second form were apt to stress that the faith which God foresaw in sinners was His gift to them, and so salvation is by God's grace alone. The later, nineteenth century teachers, however, often taught that the faith which God foresaw in sinners is a product of their own free will and a "condition" which they fulfill for salvation. By so teaching, the latter group did damage to the Reformation principle of *sola gratia*, salvation by grace alone. They taught synergism in its place.

This paper is an attempt to explain, clearly and simply, the doctrine of election. This paper deals with the origins of the doctrine in the Bible, its history in pre-Reformation times, and its history in Lutheranism since the Reformation. Also attention is given

to the controversy of the late 1800's. The relationship of each of the two forms of the doctrine of election to other articles of Christian doctrine is examined, and the influence which each exerts upon Lutheran pastors in performing their ministries is explored.

The writer of this paper believes that the first form of the doctrine of election is the correct one. In this writer's opinion, only the first form is totally consistent with Scripture, with the Lutheran Confessions, and with the chief article of the Christian faith, which is that justification is by God's grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER II

SCRIPTURE AND THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

The doctrine that God elected or chose His saints unto salvation is taught repeatedly in the New Testament. The two main passages dealing with the doctrine of election are Romans 8:28-39 and Ephesians 1:3-14. Other important passages are Matthew 22:1-14, Mark 13:20-22, John 15:16, I Corinthians 1:27-31, II Thessalonians 2:13-14, James 2:5, and I Peter 1:1-2. Other passages also mention the doctrine.

The passages listed above will each be examined briefly. First, however, let us consider the Old Testament foreshadowing of the New Testament doctrine of election.

Election Foreshadowed in the Old Testament

Martin Luther once wrote:

Now God always works so that the figure or type appears first, and then the true reality and fulfillment of the type follows. So the Old Testament first comes forth as a type, and¹ the New Testament follows as the true reality.

This is true concerning election. The doctrine of election which is taught in the New Testament with regard to the Church of Jesus Christ was foreshadowed in the Old Testament by God's choosing of the nation of Israel.

¹Martin Luther, Luther's Works, 55 vols., gen. eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Muhlenberg/Fortress Press, 1955-1986), (Hereafter LW), 37:254 (Confession Concerning Christ's Supper, 1528).

Moses spoke to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 7:6-8a, and said:

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God.
The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the
peoples on the face of the earth to be his people,
his treasured possession.

The LORD did not set his affection on you and
choose you because you were more numerous than
other peoples, for you were the fewest of all
peoples.

But it was because the LORD loved you . . . ²

As this passage shows, the nation of Israel was chosen by God to receive His special blessing. Above all, God chose Israel to be His people through whom He would send His Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Savior of the world. By choosing Israel in Old Testament times, God foreshadowed the New Testament teaching that He has also chosen all who will be saved by Christ.

In the passage above, note that God did not choose the Israelites on the basis of foreseeing faith in them, or on the basis of any worthiness in them. On the contrary, Moses reminded the Israelites that they were "the fewest of all peoples." They had nothing to commend them to God. God simply chose them, "because the LORD loved you." The basis for God's choice was His love and grace alone, nothing else.

George Stoeckhardt has pointed out that words in the Greek New Testament referring to predestination are based upon words in the

²All Bible quotations are from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

Hebrew Old Testament.³ For example, the Hebrew word for "choose" in Deuteronomy 14:2 is **בָּרַךְ**. In the Septuagint, which was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament made in about 250 B.C., that Hebrew word was translated by the Greek word **ἐξελέξατο**.

When the Apostle Paul wrote his Epistle to the Ephesians about three hundred later, he used the same Greek word, **ἐξελέξατο**, to refer to God's choosing of sinners to be saved by faith in Christ. Paul, who was writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, deliberately patterned his New Testament doctrine of the election of Christians after the Old Testament doctrine of the election of the nation Israel.

The elections are similar. Both are based upon God's grace alone. Neither is based upon any foreseen faith or other form of worthiness in the ones chosen.

Election Revealed in the New Testament

Now let's look at some New Testament passages which teach the doctrine of election. The first is Matthew 22:1-14. It is Christ's parable of the wedding feast.

Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: "The kingdom is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

Then he sent some more servants and said, "Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner:

³George Stoeckhardt. Predestination Election, trans. Erwin W. Koehlinger (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, n.d.), p. 87.

My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet."

But they paid no attention and went off - one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

Then he said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find." So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. "Friend," he asked, "how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" The man was speechless.

Then the king told the attendants, "Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Concerning this parable, Martin Chemnitz wrote:

There is no better, surer way for a simple person to read, hear, speak, or think about this article of the providence of God than in terms of this parable. Keep it always before your eyes and in your heart, that this parable should set the bounds for all disputations concerning this article. When our thoughts wish to stray too far or too high and go beyond these bounds, then let us remember that our dear Christ has set forth this high article⁴ in a parable to keep our thoughts simple . . .

⁴This statement by Chemnitz is from a sermon which he preached in the year 1573. The sermon is entitled, Eine Christliche Predige von der Versehung oder Wahl Gottes zur Seligkeit aus dem Evangelio Matthei 22. Am zwanzigsten Sonntag nach Trinitatis Gethan in Fuerstlichen Capellen zu Wolffenbuettel. A copy of the sermon from 1573 is in the rare book collection of the library at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. The quotation is from an English translation made by this writer in 1987.

Chemnitz points to the last statement in the parable as the key to its interpretation. The statement says "For many are invited, but few are chosen." Chemnitz says that this statement shows that God, through His Word and the sacraments, calls many people to salvation through faith in Christ, but many refuse His invitation. Thus they exclude themselves from the Kingdom of God.

Only the chosen, the **ἐκλεκτοί**, whom God has elected unto salvation, accept God's invitation and receive His blessings. They do so, not by virtue of their own worthiness, but because of God's grace and because of the power of His Word.

Mark 13:20-22

In Mark 13:20-22, Christ describes the great tribulation which will precede His return. This passage also contains three uses of the word "elect" and "chosen." It says:

If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the **elect**, whom he has **chosen**, he has shortened them. At that time if anyone says to you, "Look here is the Christ!" or, "Look, there he is!" do not believe it. For false Christs and prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the **elect** - if that were possible.

All three of the words in bold type are from the same root word in Greek. It is the word **ἐκλέγομαι**, which literally means "to speak out," or "to choose out," in the sense of selecting some items or persons from among others.

Christ calls Christians the "elect." That means that they are people "chosen out" for salvation from the midst of lost humanity. Christ says that it is impossible for God's elect to be so deceived by

false teachers that they cease to be His elect.

John 15:16

In John 15:16, Christ speaks to His disciples on the night of the Last Supper. He says:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last . . .

In this passage, Christ says that He chose His people: ἐγὼ ἐξελέξαμην ὑμᾶς. It refutes the idea that Christians choose Christ. If a person chooses Christ as His Savior, or if he chooses to serve Christ in the office of the ministry or in some other way, the sinner's choice is only the result of God's earlier choice of him. The ultimate act of choosing is God's, not man's.

I Corinthians 1:27-31

This passage, written by Paul, speaks about the fact that God chose, ἐξελέξατο, His people without regard to any exceptional qualities in them. It says that no one chosen by God has any reason for boasting about being chosen. The passage says:

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Being chosen by God for salvation is not a mark of moral or spiritual superiority. Indeed, this passage shows that those who are

chosen by God are often less worthy than others. Therefore humility before God, not pride, is the proper response to being elected by Him.

Also, this passage says, "It is because of him that you are in Christ." This statement clearly refutes the idea that people become Christians because they have chosen God. Every notion that man has a free will to choose to be saved is here opposed. Rather this passage teaches that people become Christians because God has chosen them.

II Thessalonians 2:13-14

This passage says:

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Note in this passage that again the choice of sinners for salvation is God's choice: *εἰλατο ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός*. Also, God's choosing is shown to have occurred before the creation of the world. The phrase, "from the beginning," conveys that idea. This statement indicates that God's election of sinners occurred in eternity.

Also, the passage teaches that God chose sinners to be saved "through belief in the truth." This does not mean, as the *intuitu fidei* doctrine of election suggests, that God elected people whose faith He first foresaw. Rather it means that God's election included His decision that His people would come to believe in the truth. God chose His people unto faith, not because they already had it.

James 2:5

This verse says:

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God **chosen** those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

This passage shows that the Apostle James, as well as Christ and Paul, taught the doctrine of election. James, too, taught that God chose, ἐξελέξατο, people who are poor to become rich in faith and to inherit God's kingdom.

I Peter 1:1-2

Peter, too, taught the doctrine of election. I Peter 1:1-2 passage states:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To God's **elect**, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been **chosen** according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood . . .

The word "foreknowledge" is used in this passage. The advocates of the *intuitu fidei* form of election have pointed to the word "foreknowledge," πρόγνωσιν, and said that it means that God foreknew who would come to faith in Christ. Then He chose them to be saved because He foresaw faith in them.

The Greek word for "foreknowledge," however, can mean more than just knowing who someone is before he exists, or knowing what that person will do before he does it. It also means knowing a person with the kind of knowledge which includes love.

Remember that in both the Old and New Testaments the Hebrew and Greek words for "know" are used sometimes to refer to knowing someone sexually. For example, the King James Version of Genesis 4:1 says that Adam "knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain."

Similarly, Matthew 1:24-25 says that Joseph, after being told by an angel about the coming birth of Jesus, took Mary as his wife, but he "knew her not" until after the birth of Christ. Both of these passages show that the words for "know" in Greek and Hebrew include a broader range of meaning than our English word "know" usually does.

Christ also used the word "know" in a way which denotes intimacy and love, although not sexual love. Christ said in John 10:14-15:

I am the good shepherd; I **know** my sheep and my sheep
know me -
 just as the Father **knows** me and I **know** the Father
 - and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Christ is obviously not referring here only to knowledge without love and without a personal relationship. Otherwise He would be saying only that He and His people are acquainted with each other, and that He and His Father are acquainted with each other. No, Christ means more than that. He uses the word "know," *γινώσκω*, to denote a knowledge which is personal and loving.

George Stoeckhardt has written:

When it is said in Scripture that God has known and knows us, this means that God has acknowledged, recognized, accepted us as his own, has placed us into union, into fellowship with himself and so, as though bound to him, in unity and kindred with himself, loves us with whole heart.⁵

⁵Stoeckhardt, p. 16.

In Matthew 7:23, Christ says to the ungodly, "I never knew you." This must mean more than that He never knew who the ungodly were. In that case, He would be denying His own omniscience.⁶ No, the word "know" in Scripture refers to knowledge which includes love and belonging.

Now, since the word "to know," *γινώσκω*, has such a rich meaning in the Scriptures, the word "to foreknow," *προγινώσκω*, can also have an equally rich meaning. It is the same Greek word with a prefix attached. Thus the word "foreknowledge," *πρόγνωσις*, as used in I Peter 1:2, means:

. . . God already in eternity, beforehand, has taken as, has made his own certain persons.

When Peter says in I Peter 1:2 that Christians have been chosen by God according to God's foreknowledge, Peter is not saying that God chose certain people because He foreknew that they would come to faith in Christ. No, God did not merely foreknow a particular fact about some people, and therefore elect them to salvation on that basis.

On the contrary, Peter is saying that God foreknew His people in the sense that God loved them and chose them to be His own. As Stoeckhardt has pointed out, God's foreknowing is "an act of God on definite persons." It is not merely God's "knowing about an act of man."⁸ God's foreknowledge of His people is His fore-loving of them.

⁶H.G. Stub. Om Naadevalget. Guds Ords og den lutherske Bekjendelses Laere derom med specielt Hensyn til de to Laereformer, under hvilke den er bleven fremstillet, (Decorah, Iowa: Den Norske Synodes Bogtrykkeri, 1881), p. 26.

⁷Stoeckhardt, p. 17.

⁸Stoeckhardt, pp. 22-23.

Romans 8:28-39

The two main passages in the New Testament which teach about the doctrine of election are Romans 8:28-39 and Ephesians 1:3-14. Romans 8:28-39 says:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been **called according to his purpose**. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8 also shows us that God elected sinners unto salvation "according to his purpose," *κατὰ πρόθεσιν* . Election, then, is not based upon human purpose, decision, or will. It is not based upon foreseen faith. It is based upon the will of God alone.

Luther wrote in The Bondage of the Will:

He is God, and for his will there is no cause or reason that can be laid down as a rule or measure for it, since there is nothing equal or superior to it, but it is itself

the rule of all things. For if there were any rule or standard for it, either as cause or reason, it could no longer be the will of God. For it is not because he is or was obliged so to will that what he wills is right, but on the contrary, because he himself so wills, therefore what happens must be right.⁹

Romans 8:28 uses the Greek word *πρόθεσιν* to refer to God's purpose. The word literally means "to place ahead of time." This word indicates that God placed his chosen people into the status of being His beloved children even before the creation of the world.

Romans 8:29 uses the Greek word *προώρισεν*, which means "foreordaining." This word means the appointing of something to happen ahead of time. Again, the idea is that God appointed His elect people to be His children before He created them.

Romans 8 tells us, then, that God foreknew His people, in the sense of loving them, before their creation. He fore-appointed them, while they were still in their sins, to be conformed to the image of Christ. Then He called them through the Gospel of Christ, justified them by giving them faith in Christ, and glorified them together with Christ. Romans 8 says that nothing can separate the elect from the love of God which is in Christ.

Some of the proponents of the *intuitu fidei* doctrine of election point to the word "foreknew," *προέγνω*, in Romans 8:29, and say:

If we ask: What has God foreknown these people to be, whom He has predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son? The answer, according to the preceding verse can only be: He has recognized

⁹LW, 33:181 (The Bondage of the Will, 1525).

them as the believing children of God.¹⁰

But how could people be recognized as having faith, before God had decided to give them faith? From whence, then, would their faith come? I Corinthians 4:7 asks:

. . . What do you have that you did not receive?
And if you did receive it, why do you boast as
though you did not?

Those who teach the *intuitu fidei* doctrine of election seem to boast that man has a faith which he did not receive. Indeed, as shall be seen later, some teach that faith is a product of free will in man. In so doing, they contradict the Bible.

The Bible teaches that faith is a gift of God, not a work of man. Therefore God does not recognize people as believers, until He has decided to make them believers, and God's decision to give faith to sinners is also His decision which elects them unto salvation. God did not elect particular sinners unto salvation in view of their faith, but He elected them unto faith and to all of the blessings which go along with it.

Ephesians 1:3-14

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus
Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms

¹⁰George H. Schodde, ed., The Error of Modern Missouri: Its Inception, Development, and Refutation, I. The Present Controversy on Predestination: A Contribution to Its History and Proper Estimate, by F.W. Stellhorn; II. "Intuitu Fidei", by F.A. Schmidt; III. A Testimony Against the False Doctrine of Predestination recently introduced by the Missouri Synod, by Several Former Members of the Missouri Synod, (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1897), p. 721.

with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory.

This passage is the main *sedes doctrinae* of the doctrine of election in Scripture.¹¹ It states again and again that God elected His people unto salvation according to His own good pleasure, plan, purpose, and will. It contains no indication that God's choosing was based on anything in man.

Verse 5 says that God fore-appointed Christians unto sonship "in accordance with his pleasure and will." The Greek phrase is *κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ*. Whose will is decisive here? Not man's will, but God's.

¹¹Stoekhardt, p. 153.

God's will is said in verse 9 to be a "mystery," a *μυστήριον* . That means that there are aspects of God's choosing of His people which we cannot understand. Election is a mystery, because God has not revealed everything about it to us.

Some proponents of the *intuitu fidei* doctrine of election deny that it is a mystery. They have written:

. . . the Scriptures say nowhere that that election is a mystery in a special sense.¹²

Also they say:

Election is revealed to us in the Scripture and is no more a mystery than any other article.¹³

They believe that there is no special mystery in election, and therefore they are able to answer the question: Why are some people saved, and not others? They answer that question on the basis of foreseen faith.

Yet, as seen above, Ephesians 1:9 does state that God's will in election is a mystery. Therefore Luther was correct in The Bondage of the Will when he gave the following answer to the question of why some are saved and not others:

This belongs to the secrets of his majesty, where his judgments are incomprehensible.¹⁴

God has not fully revealed to us why He allows some sinners to be lost. His Word says that their condemnation is their own fault, not His. Nevertheless, why God allows it to occur remains a mystery.

¹²Schodde, *Former Missourians*, pp. 594-595.

¹³Schodde, *Former Missourians*, p. 621.

¹⁴LW, 33:180 (*The Bondage of the Will*, 1525).

Some supporters of the *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election point to the fact that Ephesians 1:4 and Ephesians 1:11 state that Christians are chosen "in him," ἐν αὐτῷ and ἐν ᾧ, that is, "in Christ." They say that this is proof that God elected people whom He already foresaw as believers. God foresaw them as being "in Christ." Therefore God elected them.

But this is a misunderstanding of the passage. Paul's real meaning was that God had already decided to make Christ's death the atonement for sinners when He elected certain sinners unto salvation. Christ was to be the agent of the salvation of sinners.

Commenting on the necessity of Christ's atoning death as the basis for salvation, George Stoeckhardt wrote:

God could not have chosen and predestined in eternity a single sinner to salvation had he not already in eternity had his eye upon Christ the Redeemer.¹⁵

This is the meaning of the phrase "in Christ" in Ephesians 1. God elected sinners unto salvation on the basis of the coming death of Christ, not on the basis that certain persons were already in Christ because they already had faith in Him.

Ephesians 1 teaches, then, that there are only two causes which induced God to predestine the elect unto adoption as His children and unto eternal salvation. The two causes are the good pleasure of His will and the merit of Christ which He provided for sinners by His

¹⁵Stoeckhardt, p. 33.

life, death, and resurrection.¹⁶ As C.F.W. Walther wrote:

. . . God has not foreseen in His elect anything good which he might have regarded and which therefore might have induced Him to elect them; on the contrary, he saw them lying in the blood of their sins, and then He said: "Ye shall live!"¹⁷

Ephesians 1, then, like all Scripture dealing with the doctrine of election, teaches that human merit was not a factor in God's choosing of His saints. Rather, election is completely a gift of God's grace alone.

¹⁶C.F.W. Walther, Sermon on Predestination, trans. from "Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel-Postille" by August Crull, (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1883), p. 14.

¹⁷Walther, Sermon on Predestination, p. 14.

CHAPTER III

THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS AND THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

The Lutheran Confessions support the first form of the doctrine of election. They teach that God, before the creation of the world, looked ahead, through the ages of time, and graciously predestinated certain poor sinners unto salvation. He appointed them to be saved by faith in Jesus Christ.

The Confessions also teach that God did not choose His people because they were more worthy of salvation than others. Nor did God predestine anyone to be damned. God simply chose His people, out of His pure grace, so that now, in the ages of time, His chosen ones come to faith in Christ and are saved as a result of His grace alone.

The Lutheran Confessions do not teach the second form of the doctrine of election, the *intuitu fidei* form. They do not teach that God, before the creation of the world, looked ahead and saw that particular persons would hear the Gospel and come to faith in Christ. Then, since He saw that they would come to faith in Christ, He predestinated them to be saved.

The Confessions do not teach that foreseen faith preceded election. Rather they teach that election preceded faith.

Article XI of the Formula of Concord is the main passage of the Lutheran Confessions which deals with the the doctrine of election. Article XI has several emphases. One is that predestination applies

only to those who are saved, and not to those who are lost. The article says:

. . . the eternal election of God or God's predestination to salvation does not extend over both the godly and the ungodly, but only over the children of God, who have been elected and predestined to eternal life . . . The source and cause of evil is not God's foreknowledge . . . but rather the wicked and perverse will of the devil and of men . . .¹⁸

This is one of the ways in which the doctrine of election as taught in the Lutheran Confessions is different from Calvinism. Calvinism teaches that God chose some sinners to be damned, just as He chose others to be saved. The Lutheran Confessions deny that God chose anyone to be damned.

Another emphasis of the Formula is that the Scriptures alone should govern our understanding of the doctrine of election. The Formula warns against following the dictates of reason with regard to the doctrine of election.

It says:

When we follow the Scriptures and organize our thinking about this article in this light, we can by the grace of God easily orient ourselves in it.¹⁹

The Formula also joins Scripture and Luther in saying that there are indeed mysteries in the doctrine of election which are beyond our understanding in this world. Referring to the Apostle Paul's teaching about election, the Formula says:

¹⁸Theodore G. Tappert, editor, The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 617:5 & 7.

¹⁹Tappert, p. 620:24 (F. of C., Art. XI.).

. . . as soon as he comes to the point where he shows how much of this mystery God has reserved for his own hidden wisdom, Paul immediately commands silence and cuts off further discussion with the following words: "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?"²⁰

Human reason should not probe into questions about election which are not revealed in Scripture. We are not able to comprehend it. Rather we should content ourselves with what God has revealed in His Word.

The Formula of Concord also emphasizes several other points about election, but above all, it teaches that election supports the chief article of the Christian faith, which is that justification is by God's grace alone. The Formula states about election:

. . . it is indeed a useful, salutary, and comforting doctrine, for it mightily substantiates the article that we are justified and saved without our works and merit, purely by grace and solely for Christ's sake.²¹

Martin Luther once wrote:

When I preach a sermon I take an antithesis.²²

Luther also wrote:

. . . Scripture preaches Christ by contrast and antithesis.²³

And Luther further wrote:

²⁰Tappert, p. 626:64 (F. of C., Art. XI.).

²¹Tappert, p. 623:43 (F. of C., Art. XI.).

²²LW, 51:xx (Sermon preached in 1532).

²³LW, 33:287 (The Bondage of the Will, 1525).

It is the mark of an intelligent man to discern the antitheses in Scripture and to be able to interpret Scripture with their help.²⁴

In these comments, Luther was saying that the best way to preach the truth about Christ is to oppose false doctrine about Him. The best way to declare what is correct about Christ is to reject what is incorrect about Him.

This principle applies to Luther's whole theology. For Luther, the best way to present theses, which are ideas, is to oppose their antitheses, that is, the ideas which contradict them.

In Luther's whole theology, there is a great antithesis. It is the idea that a sinner can make himself righteous before God by his own good works, deeds, or decisions. After Luther finally came to understand the Gospel, he opposed this antithesis with all of his might in all of his preaching and teaching.

Luther had tried good works as a way of salvation as a monk in the Roman Catholic Church. He tried to find peace with God by his own human efforts. But it did not work. It did not bring him peace. It only troubled his soul further. It led him, not to heaven, but to hell.

Then Luther found in the Bible that salvation is a gift of God's grace, given by faith in Jesus Christ. That teaching set his soul free. It brought him peace. This became Luther's thesis, his positive idea: God saves sinners by His grace alone through faith alone in His Son Jesus Christ.

²⁴LW, 26:248 (Lectures on Galatians, 1535).

Luther's former thesis that salvation can be achieved by human good works and cooperation with God became his antithesis. It became the negative idea against which Luther always preached.

The Formula of Concord followed Luther in method and in spirit. In all its articles, it carefully defined what it opposed, as well as what it professed.

Above all, it joined Luther in opposing the idea that a sinner can do anything to contribute to his salvation. According to the Formula of Concord, there is no cause within us on account of which God elected us to salvation.

Article XI stresses that salvation is by God's grace alone, without any assistance from man. In so doing, it opposes the doctrine that foreseen faith is something in man which qualifies him for salvation.

The Formula says:

It is therefore false and wrong when men teach that the cause of our election is not only the mercy of God and the holy merit of Christ, but that there is also within us a cause of God's election on account of which God has elected us unto eternal life.²⁵

The Formula also states:

This also completely refutes all false opinions and erroneous doctrines about the powers of our natural will, for in his counsel God has determined and decreed before the world began that by the power of his Holy Spirit through the Word he would create and effect in us everything that belongs to our conversion.²⁶

Notice that the Formula says that God would create in us

²⁵Tappert, p. 631:87-88 (F. of C., Art. XI.).

²⁶Tappert, pp. 623-624:44 (F. of C., Art. XI.).

everything that is necessary for salvation. Since faith is necessary for salvation, that means that God creates faith in us. God gives us faith, as a gift, through the Word and the sacraments.

The Formula of Concord states that there is nothing in us which caused God to elect us. That includes foreseen faith. Our faith did not cause God to elect us. On the contrary, God's election is the cause of our faith. The Formula says:

God's eternal election . . . not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but by God's gracious will and pleasure in Christ Jesus it is also a **cause** which creates, effects, helps, and furthers our salvation and whatever pertains to it.²⁷

Clearly, the Formula teaches that God's election causes us to come to faith. The Formula denies that our faith caused God to elect us. Very clearly, then, the Formula confesses the first form of the doctrine of election, not the *intuitu fidei* form.

The writers of the Formula, like Luther, wanted to be sure that the doctrine of election is never taught in such a way that man is made the author of his own salvation. On the contrary, they wanted to acknowledge that all glory for saving sinners belongs to God alone.

The Formula teaches that nothing decided or done by man causes God to elect him to salvation. Rather the sole cause of man's election and salvation is God's grace alone.

Many Lutheran theologians, including many in the early decades of the Lutheran church, taught the *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election. The Lutheran Confessions, however, do not.

²⁷Tappert, p. 617:8 (F. of C., Art. XI.).

C.F.W. Walther, a nineteenth century teacher of the scriptural and confessional form of the doctrine of election, wrote:

. . . whenever a controversy arises concerning the question, whether a doctrine is Lutheran, we must not ask: "What does this or that "father" of the Lutheran Church teach in his private writings?" for he also may have fallen into error; on the contrary, we must ask: "What does the public Confession of the Lutheran Church teach concerning the controverted point?" for in her confession our Church has recorded for all times, what²⁸ she believes, teaches, and confesses . . .

The Lutheran Confessions teach and confess the first form of the doctrine of election.

²⁸C.F.W. Walther, The Doctrine Concerning Election Presented In Questions and Answers From the Eleventh Article of the Formula of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, translated by J. Humberger and published by the Ev. Lutheran Augustana Conference of Stark and other Counties of Ohio (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1881), pp. 5-6.

CHAPTER IV

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION IN PRE-REFORMATION TIMES

Martin Luther posted the Ninty-Five Theses on the church door at Wittenberg in 1517. The Formula of Concord was published in 1580. With those dates as guidelines, the Lutheran Reformation can be said to have occurred between A.D. 1517 and A.D. 1580.

What happened to the doctrine of election in the Christian church prior to that time? What was taught about election between the writing of the last New Testament book in about A.D. 95, and the Reformation in the 1500's? The answer is that the doctrine of election was disputed several times. Let's take note here of one of those disputes.

In the fifth century of the Christian era, a great theological struggle took place between Augustine and Pelagius over the issue of man's ability to contribute toward his own salvation. These two influential teachers, Augustine and Pelagius, disagreed about whether man is born a sinner, about whether man has a free will to do good or evil, and therefore about whether man is able to choose or reject salvation.

Pelagius taught that man is born morally neutral, and that every person subsequently chooses for himself whether he will be a righteous person or an unrighteous one. Pelagius said that man has the ability to choose his spiritual destiny, and that man must choose properly in order to be saved. In other words, Pelagius taught synergism, the

idea that a righteous person is one who "works together" with God to achieve his salvation.

Augustine, on the other hand, taught that man is born with a sinful nature which is totally corrupt. Because of the inherited sinful nature, man is not able to choose to do what is right. Man cannot work together with God on his own salvation. Salvation is, and can only be, God's work alone.

In the struggle between Augustine and Pelagius, Augustine eventually prevailed. He came to be regarded as a church father and as a champion of orthodoxy. Pelagius eventually came to be viewed as a heretic who had departed from the apostolic faith.

These two men differed widely in their teaching about the amount of spiritual power which is possessed by unregenerate man. They differed also on the doctrine of election. Augustine taught, correctly, that God elected His people unto salvation without foreseeing any merit in them.

Pelagius, on the other hand, taught that God based His predestination on divine foreknowledge of the choices which people would make by the power of their free will.²⁹ Pelagius taught that God predestined unto salvation those whom He foresaw as freely choosing to become righteous people. G.F. Wiggers has described Pelagius' doctrine of election in these words:

²⁹G.F. Wiggers, An Historical Presentation of Augustinism and Pelagianism From The Original Sources, translated by Ralph Emerson (New York: Gould, Newman & Saxton, 1840), p. 252. Pelagius is quoted as stating God's position thus: ". . . I will have mercy on him whom I have foreknown to be able to merit mercy . . ."

According to Pelagius, foreordination to salvation or damnation, is founded on prescience . . . God designed those for salvation who, as he foreknew, would believe in him and keep his commands . . .³⁰

There is very little difference between Pelagius' doctrine of election and that of some of the later, nineteenth century proponents of the *intuitu fidei* form of election. Both taught that man has a free will, and that a decision of man's will determines whether or not God elects him unto salvation.

Some of the later *intuitu fidei* theologians based their doctrine of free will on the doctrine of prevenient grace. They said that prevenient grace is a form of grace which God gives to unregenerate sinners before He saves them. God gives it in order to free the will of sinners, and then they are able to make right choices in spiritual matters.

Pelagius attributed man's free will to inborn spiritual ability. The later *intuitu fidei* theologians attributed it to prevenient grace. The end result, however, is the same. Both Pelagius and the *intuitu fidei* theologians saw man as having a free will, and therefore as being responsible, by the choices which he makes, for whether or not he is elected unto salvation.

It must be pointed out that there were also flaws in Augustine's doctrine of election. Augustine erred by teaching that God predestined some persons unto damnation, and that God does not desire their salvation. Augustine wrote:

³⁰Wiggers, p. 252.

Many are not saved, not because themselves do not will,
but because God does not will it.³¹

As we have already seen, the writers of the Formula of Concord later rejected that idea as unscriptural.

Augustine also was the source of the very doctrine of prevenient grace which the later *intuitu fidei* theologians used to come up with a doctrine of election based on free will, much like that of his opponent, Pelagius. Also, Augustine taught that Christ died only for the sins of those who are elected unto salvation. This is an erroneous doctrine called "limited atonement."

There were errors in Augustine's doctrine. Nevertheless, Augustine came much closer to the truth of God's Word than did Pelagius, because Augustine taught that election is based upon God's will alone, and not upon the decisions of man. Augustine's doctrine was found by the church to be far more orthodox than that of Pelagius.

The dispute between Augustinianism and Pelagianism was settled at the Council of Orange, in 529 A.D. The Council of Orange was a high point in church history for correct teaching of the doctrine of election.³² The Council of Orange taught that God elected His people unto salvation solely by His grace alone, without having foreseen anything meritorious in them. In that respect, it basically upheld Augustine and opposed Pelagius.

³¹Wiggers, p. 245 (Ep. 197. c. 6.).

³²F. Pieper, Conversion and Election: A Plea for a United Lutheranism in America (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1913), p. 5.

The Council of Orange also, however, avoided some of Augustine's errors. It rejected his teaching that God predestined some persons to hell, just as He predestined others to heaven. It set forth the same scriptural doctrine of election which was confessed a thousand years later in the Formula of Concord.

The history of the struggle between Augustinianism and Pelagianism shows that there is an intimate connection between what one teaches about salvation by God's grace alone and what one teaches about election. Augustine taught that salvation is entirely by God's grace alone, and he also taught that election is based upon the good pleasure of God's will, and not upon anything in man.

Pelagius, on the other hand, taught that man can cooperate with God in the work of salvation. He also taught that predestination is based upon foreseen faith or upon some other form of foreseen merit in man.

Pelagius' synergistic doctrine is Luther's antithesis. It makes salvation the work of man. Luther's thesis is that salvation is God's work alone in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER V
THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION IN LUTHERANISM
FROM THE REFORMATION TO THE ELECTION CONTROVERSY

The doctrine of election was not a major issue between Martin Luther and the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation. Consequently, the early Confessional writings of Lutheranism say little about it.

By the time of the writing of the Formula of Concord in the 1570's, however, the writers of the Formula had realized that election might become controversial in the Lutheran Church. They wanted to prevent controversy from arising, and so they included Article XI in the Formula.

The Threat of Calvinism

Why did the doctrine of election pose a greater danger to Lutheran unity in 1580, than it had earlier? The main reason was the emergence and growing influence of Calvinism.

In 1536, John Calvin published the first edition of his Institutes of the Christian Religion. In the Institutes, Calvin taught that the eternal decrees of God are the starting point for all Christian theology.

Calvin, like Augustine centuries earlier, taught double predestination. Calvin taught not only that God has elected some

sinners to salvation, but also others to eternal damnation.

Calvin also taught the doctrine of limited atonement, which means that Christ did not die for the sins of all sinners, but only for the sins of those whom God had elected unto eternal life. Furthermore, Calvin taught irresistible grace by which he meant that if a person has been elected by God, then that person can never go lost, even if he completely lacks faith in Christ and lives and dies in unrepented sin.

Calvinism raised all sorts of red flags for Lutherans. First of all, the starting point for all Lutheran theology is not God's sovereign decrees, but rather God's grace in Jesus Christ. Luther's theology reflected his personal search to become righteous before God and be saved. Luther had tried to become righteous by performing human good works, but he had found that that way of salvation does not work.

Then Luther discovered in the Bible that God justifies sinners by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This discovery became for Luther the basis for his personal peace and for his theology.

After he discovered the Gospel, Luther's whole theology, and his whole understanding of Christian life and experience, came to be based upon the thesis that God saves sinners by His grace alone. Luther taught that salvation is all a gift of God, given in Christ. The idea that a sinner's works or will can contribute to his salvation became anathema to Luther. That idea became his antithesis.

The focus of Luther's theology became the Gospel. The Gospel is the message that God loves sinners, and has done everything necessary

to save sinners through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ.

Yes, Luther acknowledged that God is sovereign and that God's choosing of sinners to be saved is the cause of their coming to salvation. Nevertheless, Luther said that the doctrine of election should be considered only **after** one has first been convicted of sin by the Law of God, and **after** one has been given faith in Christ by the Gospel of God. Election should be viewed in light of the grace of God, rather than grace being viewed in the light of election.

Luther died in 1546, but Lutheran theologians who shared his conviction that grace is central to the Christian faith were concerned about the tendency of Calvinism to minimize grace. They were also concerned that Calvinism denied the Scriptural teaching that Christ died for all sinners and that God desires all sinners to be saved.

Lutheran theologians objected to Calvinism because Calvin seemed to make a sinner's faith a matter of indifference with regard to his salvation. In their view, Calvin's theology would lead people either to conclude that they are not elected unto salvation, and so there is no hope for them. Or else they would conclude that they are elected unto salvation, and so they do not need to have faith in Christ or to receive the Word and the sacraments. Lutheran theologians wanted to avoid those dangers and errors in Calvinism.

The *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election seemed to many Lutheran theologians to be a useful way to defend the role of faith in the salvation of sinners. If they could say that God elected only those sinners unto salvation whom He foresaw as coming to faith, then

surely that would show the importance of faith in Christian theology.

Unfortunately, in trying to protect Christianity from losing the doctrine of justification by faith, some Lutherans went too far. They made faith into a work of man. They taught that faith is a work which man must perform in order to be saved. They taught that God requires faith in sinners in order to elect them unto salvation, and sinners must produce their own faith.

As shall be shown later, nineteenth century teachers of the *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election taught election in exactly that way, doing damage to the doctrine of *sola gratia*. They taught that man has a free will, and must cooperate with God in the work of salvation by choosing to believe. They taught that God foresaw such self-chosen faith, and on the grounds of it, He elected people unto salvation.

To support their synergistic conclusions, the nineteenth century American theologians often quoted from sixteenth and seventeenth century Lutheran theologians who had also spoken of election as being "in view of faith." There was a difference, however, between the two groups.

The sixteenth and seventeenth century Lutheran theologians taught that faith is a gift of God, and that God justifies sinners by faith. Their concern in asserting the importance of faith was to fend off Calvinism, which made faith largely irrelevant to salvation.

The nineteenth century synergists, however, taught that faith is a work of man's free will by which man becomes worthy of salvation. Their concern was to reserve a role for man in the work of his own

salvation.

Writings of Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century

Lutheran Theologians

The writings of the Lutheran theologians of the late 1500's and the 1600's show their concerns about the doctrine of election. Many of them taught the *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election, but not in such a way as to make faith a good work which originates in the free will of man.

Aegidius Hunnius

Aegidius Hunnius (1550-1643) was the father of the *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election in the Lutheran church. He was the first to use the phrase "*intuitu fidei*," meaning "in view of faith."³³

Although Hunnius originated the false, second form of the doctrine of election, he did not do so to serve the cause of synergism. He was not trying to prove that God chose certain sinners unto salvation because He foresaw that they would make themselves worthy of salvation by coming to faith in Christ.

On the contrary, Hunnius held the same antithesis as Luther. Hunnius too said that man can do nothing to make himself worthy of salvation. Hunnius wrote:

No cause of justification and salvation dare be found
or placed in man . . . far less dare faith be
considered a cause of our predestination, as though
it constituted a certain quality in us or a virtue, the

³³Schodde, Stellhorn, p. 25.

dignity and worthiness of which moved God to choose us unto salvation. God forbid!³⁴

This statement shows that Hunnius wanted to stand with Luther and to declare that salvation is solely a work of God's grace alone.

Hunnius was trying to refute Calvin's teaching that God first elected sinners unto salvation, and then, afterwards, planned for the death of Christ and for sinners to be saved by coming to faith in Christ. Hunnius wrote:

. . . we do not conclude that our election is not based on Christ's suffering and death. That would contradict the clearest testimony of St. Paul, Eph. 1,4: "He hath chosen us in Him," i.e. Christ . . . it is impossible to eject faith from election, unless Christ Himself who is held fast by the arms of faith is likewise ejected.³⁵

Hunnius desired to keep Christ, and faith in Christ, at the heart of all discussion about salvation. It was a noble desire. Unfortunately, Hunnius attempted to achieve it by saying that God elected sinners unto salvation by foreseeing faith in them, faith which God had not as yet decided to give them. Carried forward by reason, his teaching naturally leads to the conclusion, as it did in the nineteenth century *intuitu fidei* theologians, that a sinner must produce his own faith. Thus it contributes to the erroneous idea that a sinner can do something to help with his own salvation.

³⁴Schodde, Schmidt, p. 237.

³⁵Schodde, Schmidt, pp. 239-240.

Daniel Arcularius

Daniel Arcularius taught clearly that faith is a gift from God and not a product of free will in man. Arcularius was a professor at Marburg, who died in 1596. He held that God elected sinners to salvation in view of faith, but, by so saying, Arcularius meant that God had already decided that all who would be saved would be justified by faith in Christ. He did not refer this to particular individuals.

Arcularius did not mean that God foresaw particular individuals as coming to faith in Christ, and therefore elected them because they were worthy of salvation.

Arcularius held firmly to Luther's thesis that salvation is by God's grace alone. He wrote:

We do not make the decree of election dependent on faith as a cause lying in the free will of man and moving the will of God in election. On the contrary, . . . Christ³⁶ as well as faith is included in the decree of election.

In other words, God's election of a particular sinner unto salvation is the cause why the sinner comes to faith in Christ.

Arcularius also rightly pointed out that God gives the gift of faith through the Word and sacraments. He wrote:

. . .faith is a gift of God, yet God kindles it in us, and also increases and nourishes it, through certain instruments and means, I mean through the office of the Word and the Sacraments.³⁷

Arcularius rightly taught that the Word and the sacraments are means of grace. They are tools which God uses to give the gift of

³⁶Schodde, Schmidt, p. 288.

³⁷Schodde, Schmidt, p. 289.

faith in Christ to sinners, and, with faith, all of His other gifts.

Arcularius taught the *intuitu fidei* doctrine which was popular in his time. Yet, Arcularius was not a synergist.

John George Sigwart

John Sigwart (1554-1618) shows the real concern which motivated many Lutheran theologians in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to include foreseen faith in the doctrine of election. Sigwart wrote:

But we reject the Calvinistic definition according to which God is said to have chosen some absolutely unto eternal life, without regard either to Christ's merit or to faith . . .³⁸

Lutherans saw great danger in Calvin's teaching that God's decrees of election preceded God's decision to make Christ the Savior of sinners. Such a teaching would make God's grace, faith in Christ, and even Christ's atoning work merely secondary elements in the plan of salvation. Thus Lutherans opposed it.

David Lobeck

David Lobeck (1560-1603) is another early Lutheran theologian who opposed Calvinism by adopting the intuitu fidei doctrine. Yet Lobeck, too, took pains not to embrace synergism. Lobeck wrote:

When we teach, the foresight of faith is included in the decree of election, we do not mean that we are elected for the sake of faith, much less that faith in any way depends on our powers, but we only designate

³⁸Schodde, Schmidt, p. 291.

the means without which there is for God no justification of a sinner,³⁹ and likewise no election or bestowal of salvation.

This statement by Lobeck shows his desire to keep Christ, and justification by faith in Christ, at the heart of the work of salvation. The statement errs by making faith the cause of election, instead of election the cause of faith. Nevertheless the statement is very far from saying that prevenient grace frees man's will to be able to choose to believe, and that, because man does his part, God elects him unto salvation. Lobeck's theology was very far from that of the later, nineteenth century *intuitu fidei* theologians.

The nineteenth century theologians would stress the freedom of man's will. They would speak of the necessity for man to fulfill certain conditions and make certain decisions in order to be saved. Most of the Lutheran writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not.

John Gerhard

John Gerhard (1582-1637) was another seventeenth century theologian who accepted the intuitu fidei doctrine of election. Yet Gerhard, too, carefully avoided all synergism. He wrote:

We confess with a loud voice that we teach that God found nothing good in man who was to be elected unto eternal life, because He did not so regard either good works or the use of the free will, or even faith, that, moved thereby, or on this account He elected some. On the contrary, we say that the one

³⁹ Schodde, Schmidt, p. 297.

and only merit of Christ was the thing whose worthiness God considered, and that in mere grace He formed the decree of election. Since, however, Christ's merit is found in man only through faith, we teach that election took place in view of the merit of Christ apprehended by faith. We say, therefore, that those all and those alone were elected of God from eternity unto salvation, of whom He foresaw that by the efficacy of the Holy Spirit and through the ministration of the Gospel they would truly believe in Christ the Redeemer and persevere to the end of life.⁴⁰

Gerhard teaches that God considered the work of Christ and the faith of Christians when He elected certain sinners unto salvation. Yet Gerhard specifically denies that faith is a work of man's free will. Rather he says that the Holy Spirit produces faith through the Gospel.

Later, nineteenth century theologians would call faith a "condition" which a sinner must fulfill in order to be elected unto salvation and be saved. Gerhard did not view faith in that way. He said that faith is a gift of God.

In another place, Gerhard states explicitly:

. . . we teach that faith is a gracious gift of God . . .⁴¹

Clearly, not all of the seventeenth century Lutheran theologians who used the phrase "in view of faith," saw faith as a product of man's free will.

Gerhard holds both to Luther's thesis and to his antithesis. Gerhard teaches that salvation is all the work of Christ, accomplished

⁴⁰Schodde, Schmidt, pp. 434-435.

⁴¹Schodde, Schmidt, p. 437.

by the grace of God. And Gerhard also denies that there is any worthiness in man, foreseen or otherwise, which causes God to elect him unto salvation.

Martin Chemnitz

Except for Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon, the most influential Lutheran theologian of all time was probably Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586). Chemnitz was one of the six authors of the Formula of Concord. As was seen above in connection with his exposition of Matthew 22:1-14, Chemnitz preached about the doctrine of election and had strong convictions concerning it.

Chemnitz was a very influential force in the writing of Article XI of the Formula of Concord. Many statements in Article XI sound very much like excerpts from Chemnitz' sermon on Matthew 22.

Martin Chemnitz did not teach the *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election. He did **not** teach that God elected certain persons to salvation because God foresaw faith in them. Rather, like Luther, Chemnitz confessed the first form of the doctrine. In other words, Chemnitz taught that God's election **causes** man to come to faith in Christ.

In 1593, Chemnitz wrote a training manual for pastors called the Enchiridion. In the Enchiridion, Chemnitz wrote:

. . . the election of God does not follow our faith and righteousness but **precedes it as efficient cause** (Ro 8:30) . . . And this election was made before the world began, not in view of our good works, either past or present or future, but according to the purpose and good pleasure of the grace of God (Ro 9:11;

2 Ti 1:9).⁴²

Notice what Chemnitz said. God's election does not follow our faith. In other words, our faith did not cause God to elect us. On the contrary, God's election is the cause of our faith.

Here Chemnitz, one of the authors of the Formula of Concord, rejects explicitly the *intuitu fidei* doctrine of election. In so doing, he sets forth not only his own doctrine, but also that of the Formula of Concord, of Martin Luther, and of the New Testament.

At another place in the Enchiridion, Chemnitz has an excellent statement about the doctrine of election. It says that the true doctrine of election supports justification by grace through faith, and opposes the notion of free will in man. Therefore election provides comfort for believers in Christ. The passage is lengthy, but is so valuable that it deserves to be quoted in full.

Writing concerning the doctrine of election, Chemnitz says:

I. This article excellently confirms the doctrine of free justification by faith, namely that we are justified and saved without our works and merits, freely through grace, for Christ's sake. For before we were born, in fact, before the foundations of the world were laid, before this world began, when we were still nothing, much less could do anything good, we were predestined and chosen to salvation according to God's purpose, on the basis of grace, in Christ, not on the basis of works, or according to our works, as Paul strongly emphasizes that matter Ro 9:11 ff; 2 Ti 1:8-9.

This article overturns all the opinions by which something is ascribed to the natural powers of our will in spiritual things and actions. For God, before

⁴²Martin Chemnitz, Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion, edited, translated, and annotated by Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), p. 90.

the times of this world, in His eternal counsel, decreed that He Himself wanted to effect and work in us, through His Spirit, all the things that belong to our conversion. And man, without this working of God and left to himself, is, per se and of himself, with all the powers of his natural will in the spiritual things that concern our conversion, nothing but enmity against God. Ro 8:7; Gn 6:5.

III. This doctrine supplies very sweet comfort. For it teaches that our conversion, justification, and salvation was so much in the mind and heart of God, that before the foundation of the world He took counsel and determined and preordained how He wanted to call, lead, and preserve us unto that salvation.⁴³

Note the sentence which is highlighted above. It declares that natural man has no free will to choose to please God or to fulfill conditions for salvation. How different this statement is from that of the later nineteenth century synergists who ascribed great powers to the free will of unregenerate man!

Erick Pontoppidan

Erick Pontoppidan (1698-1764), a bishop of the Church of Norway, wrote an explanation of Luther's Small Catechism entitled Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed (Truth unto Godliness). This explanation became immensely popular among the Norwegian people.

Pontoppidan's book was used widely in the catechetical instruction of Norwegian young people. Its influence became so great that it came to be known as "Barnelaerdom", which means "doctrine for children."⁴⁴ Unfortunately for Norwegian Lutherans, Pontoppidan

⁴³ Chemnitz, Enchiridion, p. 93.

⁴⁴ F.A. Schmidt, Naadevalg Striden: Nogle Foredrag til Belysning af den i Synodalkonferentsen opkomne Laerestrid om Praedestinationen (Chicago: Nordens Bogtrykkeri, 1881), p. 8.

included the *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election in his book.

Question 548 in Pontoppidan's book is this: "What is election?"

The answer is given:

God has appointed all those to eternal life whom He from eternity has foreseen would accept grace, believe in Christ, and remain constant in this faith unto the end.⁴⁵

As this answer shows, Pontoppidan taught the second form of the doctrine of election. He taught that God elected particular persons to salvation in view of their coming to faith in Christ.

Through Pontoppidan's book, the *intuitu fidei* doctrine was transmitted to generation after generation of Norwegian Christians, and consequently, many Norwegian theologians and church leaders came to hold to it. Among them were Professor Gisle Johnson in Norway, and Professors Georg Sverdrup and Sven Oftedal in America.

Gisle Johnson

Gisle Johnson (1822-1894) was a seminary professor in Oslo. Johnson was troubled by the mystery of how the sinfulness of the lost is the cause of their condemnation, but the grace of God is the cause of the salvation of the saved. His question was: Why are some saved and not others? Does God deal unfairly?

Johnson tried to use the *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of

⁴⁵E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold, The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), I, pp. 256-257, quoted in William J. Schmelder, "The Predestination Controversy: Review and Reflection," Concordia Journal vol. 1, number 1, (January, 1975): 28.

election to answer his question. He concluded that God foresaw that some people would choose to come to faith in Christ and others would not. Therefore, on that basis, God elected some to salvation and left others in condemnation.

Johnson thought that this line of reasoning would solve the problem of why some are saved and not others. The answer, he thought, lay in the will and choice of individual sinners.

In reality, however, Johnson only succeeded in placing the ultimate responsibility for any sinner's salvation upon the sinner himself, instead of upon the grace of God. Johnson's teaching made salvation the result of man's decision, not God's.

H.G. Stub noted that Johnson, in the end, gave up the second form of the doctrine of election as a solution to the question of why some, not others.⁴⁶ According to Stub, Johnson concluded that the question is a mystery whose answer is not revealed in Scripture.

Conclusion

Two different forms of the doctrine of election were taught in the Lutheran Church for centuries between the Reformation in the 1500's and the Election Controversy in the 1880's. During those centuries there was little open controversy in the Lutheran Church over the doctrine of election, but nevertheless there was a problem.

Sometimes the *intuitu fidei* doctrine was taught in such a way that it excluded human merit as a cause of salvation. H.G. Stub has

⁴⁶Stub, p. 31.

rightly observed that when that happened, the outcome of the second form was very much like that of the first form, only the conclusion was reached by a "troublesome detour."⁴⁷ In other words, salvation by grace alone was upheld, but in a round-about way.

At other times the *intuitu fidei* doctrine led Lutherans to misunderstand the source and nature of faith. They concluded that faith is a work which man presents to God, and which makes man worthy of salvation, an idea which both opposes the thesis and supports the antithesis of Lutheran theology.

At all times, however, the *intuitu fidei* doctrine was itself contrary to the Scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions. Yet it was taught in the Lutheran church. Whenever something contrary to the Word of God is taught in the church, a problem exists.

⁴⁷Stub, p. 24.

CHAPTER VI

THE ELECTION CONTROVERSY OF THE 1870's AND 1880's

The phrase "in view of faith" is not found in Scripture, nor is the idea which it represents. In America, in the late 1800's, the problems which can arise from this unscriptural doctrine became apparent.

The Election Controversy, or Predestination Controversy, began in the 1870's and 1880's as a dispute between those teaching the two different forms of the doctrine of election in the Lutheran Church. The controversy soon revealed, however, that another disagreement lay just beneath the surface of the issue of election.

The underlying disagreement was over how a sinner is converted and justified. Is a sinner converted and made righteous before God by God's work alone, or must the sinner, too, do certain things in order to contribute to his own salvation? In other words, is salvation by God's grace alone, or is it by synergism, a "working together" of God and man?

Luther's great thesis was that justification is by God's grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ. His antithesis was that a man can make himself righteous before God or in any way contribute to his salvation. Was Luther correct in both his thesis and his antithesis?

The importance of this question cannot be overstated. As the Apology of The Augsburg Confession says, the doctrine of justification

by grace alone is "the main doctrine of Christianity."⁴⁸ And Luther wrote in the Smalcald Articles concerning justification by grace alone:

Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed.⁴⁹

Those who taught the first form of the doctrine of election said that salvation is by God's grace alone, just as Scripture, Luther, and the Confessions teach. Those who taught the second form of the doctrine of election said that a sinner must make certain decisions, present certain conduct to God, and fulfill certain conditions in order to be saved. Thus they taught that man is partially responsible for his own salvation.

The *intuitu fidei* doctrine that God elected some people unto salvation because He foresaw that they would come to faith in Christ can easily lead to the idea that the elect must produce their own faith. Further, it can easily encourage the idea that the elect deserve salvation, because they have chosen to believe.

The *intuitu fidei* doctrine also fosters the idea that sinners have the ability to choose to please God by believing in Christ, and it encourages preachers to try to appeal to the supposedly free will of unregenerate sinners. The proponents of the *intuitu fidei* doctrine fell into all of these errors during the Election Controversy which began in the 1870's.

⁴⁸Tappert, p. 107:2 (Ap., Art. IV.).

⁴⁹Tappert, p. 292:5 (S.A., Pt. II, Art. I).

The Controversy Begins in the Missouri Synod

In 1872, Professor G. Fritschel of the Iowa Synod publicly attacked the Missouri Synod for its doctrine of election in a publication called Theologisches Monatshefte. Fritschel called the Missouri doctrine a "gross insult to the Lutheran Church."⁵⁰

In 1877, Dr. C.F.W. Walther, the president of the Missouri Synod, began to present a series of theses concerning the doctrine of election at a convention of the Western District of the Missouri Synod.⁵¹ Walther's theses, following Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, taught the first form of the doctrine of election.

H. A. Allwardt, a Missouri pastor, criticized Walther's theses, and Allwardt contacted F.A. Schmidt, a former professor of the Missouri Synod who was then teaching in the Norwegian Synod, to join him in opposing Walther's theses.⁵² F.A. Schmidt became the chief opponent of Walther in the controversy which followed.

Before going public with their dispute, Schmidt and Walther met in Columbus, Ohio, in July, 1879, to discuss their differences and to try to reach agreement.⁵³ The effort failed.

Schmidt decided to publish a new periodical to attack Walther's doctrine of election. It was called Altes und Neues, and the first issue came out in January, 1880. In it, Schmidt accused Walther and the Missouri Synod of being Crypto-Calvinists. This is an accusation

⁵⁰Schodde, Stellhorn, p. 67.

⁵¹Schodde, Stellhorn, p. 69.

⁵²Schodde, Stellhorn, p. 90.

⁵³Schodde, Stellhorn, p. 90.

which means that they held secretly to Calvin's doctrine of double predestination. Schmidt wrote:

In God's name let us have open and decisive war
against this new Crypto-Calvinism . . .⁵⁴

Subsequently, Schmidt hurled the charge of Calvinism and Crypto-Calvinism at Walther innumerable times. Walther and the Missouri Synod considered this accusation to be extremely insulting.

Walther responded to Schmidt with a five-part article on the doctrine of election in the February, 1880, issue of Lehre und Wehre, a Missouri Synod publication for pastors. Also, in Der Lutheraner, a publication intended for laity as well as pastors, Walther carefully pointed out in thirteen propositions the differences between his doctrine of election, based upon Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and that of John Calvin. In the fourth of the thirteen propositions, Walther wrote:

We believe, teach, and confess that no man is lost because God would not save him, or because God with His grace passed him by, or because he did not offer the grace of perseverance to him also and would not bestow it upon him; but that all men who are lost perish by their own fault, namely on account of their unbelief, and because they have obstinately resisted the Word and grace of God to the end . . . Hence we heartily condemn the contrary Calvinistic doctrine.⁵⁵

Here is the essential difference between the Lutheran doctrine of election and the Calvinistic doctrine. The Lutheran teaching is that

⁵⁴Schodde, Stellhorn, p. 107.

⁵⁵Der Lutheraner, vol. 36, numbers 2-9, p. 33, as quoted in Schodde, Stellhorn, pp. 157-158.

sinful man is responsible for his own damnation. The Calvinistic teaching is that God is responsible for the damnation of a sinner.

Between 1872, when Fritschel first attacked Walther, and 1881, there were peaceful relations between the Missouri Synod and the Ohio Synod, which was another German synod in America. They were both members of the Synodical Conference, a conservative and confessional fellowship of Lutheran Synods in the United States.

Then, in February, 1881, Dr. Matthias Loy, a long-time professor at Ohio's Columbus Seminary and a friend of Dr. Walther's, attacked Walther on the doctrine of election in The Columbus Theological Magazine.⁵⁶ A few months later, on September 8, 1881, at its convention, the Ohio Synod declared its adherence to the *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election.⁵⁷ In the same year, the Ohio Synod withdrew from the Synodical Conference,⁵⁸ and in 1882, it began to publish Theologisches Zeitblätter to oppose Missouri Lutheranism.⁵⁹

F. W. Stellhorn, a Missouri Synod professor, left the Missouri Synod and joined the Ohio Synod. He became a professor at the Columbus Seminary and a leader in attacking Walther.⁶⁰ Stellhorn was

⁵⁶E. Clifford Nelson, ed., The Lutherans in North America, in collaboration with Theodore G. Tappert, H. George Anderson, August R. Suelflow, Eugene L. Fevold, and Fred W. Meuser, revised edition (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 316.

⁵⁷Schodde, Stellhorn, p. 189.

⁵⁸Nelson, p. 319.

⁵⁹Schodde, Stellhorn, p. 190.

⁶⁰Erwin L. Lueker, ed. in chief, Lutheran Cyclopedia, with William R. Arndt, Richard R. Caemmerer, Otto A. Dorn, and Frederick E. Mayer (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 1008.

married to Walther's niece.⁶¹ This fact shows how personally and deeply painful the controversy was for many involved.

The split lasted for decades. Even after the Ohio Synod merged with three other synods to form the American Lutheran Church in 1930, the division between Missouri and Ohio was not overcome, despite the desires of many to set it aside.

Other issues, notably the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture, also arose to hold Missouri and the American Lutheran Church apart, but their separation began with the Election Controversy. The influence of the Election Controversy upon Lutheranism lingers today.

The Election Controversy: The Immediate Issue Defined

The basic disagreement in the Election Controversy comes in answering the following question: Does election cause faith, or does faith cause election? In other words, does God's election cause sinners to come to faith in Christ, or did a foreseen faith in sinners cause God to elect them to salvation?

Dr. C.F.W. Walther showed that this was the basic issue by giving the following definition of the chief controverted point:

It consists simply in the following twofold question: 1st, whether God from eternity, before the foundations of the world were laid, out of pure mercy and only for the sake of the most holy merit of Christ, elected and ordained the chosen children of God unto salvation and whatever pertains to it, consequently also to faith, repentance, and conversion; - or 2nd, whether in His election God took into consideration anything good in man, namely the foreseen persevering faith

⁶¹Schmelder, p. 24.

and thus elected certain persons to salvation in consideration of, with respect to, on account of, or in consequence of their conduct, their non-resistance, and their faith. The first of these questions we affirm, while our opponents deny it, but the second we deny, while our opponents affirm it.⁶²

Walther taught that God's election causes sinners to come to faith. He explained that God did not take faith into account in choosing who would be saved, because no one can produce his own faith. Rather all must receive faith as a gift from God. Walther wrote:

God therefore has not regarded even faith itself nor elected them on account of their faith; on the contrary, because no man can acquire faith by his own efforts, He has determined from eternity, to work faith in them through the gospel and to preserve them in faith unto the end.⁶³

Walther taught that no sinner could possess faith for God to foresee, if God had not first decided to give it to him. God's very decision to give a sinner faith in Christ is also God's decision which elects that sinner unto salvation.

F.A. Schmidt, Walther's main opponent in the Election Controversy, agreed with Walther about what the basic question was, but, of course, disagreed about the answer. Schmidt showed his agreement about the basic question in the controversy in the following

⁶²C.F.W. Walther, The Controversy Concerning Predestination, A plain, trustworthy advice for pious Christians that would like to know whose doctrine in the present controversy concerning predestination is Lutheran, and whose is not, published by Rev. Prof. C.F.W. Walther, D.D., translated by Aug. Crull (St. Louis, Mo: Concordia Publishing House, 1881), p. 5.

⁶³Walther, Sermon on Predestination, pp. 14-15.

statement:

The chief question with regard to the conception and definition of election is always the following: Whether the real, final, and effective decision concerning salvation for those who shall be saved is made with a view to their foreseen faith, or if foreseen faith is excluded from election to salvation, and (faith) is established only as a necessary consequence or fruit of an already settled election.⁶⁴

Schmidt agreed about the issue. The basic question is: Does faith cause election, or does election cause faith?

Schmidt's answer, however, was different. He wrote:

. . . God has appointed all those to eternal life, whom he has foreseen, that they will accept the offered grace and trust in Christ . . .⁶⁵

In other words, according to Schmidt, foreseen faith causes election.

Another theologian who agreed with Schmidt was Georg Sverdrup, a Norwegian-American theologian and the president of Augsburg Seminary in Minneapolis. Sverdrup wrote:

Election is not the cause of faith; but faith and perseverance are conditions for election . . .⁶⁶

⁶⁴F.A. Schmidt, Naadevalg Striden: Nogle Foredrag til Belysning af den i Synodalkonferentsen opkomne Laerestrid om Praedestinationen (Chicago: Nordens Bogtrykkeri, 1881) p. 21 - "Hovedspørgsmaalet med Hensyn til Udvaelgelsens Begreb og Vaesen bliver her altid dette: Om den egentlige, endelig afgjørende Salighedsbeslutning over dem, som skulle blive salige, er fattet i Henseende til deres forudsete Tro, eller om Troens Forudviden skal udelukkes fra selve Udvaelgelsen til Salighed og sættes blot som en nødvendig Følge og Frugt af den allerede skete Udvaelgelse."

⁶⁵Schmidt, p. 22 - ". . . Gud har beskikket alle dem til det evige Liv, om hvilke han har forudset, at de ville antage den tilbudne Naade og tro paa Kristus."

⁶⁶Georg Sverdrup, Samlede Skrifter i Udvalg, udgivne ved Andreas Helland, fjerde Bind (Minneapolis, Minn.: Frikirkens Boghandels Forlag, 1911), p. 65 - "Udvaelgelsen er ikke Troens Aarsag; men Troen og Bestandigheden er Betingelse for Udvaelgelsen."

This statement shows that Sverdrup taught that faith is a condition which sinners must fulfill for God to elect them unto salvation, and that God elected people unto salvation on the basis of foreseeing that they would fulfill that condition. In Sverdrup's view, then, God's grace is contingent upon man's actions, specifically upon whether man comes to faith in Christ and continues in it.

How does Scripture answer the basic question in the Election Controversy? Does God's election cause man to come to faith, or does man's faith, foreseen by God, cause Him to elect man to salvation?

Acts 13:48 says, ". . . and all who were appointed for eternal life believed." That verse shows that being appointed for salvation takes place first, and then sinners come to faith as a consequence of being appointed to eternal life.

Romans 8:30 also shows the proper sequence. It says:

And those he (God) predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

This passage, too, teaches that justifying faith comes into a sinner's life as a consequence of God's predestination of the sinner. Scripture, then, says that election causes faith. Faith does not cause election.

Martin Chemnitz, as was mentioned earlier, taught that election is the cause of faith. Chemnitz wrote:

For the election of God does not follow our faith and righteousness but precedes it as the efficient cause (Ro. 8:30) . . .⁶⁷

⁶⁷Chemnitz, Enchiridion, p. 90.

Luther, in his later years, when he was a mature theologian, taught strongly that faith is a gift of God. In so doing, Luther indicated that God's choosing of a sinner is the cause of the sinner's coming to faith in Christ. Evidence of this is seen in Luther's commentary on John 15:16.

In John 15:16 Christ says:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit . . .

Luther commented on this verse:

Therefore Christ says here: "Just forget about all your boasting that you chose Me. Follow me, and let Me choose you first. Listen to what I say to you, in order that I, not you, may have the glory of having merited this for you by My blood and death."⁶⁸

Luther was far from teaching that faith is a condition which man must fulfill in order to be elected and saved. On the contrary, Luther taught that faith is something which is given to man by God's choice.

The Lutheran Confessions also teach that election causes faith.

The Formula of Concord states:

God's eternal election, however, not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but by God's gracious will and pleasure in Christ Jesus it is also a **cause** which creates, effects, helps, and furthers our salvation and whatever pertains to it.⁶⁹

Here the Lutheran Confessions clearly state their answer to the question of whether election causes faith, or faith causes election.

⁶⁸ LW, 24:261 (Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 14-16, 1537-1538).

⁶⁹ Tappert, p. 617:8 (F. of C., Art. XI.).

They reject the idea of the *intuitu fidei* doctrine of election. The Formula of Concord states that God's election of sinners to salvation causes in them whatever pertains to their salvation. That means that God's election causes sinners to come to faith.

The Election Controversy: The Underlying Issue

The Election Controversy was on the surface a disagreement over the doctrine of election, but even more fundamentally it was a disagreement over salvation by grace alone. It was a disagreement over whether salvation is entirely a work of God alone, caused by God's grace alone, or whether man must play some part in his own salvation.

Synergism, the idea that man can work together with God to achieve salvation, is sometimes easily obscured when dealing with other articles of doctrine, but synergism very quickly becomes obvious when dealing with the doctrine of election. This is because election is a work of God which occurred before the creation of the world.

If God elected His people unto salvation even before He created them, then it is easy to see how salvation must be by His grace alone. People could not have contributed to God's decision to elect them to salvation, because they did not yet exist.

But if, as synergists believe, people can and must work together with God in order to be saved, how could God choose people to be saved when He had not yet seen how they would conduct themselves? For those who are committed to the idea that man works together with God to accomplish salvation, a mechanism must be found for injecting human

actions into the decision of God concerning election.

The doctrine of *intuitu fidei* can be used to fill that need by synergists. If God foresaw that a sinner would choose to believe in Christ and therefore would be deserving of salvation, then the sinner could have been chosen by God before the creation of the world based on merit in the sinner. Thus the principle of synergism can be made to fit with the doctrine of election. Thus also grace alone is overthrown. In its place, human merit is established as a part of the work of salvation.

When synergism is present in a person's theology, that fact often becomes apparent when the person deals with the doctrine of election. That was true of many of the *intuitu fidei* theologians during the Election Controversy.

Expressions of Synergism

From American Intuitu Fidei Theologians

F.W. Stellhorn, who left the Missouri Synod over the doctrine of election, wrote:

. . . man can and must "remove a hindrance," if he would be converted and saved, namely his wilful contempt for and neglect of the means of grace . . .⁷⁰

Note how that statement makes salvation dependent upon something which man can and must do. Clearly it teaches synergism, the idea that man must work together with God to achieve his salvation.

Stellhorn also wrote:

⁷⁰Schodde, Stellhorn, p. 83.

. . . we say that conversion and salvation depend in a certain sense upon man's conduct toward the means of grace . . .⁷¹

Here salvation is said to depend upon the "conduct" of man. Again, this is synergism, because salvation is taught to be partly man's work, and partly God's.

Stellhorn further wrote:

If man is to be converted and saved, he must "conduct" himself aright⁷² toward the means of grace and the Holy Spirit . . .

This statement shows that Stellhorn, who was an ardent defender of the *intuitu fidei* doctrine of election, taught that a sinner's salvation depends upon the sinner's own conduct. The statement is synergistic.

F.A. Schmidt, Walther's chief opponent in the Election Controversy, also made synergistic statements. Schmidt, too, taught that God based His decision to elect sinners to salvation upon the sinners' own conduct. Schmidt wrote:

. . . God, in eternity, was constrained to see and inquire beforehand what each individual called would do in time and how he would conduct himself, in order to preordain in His eternal purpose, according to His foreknowledge, who among the called should be the elect.⁷³

In this statement, Schmidt teaches that God was "constrained" to consider man's conduct when making His eternal decrees of election. In other words, God had to follow man's lead when He formulated the

⁷¹Schodde, Stellhorn, p. 83.

⁷²Schodde, Stellhorn, p. 84.

⁷³Schodde, Schmidt, pp. 560-561.

decrees of election, and man's conduct is the decisive factor in whether or not he is saved.

Schmidt expressed the idea of human leadership even more blatantly in another statement. He wrote that God's will has a "deferential attitude toward the conduct of men."⁷⁴

One wonders how Schmidt could present such a view as being Lutheran. Martin Luther offered little support for the idea that God has to be deferential to man! Rather, Luther wrote:

. . . the Gospel takes away all glory, wisdom, righteousness, etc., from men and gives it solely to the Creator, who makes all things out of nothing. Furthermore, it is far safer to ascribe too much to God than to men.⁷⁵

Luther would have been appalled at the statement that God must be deferential to man.

F.A. Schmidt also spoke of election as being "dependent" or "contingent" upon man's decisions and actions. He wrote that God's election is dependent (afhaengig) upon which persons would convert themselves.⁷⁶

Schmidt wrote:

. . . the decree of election was dependent on which sinners would, by His call of grace, allow themselves to be brought to faith, and which would not . . .⁷⁷

⁷⁴Schodde, Schmidt, p. 565.

⁷⁵LW, 26:66 (Lectures on Galatians, 1535).

⁷⁶Schmidt, Naadevalg-Striden, p. I.

⁷⁷Schmidt, Naadevalg-Striden, p. 37 - ". . . Salighedsbestemmelse vaere afhaengig af, hvilke Syndere vilde ved hans Naade kald lade sig bringe til Troen og hvilke ikke . . . "

Here is a clear statement of a synergistic understanding of the *intuitu fidei* doctrine of election. This statement says that God based His divine decree of election upon the actions of men.

Schmidt also described faith as a "vilkaar", a "condition" which man must meet in order to be saved.⁷⁸ Schmidt thus viewed faith as a work of man, and not as a gift of God. This view of faith agrees with the synergistic idea that man "works together" with God to accomplish his salvation.

Other *intuitu fidei* theologians also described faith as a condition which man must fulfill in order to be saved. Leander Keyser, a theology professor at Hamma Divinity School in Springfield, Ohio, wrote:

. . . the conditions of salvation are made repentance and faith.⁷⁹

Keyser also described faith as a work of man, rather than as a gift of God. He wrote:

Faith is simply the act of the soul by which it accepts God's gift of salvation.⁸⁰

Keyser also taught that God gives to sinners a preliminary kind of grace, called prevenient grace, which empowers a sinner to "relate himself to the gracious overtures of salvation."⁸¹ In other words,

⁷³Schmidt, Naadevalg-Striden, p. III.

⁷⁹Leander S. Keyser, Election and Conversion: A Frank Discussion of Dr. Pieper's book on "Conversion and Election," with Suggestions for Lutheran Concord and Union on Another Basis (Burlington, Iowa: The German Literary Board, 1914), p. 32.

⁸⁰Keyser, p. 27.

⁸¹Keyser, pp. 50 & 51.

God uses prevenient grace to free a sinner's will from its bondage to sin, and then, after the will is freed, the sinner can, and must, make his own decision about whether or not he will be saved.

The sinner can choose to believe, and be saved. Or he can choose not to believe, and be damned. After being given prevenient grace, the sinner must complete the work of his salvation by making the correct decision. As Keyser put it:

. . . God's responsibility ends and the sinner's begins.⁸²

This statement is synergism. It teaches that man works together with God to achieve his own salvation.

Keyser further showed how synergism underlay his position by stating that the Holy Spirit:

. . . effects a certain enablement of the will, thus making the sinner a responsible agent respecting his personal salvation . . . he can do something . . ."⁸³

Keyser taught synergism and that unregenerate sinners have a free will. This fact shows how error in one article of doctrine leads to error in others.

The theology of Leander Keyser also shows how quickly and easily the concept of the total depravity of sinners is lost when one begins to speak about prevenient grace and about unregenerate sinners having a free will. Keyser wrote:

⁸²Keyser, p. 114.

⁸³Keyser, p. 61.

Wherever there is an honest will, an upright, sincere resolution . . . men will be drawn to Christ . . .⁸⁴

Notice that sinners here are described as "honest," "upright," and "sincere." The Bible, however, has a very different description of sinners. It says in Jeremiah 17:9:

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Again, error in one article of doctrine leads to errors in others.

P. Eirich was another supporter of the *intuitu fidei* teaching who also made synergistic statements. Eirich wrote:

. . . faith in some way depends upon that which man can do . . .⁸⁵

Eirich also wrote:

Faith and conversion, then, are very much dependent upon man's deportment toward the Word of God . . .⁸⁶

In P. Eirich's view, human deeds and "man's deportment" contribute to the work of salvation.

Denials of synergism were frequent by the nineteenth century *intuitu fidei* theologians, but the evidence of their synergism is clear. They taught again and again that man must do certain actions and make certain decisions, and so work together with God to accomplish salvation.

⁸⁴Keyser, p. 74.

⁸⁵P. Eirich, "The Lutheran Doctrine of Conversion," The Columbus Theological Magazine, edited by the faculty of Capital University, vol II (Columbus, Ohio: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1882), p. 371.

⁸⁶Eirich, pp. 366-367.

Contrasts to Synergism

The Word of God says in Romans 3:20:

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law . . .

Romans 8:7 says:

The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, **nor can it do so.**

These verses teach that no sinner can be saved by anything that he does. Man is powerless to contribute to his own salvation.

Martin Luther, too, taught that man cannot assist with his own salvation. He wrote:

But no man can be thoroughly humbled until he knows that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, devices, endeavors, will, and works, and depends entirely on the choice, will, and work of another, namely, of God alone. For as long as he is persuaded that he himself can do even the least thing toward his salvation, he retains some self-confidence and does not altogether despair of himself, and therefore he is not humbled before God, but presumes that there is - or at least hopes or desires that there may be - some place, time, and work for ⁸⁷him, by which he may at length attain to salvation.

Luther rejected synergism totally. It was his antithesis. Also Luther totally rejected the idea that unregenerate man has a free will and is able to choose whether or not he will be saved. Luther wrote:

I wish the defenders of free choice would take warning at this point, and realize that when they assert free choice they are denying Christ. For if it is by my effort that I obtain the grace of God, what need ⁸⁸have I of the grace of Christ in order to receive it?

⁸⁷LW, 33:62 (The Bondage of the Will, 1525).

⁸⁸LW, 33:279 (The Bondage of the Will, 1525).

Luther's words make the same point as does Romans 11:5-6. That passage says:

. . . there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

Election and salvation are either entirely by God's grace alone, or else they are entirely by human works alone. Divine grace and human works cannot be mixed together, or be made partners in the work of salvation.

The Formula of Concord also rejects synergism. It says:

. . . we believe that after the Fall and prior to his conversion not a spark of spiritual powers has remained or exists in man by which he could make himself ready for the grace of God or to accept the proffered grace, nor that he has any capacity for grace by and for himself or can apply himself to it or prepare himself for it, or help, do, effect, or cooperate toward his conversion by own powers, either altogether or half⁸⁹-way or in the tiniest or smallest degree . . .

How different these words are from statements about man fulfilling conditions and conducting himself properly in order to be saved! The Formula totally excludes synergism.

George Stoeckhardt was a nineteenth century theologian who taught the first form of the doctrine of election. He also opposed synergism. Stoeckhardt wrote:

Truly, we have nothing inviting and amiable in us that could have and were to have moved God to choose us. By nature we belong to the degenerate, corrupt human race, an abomination to God. That God by means of his eternal election has removed us from the same and chosen us to be his own is, however,

⁸⁹Tappert, p. 521:7 (F. of C., Art. II).

in no way based in our nature and state, in any of our doing and conduct.⁹⁰

What a wonderful contrast these words are to the synergistic statements of the *intuitu fidei* theologians!

As was noted above, F.A. Schmidt, the *intuitu fidei* theologian, said that God, before forming His divine decrees of election, was constrained to foresee and inquire how a sinner would conduct himself. Stoeckhardt, a teacher of the first form of the doctrine of election, said that there is nothing good in sinners which could move God to choose them for salvation. Stoeckhardt's view is the correct and Biblical one.

C.F.W. Walther pointed out that there is great danger in the *intuitu fidei* doctrine. He wrote:

Through the teaching that election to salvation occurred in view of faith, **if this is taken seriously**, the whole doctrine of justification by faith alone (as the means of appropriation) is therefore overthrown. It is in vain that those who wish to cling at all costs to "in view of faith" try to escape from the charge that thereby they cancel "by grace alone" and in a synergistic and Pelagian fashion ascribe to man cooperation in his own salvation.⁹¹

Walther was right. The synergism which the *intuitu fidei* doctrine encourages, opposes the doctrine that salvation is by God's grace alone.

⁹⁰Stoeckhardt, p. 156.

⁹¹C.F.W. Walther, "Election Is Not In Conflict With Justification," in Lutheran Confessional Theology in America, 1840-1880, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 205.

Consequences of the Conflict
on the Synodical Conference

The effectiveness of the Synodical Conference was irreparably damaged by the Election Controversy. The Synodical Conference was formed in 1872, as a federation of Lutheran synods. Its purpose was to promote confessional Lutheranism in the United States.

The chief distinguishing mark of the Synodical Conference was "adherence to God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions."⁹² Its ultimate goal was to unite all Lutheran synods in America into one orthodox Lutheran Church.⁹³

In 1881, because of the Election Controversy, the Ohio Synod withdrew from the Synodical Conference. In 1883, the Norwegian Synod also withdrew.⁹⁴ The Synodical Conference never regained momentum for fostering Lutheran unity in America based on diligent commitment to the Lutheran Confessions.

F.A. Schmidt wrote that he foresaw from the beginning that his actions could lead to the dissolution of the Synodical Conference.⁹⁵ Yet he proceeded anyway to attack Missouri, thus giving a serious setback to confessional Lutheranism in America.

The Election Controversy Among the Norwegians

During the 1870's when the Election Controversy began, there were

⁹² Lutheran Cyclopedia, p. 1031.

⁹³ Lutheran Cyclopedia, p. 1030.

⁹⁴ Lutheran Cyclopedia, p. 1031.

⁹⁵ Schmidt, Naadevalg-Striden, p. VI.

five Norwegian Lutheran synods in America. They were the Eielsen Synod, the Hauge Synod, the Norwegian-Danish Augustana Synod, the Norwegian-Danish Conference, and the Norwegian Synod.⁹⁶

The largest of the five was the Norwegian Synod. It was also the strongest in its commitment to the Lutheran Confessions, and it had a close relationship with the Missouri Synod. The Norwegian Synod trained its pastors at Missouri's Concordia Seminary, in St. Louis, from 1859 to 1876. Then, still having a cordial relationship with Missouri, it established its own seminary in Madison, Wisconsin.⁹⁷

The Norwegian Synod was hit harder by the Election Controversy than any other portion of Norwegian-American Lutheranism. In 1887-88, a minority of pastors and congregations left the Norwegian Synod to form the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood. Although the majority of the Norwegian Synod supported the Missouri Synod, and joined with it in confessing the Scriptural and confessional "first form" of the doctrine of election, a significant minority did not.

No other Norwegian synod supported Missouri. Many Norwegians felt obliged to remain loyal to the *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election, because it was the form taught in Pontoppidan's explanation of the Catechism, Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed.

In 1890, the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood led the Norwegian-Danish Conference and the Norwegian Augustana Synod in a merger which formed the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. This reduced the Norwegian Synod from being the largest of the Norwegian church

⁹⁶Nelson, p. 189.

⁹⁷Nelson, p. 188.

bodies to being second in size to the new United Church.

Very quickly after the merger of 1890, Georg Sverdrup and the Friends of Augsburg began to distance themselves from the rest of the new United Church. Their concern was that Augsburg College and Seminary were being slighted by the new church body. In 1897, Sverdrup and the Friends of Augsburg formed a new church body, the Lutheran Free Church.

Also very quickly after the merger of 1890, pressure began to build among other Norwegian Lutherans for another merger which would bring together the United Church, the Norwegian Synod, and the Hauge Synod.⁹⁸ Such a merger would unite almost all Norwegian Lutherans in America, those in the Lutheran Free Church being a notable exception. The main obstacle to the merger was disagreement over which form of the doctrine of election would be taught as the official position of the new church.

The Madison Agreement

And the Disastrous Results of Compromise

The theologians of the Norwegian Synod, which supported the first form of the doctrine of election, and the theologians of the United Church and of the Hauge Synod, which supported the *intuitu fidei* form, could not reach agreement. In numerous merger discussions, held between 1905 and 1910, they failed to reach agreement on the doctrine of election.

⁹⁸Nelson, p. 340.

Finally, in 1912, leaders of the synods which wanted to merge appointed a special committee consisting only of parish pastors and no seminary professors or theologians. This committee was given the task of settling the disagreement over election.

A settlement, called in Norwegian *Opgjoer*, and known more formally as the Madison Agreement, was reached. It was a compromise. It approved of both forms of the doctrine of election, and it said that both forms could be taught in the new church body which was to be formed by merger in 1917.⁹⁹

The compromise was accepted, and in 1917, ninety-two percent of all Norwegian Lutherans in America were brought together into a new church body, the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America.¹⁰⁰ The Norwegians in the Lutheran Free Church did not participate, because of their unhappy experience with the merger of 1890.

In 1946, the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America was renamed the Evangelical Lutheran Church (the ELC).¹⁰¹ In 1960, it merged into The American Lutheran Church (TALC), and in 1988, it became a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Was the Madison Agreement a good settlement of the Election Controversy for the Norwegian Lutherans, and did it bring blessing to the Norwegian church? In the opinion of this writer, the answer to both questions is "No."

⁹⁹Nelson, p. 372.

¹⁰⁰Nelson, p. 372.

¹⁰¹Nelson, p. 470.

The **Opgjoer** contains some statements which agree with the Biblical, confessional doctrine of election, but also other statements which agree with the **intuitu fidei** doctrine of election. These two different kinds of statements do not agree with each other. Thus the **Opgjoer** contradicts itself.

For example, **Opgjoer** says:

. . . we reject . . . The doctrine, that the faith which is indissolubly connected with election is wholly or in part a product of, ¹⁰² or dependent upon, man's own choosing, power, or ability.

That statement denies that man can do anything to assist in his own salvation. It denies that an unregenerate sinner has a free will, and it upholds the Biblical doctrine that salvation is a gift of God's grace alone. It is sound and correct theology.

Elsewhere, however, **Opgjoer** also says:

. . . we have agreed to reject all erroneous doctrines which . . . would weaken man's sense of responsibility in respect of the acceptance or rejection of God's ¹⁰³ grace.

That statement suggests that man **should** feel that he is able to accept God's grace. Thus it also suggests that man **has** a free will which is able to accept, as well as reject, the gift of salvation, without God's empowering him to do so. Thus, also, it suggests that man has a part to play in the work of his own salvation.

Such teaching is contrary to God's Word and to the Lutheran

¹⁰²Pieper, Conversion and Election, p. 8.

¹⁰³Pieper, Conversion and Election, p. 8.

Confessions. It opposes Luther's thesis and supports his antithesis.

As this example shows, the Opgjøer contradicts itself. It tries to reconcile two irreconcilable positions, and it fails.

One of the church leaders who supported the Opgjøer was H.G. Stub. Stub was president of the Norwegian Synod at the time of the 1917 merger, and he became the first president of the newly-formed Norwegian Lutheran Church of America after the merger. His actions in the Election Controversy show how one may personally hold to correct doctrine, but still, by accomodating error, effectively support the triumph of it.

In 1881, Stub wrote Om Naadevalget, which means, Concerning the Election of Grace. In that essay Stub said that he held to the first form of the doctrine of election. He called it the form which is presented in the Confessions, and he said, referring to his ordination vows, that he had pledged himself to it.¹⁰⁴

Stub also acknowledged that synergism is compatible with the second form of the doctrine of election, but not with the first. He wrote:

The first form of the doctrine is really very inconvenient for semi-pelagianists and synergists. They can hide themselves behind the second form, but not behind the first.¹⁰⁵

Stub also wrote:

¹⁰⁴ Stub, Om Naadevalget, p. 33.

¹⁰⁵ Stub, Om Naadevalget, p. 18 - "Den første Laereform er nemlig meget ubekvem for Semipelagianere og Synergister. Bag den anden Laereform kan de skjule sig, men ikke bag den første."

In conversion, only God works.¹⁰⁶

In spite of all of this, however, Stub could not bring himself to call the second form of the doctrine of election a false doctrine. He said, "Far be it from me!"¹⁰⁷ to do such a thing. He suggested that one reason for his reluctance was that Pontoppidan, the Norwegian writer of the explanation of the Catechism, had taught the second form, and he could not bring himself to criticize Pontoppidan.

Stub, then, was willing to state thetically what he believed about the doctrine of election, but he was not willing to declare his antithesis and oppose it consistently. More plainly put, he was willing to state what was right, but he was not willing to state what was wrong concerning the doctrine of election.

Instead, even in 1881, Stub tried to reconcile the two forms of the doctrine of election. He said that the sixteenth century Lutherans who held to the first form of the doctrine of election, and the seventeenth century Lutherans who held to the second form, both stood on "the same ground of faith."¹⁰⁸ He implied that Lutherans should always be united, even while holding to divergent doctrines of election.

In the merger of 1917, Stub helped to put this principle of compromise into practical effect. He assisted in the adoption of the *Opgjoer* and in the merger which was based upon it.

¹⁰⁶Stub, Om Naadevalget, p. 21.

¹⁰⁷Stub, Om Naadevalget, p. 17.

¹⁰⁸Stub, Om Naadevalget, p. 35.

Did this compromise result in blessing for the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America? In this writer's opinion, it did not. Today, the churches which Stub led are a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a church body which officially rejects the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy and which supports the use of the historical-critical method of Biblical interpretation. That method often leads its professors and pastors to reject the miraculous and supernatural elements of Biblical narrative as myths.

On the other hand, most of the churches which did hold to the first form of the doctrine of election still also hold, officially, to Biblical inerrancy, and they still officially reject the historical-critical method of Biblical interpretation. The first form of the doctrine of election, then, has contributed to a better spiritual heritage than has the second.

In 1962, the majority of the congregations and pastors of the Lutheran Free Church merged into The American Lutheran Church. Today those congregations are in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. At the same time, in 1962, a minority of congregations and pastors did not participate in the merger, and instead they formed the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.

Up to the present time, the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations has not officially declared a position with regard to the doctrine of election, other than by its declaration that it adheres to Scripture, to the Augsburg Confession, and to Luther's Small Catechism. Therefore the AFLC could go either way with regard to the doctrine of election.

It could officially adopt the *intuitu fidei* form. If it does so, it will probably follow a downward doctrinal trajectory similar to that which the rest of Norwegian-American Lutheranism began in 1917.

Or it could discard the *intuitu fidei* doctrine, and realign itself with confessional Lutheranism. This writer fervently hopes that it will do the latter.

When the *intuitu fidei* doctrine first became prominent in Lutheranism in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, it was followed, within two or three generations, by the Age of Rationalism. When the *intuitu fidei* doctrine was embraced by Norwegian-American Lutheranism in 1917, it was followed, within two or three generations, by the liberal rationalism which prevails today in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

History suggests, then, that the *intuitu fidei* doctrine is a camel's nose of rationalism in the Lutheran Church. Where it appears, the rest of liberal rationalism is likely soon to follow. As Luther said, error in one article of doctrine leads to error in all.

CHAPTER VII

ELECTION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DOCTRINES

Martin Luther once wrote:

Therefore doctrine must be one eternal and round golden circle, in which there is no crack; if even the tiniest crack appears, the circle is no longer perfect.¹⁰⁹

He also said:

. . . one doctrine is all doctrines and all are one, so that when one is lost all are eventually lost, because they belong together and are held together by a common bond.¹¹⁰

Luther's point was that error in one article of doctrine inevitably leads to error in other articles. The writings of the nineteenth century *intuitu fidei* theologians show that this is true.

The *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election breaks the unity and purity of Christian doctrine based upon God's Word alone. It introduces rationalism and synergism into theology. As a result, other articles of doctrine are also damaged.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how errors about the doctrine of election contributed to other doctrinal errors on the part of nineteenth century *intuitu fidei* theologians. Statements from those theologians will be presented side-by-side with statements from Scripture, from the Lutheran Confessions, and from teachers of the

¹⁰⁹ LW, 27:38 (Lectures on Galatians, 1535).

¹¹⁰ LW, 27:38 (Lectures on Galatians, 1535).

first form of the doctrine of election, in order that a comparison may be made and the differences seen.

Sola Gratia

Scripture teaches that salvation is entirely a work of God's grace alone. There is no merit in man which makes man worthy of being saved, and there is no difference, in God's eyes, between one sinner and another, making one more worthy of salvation than another.

Ephesians 2:8-9 tells Christians:

For it is **by grace** you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.

That passage teaches that man does not earn his salvation or deserve it. Salvation is not a human achievement. Even the faith by which a sinner is saved is a gift from God. God produces faith in human hearts.

In contrast with what God's Word teaches about salvation being God's work alone, F.W. Stellhorn, an *intuitu fidei* theologian, wrote:

. . . we say that conversion and salvation depend in a certain sense upon man's conduct toward the means of grace . . .¹¹¹

As this statement shows, Stellhorn taught that man must conduct himself in a certain way in order to be saved. In other words, a sinner must achieve his own salvation by his own deeds. This teaching contradicts *sola gratia*.

¹¹¹Schodde, Stellhorn, p. 84.

F.A. Schmidt, the leading *intuitu fidei* theologian of the 1800's, wrote:

. . . the question, which particular sinners are to be justified, and which are not, is decided in God's will strictly according to the attitude which ~~the~~ called assume toward the merits of Jesus Christ.¹¹²

According to that statement, man's attitude is the basis of his salvation. If such a thing were true, then salvation would certainly not be by God's grace alone.

F.A. Schmidt also said that God elected to salvation only the sinners in whom He foresaw a "difference" (*forskjel*).¹¹³ In other words, God foresaw that some sinners would be different from others, and God decided to elect those who would be different because of the difference within them.

Are some sinners different from others in God's eyes? Romans 3:10-12 says:

. . . There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Even more to the point, Romans 3:22-23 says:

. . . there is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .

God's Word teaches, then, that all sinners are equally sinful before God and that there is no difference between them in God's sight. Clearly, God's Word opposes Schmidt's doctrine about

¹¹²Schodde, *Stellhorn*, p. 512.

¹¹³Schmidt, *Naadevalg-Striden*, p. 4.

differences among sinners being the basis for the election of some and not of others. Such an idea contradicts the teaching that salvation is by God's grace alone.

Why did Schmidt err? Having embraced error with regard to the doctrine of election, he also erred about the nature of man and about the basis for salvation. The golden ring of doctrine being broken at one point, all doctrines were lost.

On the other hand, when election is rightly understood and taught, then the doctrine that salvation is by God's grace alone is also upheld. Note in the following statements from George Stoeckhardt how man's efforts are excluded from the work of salvation and how God's grace alone is shown to be the source of salvation:

Where Holy Scripture speaks of predestination, it refers with the words "election," "predestinate" to an act of God according to which he has selected from the mass of fallen men definite persons.

Holy Scripture designates as the motive for election God's pleasure and the merit of Christ. It says that we are chosen "according to the counsel and good pleasure of God", Eph. 1,5. 11 . . . Thus consideration of man's conduct is totally excluded.¹¹⁴

Notice here how the doctrine of election is rightly presented, and, as a consequence, the chief article of the Christian religion is also purely and clearly taught. Salvation is shown to be by God's grace alone, and man is said to contribute nothing to it. When election is rightly taught, it adorns the doctrine that salvation is by God's grace alone.

¹¹⁴Stoeckhardt, pp. 1-2.

The *intuitu fidei* doctrine of election tends to present salvation as a man-centered work rather than as a Christ-centered work. In The Large Catechism, Luther warned that the devil seeks to "lead us away from God's work to our own."¹¹⁵

Commenting on the tendency to ascribe glory to man concerning his own salvation, C.F.W. Walther wrote:

Anybody who has a teaching on the basis of which man is given an opportunity to boast about himself has a false teaching, while the teaching that really and truly gives God all the glory is most assuredly divine teaching; no matter how much self-righteous man may be offended by it.¹¹⁶

The ways in which the two different forms of the doctrine of election effect the doctrine of salvation by grace alone show which of them is correct. The first form ascribes everything to God's grace alone. The second ascribes salvation, at least in part, to the conduct, attitude, will, and decisions of men.

Faith: Is It a Work of Man, Or Is It a Gift of God?

The nature of faith is another doctrine on which the teachers of the two different forms of the doctrine of election disagreed. The *intuitu fidei* theologians taught that faith is an act of man's will. They taught that it is a condition which man must fulfill in order to be saved.

¹¹⁵Tappert, p. 437:11 (L.C., Fourth Part: Baptism).

¹¹⁶C.F.W. Walther, "God's Grace Alone the Cause of Man's Election," in Lutheran Confessional Theology in America, 1840-1880, p. 180.

P. Eirich wrote:

. . . faith in some way depends upon that which man can do, and must do . . .¹¹⁷

In other words, Eirich saw faith as a work of man.

F.A. Schmidt referred to faith as a *Vilkaar*, a "condition" which man must fulfill.¹¹⁸ He too saw it as a work which man must perform.

Leander Keyser also referred to faith as a condition,¹¹⁹ and Keyser wrote:

Faith is simply the act of the soul by which it accepts God's gift of salvation.¹²⁰

Keyser saw faith as an act of man rather than as a gift of God, and he saw it as a condition required for salvation.

Georg Sverdrup did the same. Sverdrup wrote:

Election is not the cause of faith; but faith and perseverance are conditions for election.¹²¹

Sverdrup saw faith and perseverance in faith as conditions which a sinner must fulfill in order to be qualified to be elected and be saved.

This view of faith on the part of the *intuitu fidei* theologians of the nineteenth century was very different from that of the theologians of the Scriptural and Confessional form of the doctrine of

¹¹⁷P. Eirich, "The Lutheran Doctrine of Conversion," The Columbus Theological Magazine II (December, 1882): 371.

¹¹⁸Schmidt, Naadevalg-Striden, p. III.

¹¹⁹Keyser, p. 32.

¹²⁰Keyser, p. 27.

¹²¹Sverdrup, fjerde Bind, p. 56 - "Udvaelgelsen er ikke Troens Aarsag; men Troen og Bestandigheden er Betingelse for Udvaelgelsen."

election. C.F.W. Walther, describing the *intuitu fidei*-ists, wrote:

. . . they regard faith as something (many, perhaps, without being aware of it) that man himself on his part is required to fulfill, and really does fulfill, ~~not~~ as something that God gives to man . . .¹²²

Walther also described how the teachers of the first form of the doctrine of election saw faith differently. He wrote:

. . . we nevertheless insist in accordance with the Word of God and our confession, that faith is a gift of God without human addition.¹²³

Walther taught, along with Luther and the Scriptures, that sinners cannot freely choose to come to faith in Christ, but rather they are given faith, by God, through the means of grace. This view upholds the doctrine that salvation is by God's grace alone.

What does the Bible say about faith? It says in Ephesians 2:8 that faith is a "gift of God." In John 6:44, Christ says:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him . . .

Philippians 1:6 says:

. . . he (God) who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Clearly, the Bible teaches again and again that faith is a work of God in man.

¹²²C.F.W. Walther, The Doctrine Concerning Election, p. 51.

¹²³C.F.W. Walther, "Election Is Not in Conflict with Justification," in Lutheran Confessional Theology in America, 1840-1880, p. 204.

Martin Luther taught the same thing. Luther wrote:

You assume that faith is your doing, your power, your work; and thereby you interfere with God's work. It is the gift of God, so that He alone may be accorded the honor and no man may boast of his strength. It is the Father who draws us and gives us the Word, and the Holy Spirit and faith by the Word. It is His gift, not our work or power.¹²⁴

The Augsburg Confession also teaches that faith is a work of God in the human heart. Referring to the Gospel and the sacraments, the Augsburg Confession states:

Through these, as through means, he (God) gives the **Holy Spirit**, who **works faith**, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.¹²⁵

The Augsburg Confession, then, teaches that God is the author of faith in every believer's heart, and it teaches that God uses the means of grace to produce saving faith.

This is another point of difference between those who hold to the first form of the doctrine of election and those who hold to the *intuitu fidei* form. Pastors who hold to the first form usually esteem the sacraments very highly, because they see them as God's means for granting the gift of faith. Pastors who hold to the *intuitu fidei* form sometimes minimize the sacraments, because they view faith as an act of man's will, and they consider the sacraments as having little power to influence man's will.

The question of the nature of faith leads also to the question of why God justifies sinners who have faith in Christ. Does God

¹²⁴ LW, 23:181 (Sermons on John, Chapters 6-8, 1530-1532).

¹²⁵ Tappert, p. 31:2 (A.C., Art. V.).

justify believing sinners because He is pleased by a work which they have chosen to perform for Him, or does God justify sinners because of what He Himself does in them through Christ?

The *intuitu fidei* theologians answer that God justifies and saves believing sinners because they have fulfilled His required conditions. Those theologians thus teach a way of salvation which is not based exclusively on grace, but is partially based on the works of man.

Theologians of the Scriptural form of the doctrine of election answer that God justifies sinners through faith for the sake of Jesus Christ. They teach that salvation is entirely by God's grace alone. They say that faith is a gift of God, and that God justifies sinners by imputing the righteousness of Christ to them, through faith, which He also gives them as a gift.

The Will of Unregenerate Man: Is It Bound or Free?

Leander Keyser wrote that God leaves man a free moral agent.¹²⁶

Keyser further wrote:

. . . since God in eternity elected to create free beings, He must have also in eternity elected to respect their freedom and relate Himself thereto.¹²⁷

As that statement shows, Keyser, an *intuitu fidei* theologian, taught that unregenerate sinners have free will.

P. Eirich, another *intuitu fidei* theologian, wrote:

¹²⁶Keyser, p. 36.

¹²⁷Keyser, p. 38.

Faith and conversion, then, are very much dependent upon man's deportment toward the Word of God . . .¹²⁸

Eirich also wrote:

But when prevenient or operating grace is given to a man, it at once begins not to create a mind new in its essence, but to enlighten it, to free the will of its bondage of sin, and to endow it with new powers so that in the transition of the soul from death to life (sic), several stages of life are reached - the first is the ability or capacity to abstain from wilful resistance. If the first capability of the will is used in this way, then follows the second stage or grade, namely, the ability in the will to lay hold upon grace, or to exercise faith in Christ.¹²⁹

As this statement shows, Eirich taught that an unregenerate sinner can freely choose to stop resisting God. Is that true? Is the will of a sinner free in spiritual matters **before** the sinner has faith in Christ, so that the sinner can choose between good and evil? Are unregenerate sinners able to choose to please God by ceasing to oppose Him?

The *intuitu fidei* theologians said "Yes," and they said that this ability to choose is the very basis for election. They said that God looked ahead, before the creation of the world, and foresaw that some sinners would choose to believe in Christ and others would not, even before God had decided to give faith to any of them as a gift of His grace. An action of free will on the part of some sinners, a choice to have faith, became the basis for the election of those sinners unto salvation, according to the *intuitu fidei* theologians.

¹²⁸Eirich, pp. 366-367.

¹²⁹Eirich, p. 370.

The *intuitu fidei* theologians accounted for the difference between sinners by the doctrine of free will. They taught that some sinners would choose to believe in Christ and some would not. Therefore some would be saved, and others would not.

F.A. Schmidt shows the reluctance of the *intuitu fidei* theologians to let God be God and settle matters by the good pleasure of His will. Schmidt wrote:

. . . that cannot be our Savior's meaning, that the decree of God's election in eternity shall specify for us, how things shall go in time . . .¹³⁰

Georg Sverdrup wrote that all "can give room in the heart in the time of grace" to the working of the means of grace.¹³¹ Is that true? Are sinners able to decide that they will give room in their hearts to God and to the means of grace?

What does the Bible say about free will in unregenerate sinners? In Romans 8:7-8, it says:

The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

God's Word says that it is impossible for the old nature of an unregenerate sinner to choose to please God.

P. Eirich said that a person who does not yet have saving faith in Jesus Christ can still nonetheless freely choose whether or not he will oppose God's efforts to save him. That teaching is not true, and

¹³⁰Schmidt, *Naadevalg-Striden*, p. 12 - ". . . dette ikke kan vaere Frelserens Mening, at Guds Udvaelgelses Raad i Evigheden skal forklare for os, hvorfor det gaar saaledes i Tiden . . ."

¹³¹Sverdrup, p. 65.

it flatly contradicts Romans 8:7-8 which says that a sinful mind is unable to submit to the law of God.

On the contrary, the Bible declares in John 1:13 that Christians are born again:

. . . not of blood, nor of the will¹³² of the flesh,
nor of the will of man, but of God.

The Bible records Christ as saying to His disciples in John 15:16:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit . . .

The Bible says in Romans 9:16:

So then it (salvation) is not of him that willeth,
nor of ¹³³him that runneth, but of God that sheweth
mercy.

Ephesians 1:4-5 says:

. . . In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will . . .

James 1:18 says:

He (God) chose to give us birth through the word of truth . . .

The clear teaching of all of Scripture is that no sinner has a free will, able to do anything to please God, before that person is born anew of the Spirit of God. Rather the decision that a sinner will be saved is God's decision, not the sinner's.

What did Martin Luther say about free will in man? Desiderius

¹³²Quotation is from the Authorized Version.

¹³³Quotation is from the Authorized Version.

Erasmus wrote a book entitled On The Freedom of the Will in which he challenged Luther's theology, and taught that man has a free will.

Luther replied to Erasmus:

You and you alone have seen the question on which everything hinges, and have aimed at the vital spot . . .¹³⁴

In other words, Luther saw Erasmus' doctrine of free will in unregenerate sinners as being the most serious of all challenges to his own theology of salvation by God's grace alone. Luther saw free will theology as supporting the idea that a sinner assists God in saving him, and so Luther saw it as the antithesis of his own theology that salvation is by God's grace alone.

Therefore Luther wrote:

. . . in relation to God, or in matters pertaining to salvation or damnation, a man has no free choice, but is a captive, subject and slave either to the will of God or the will of Satan.¹³⁵

And Luther further wrote:

For we cannot have it both ways; the grace of God cannot be both so cheap as to be obtainable anywhere and everywhere by any man's puny endeavor, and at the same time so dear as to be given us only in and through the grace of one Man and so great a Man. I wish the defenders of free choice would take warning at this point, and realize that when they assert free choice they are denying Christ. For if it is by my own effort that I obtain the grace of God, what need have I of the grace of Christ in order to receive it? Or what do I lack when I have the grace of God?¹³⁶

¹³⁴ LW, 33:294 (The Bondage of the Will, 1525).

¹³⁵ LW, 33:70 (The Bondage of the Will, 1525).

¹³⁶ LW, 33:279 (The Bondage of the Will, 1525).

How different Luther's words are from those of the *intuitu fidei* theologians! They spoke about conditions which man must fulfill and conduct which man must present to God in order to be saved. Luther said that nothing in man's efforts or decisions contributes to his salvation. Salvation is all by God's grace alone.

Luther's teaching agrees perfectly with Romans 11:5-6. That passage, too, states that election is by God's grace alone. It says:

So too, at the present time there is a remnant **chosen by grace**. And if by grace, then it is **no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace**.

Grace or works, one or the other, but not both, is the only basis for any sinner's election and salvation. Luther and Scripture declare that salvation is by grace alone.

Is man's will free to choose to believe in Christ, or to choose to stop opposing God, or to do anything else which pleases God and assists Him with salvation? The Formula of Concord also says no. It declares:

. . . We believe that in spiritual and divine things the intellect, heart, and will of unregenerated man cannot by any native or natural powers in any way understand, believe, accept, imagine, will, begin, accomplish, do, effect, or cooperate, but that man is entirely and completely dead and corrupted as far as anything good is concerned.¹³⁷

The Formula also says:

Just as little as a person who is physically dead can by his own powers prepare or accommodate himself to regain temporal life, so little can a man who is spiritually dead, in sin, prepare or address himself by his own power to obtain spiritual and heavenly righteousness and life, unless the Son

¹³⁷Tappert, p. 521:7 (F. of C., Art. II.).

of God has liberated him from the death of sin and made him alive.¹³⁸

The Formula also says:

. . . the unregenerated man resists God entirely and is completely the servant of sin . . .¹³⁹

That last statement shows that an unregenerate man does not have "new powers," with which he can freely choose whether or not he will oppose God. P. Eirich erred when he taught that unregenerate man has such powers by means of prevenient grace.

Leander Keyser also erred when he taught that before regeneration the Holy Spirit "effects a certain enablement of the will" in sinners.¹⁴⁰ Eirich, Keyser, and many others, because of their commitment to the *intuitu fidei* teaching, also erred by teaching that unregenerate man has a free will

Prevenient Grace

In their efforts to explain how unregenerate man could possess a free will capable of choosing whether or not to believe in Christ, some nineteenth century *intuitu fidei* theologians turned to the doctrine of prevenient grace. They claimed that prevenient grace gives freedom of will to unregenerate sinners.

They taught that prevenient grace is a kind of preliminary grace which God gives to unsaved sinners to free their wills and make them

¹³⁸Tappert, p. 522:11 (F. of C., Art. II).

¹³⁹Tappert, p. 537:85 (F. of C., Art. II).

¹⁴⁰Keyser, p. 61.

able to choose whether or not to be saved. Sinners who have been given prevenient grace are not yet born from above by the Spirit of God, but neither are they as helpless and powerless in spiritual matters as sinners without prevenient grace. Rather they are in a middle state between the natural man and the new man in Christ.

P. Eirich described the change in these words:

But when prevenient or operating grace is given to a man, it at once begins not to create a mind new in its essence, but to enlighten it, to free the will of its bondage of sin, and to endow it with new powers so that in the transition of the soul from death to live (sic) several stages of life are reached - the first is the ability¹⁴¹ or capacity to abstain from wilful resistance.

According to Eirich, a sinner who has received prevenient grace is in a transition from death to life, and, although not yet regenerate, can already abstain from wilful resistance to God. Eirich says that such an unregenerate sinner has an enlightened mind, a freed will, and new powers, all because of prevenient grace.

Leander Keyser, in his writings, also employed the doctrine of prevenient grace to support free will theology and synergism. Keyser asked what a sinner can do after he realizes his sinfulness but before he is born again. Keyser answered the question thus:

. . . he can do something, for God by his prevenient grace has given him the ability . . ."¹⁴²

Keyser further wrote:

. . . there must be an action of prevenient grace prior to conversion; which enables man in some way to

¹⁴¹Eirich, p. 370.

¹⁴²Keyser, p. 61.

exercise his will to the extent that he is willing to be saved.¹⁴³

Keyser wrote:

Prevenient grace gives all a chance, and therefore locates the responsibility . . .¹⁴⁴

That last statement means that prevenient grace gives all hearers of the Gospel a free will, and therefore it locates the responsibility for their salvation in themselves. Not only is the sinner responsible if he is lost, as God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions teach, but he is also responsible if he is saved. Everything is in man's hands because of prevenient grace. Such teaching is pure synergism.

Does prevenient grace free an unregenerate sinner's will so that he can freely choose whether or not he will oppose God's work in saving him? Luther said no.

In The Bondage of the Will, Luther wrote:

How miserably Diatribe is tormented here; to avoid losing free choice she twists herself into all sorts of shapes . . . she says that . . . grace preveniently moves the will to will, accompanies it on its way, and gives it a happy issue.¹⁴⁵

"Diatribe" was Luther's name for Erasmus' book teaching that unregenerate man has a free will in spiritual matters. Luther said that prevenient grace was one of the false arguments which Erasmus

¹⁴³Keyser, pp. 71-72.

¹⁴⁴Keyser, p. 65.

¹⁴⁵LW, 33:184-185 (The Bondage of the Will, 1525).

used to try to support his doctrine of free will.

Luther would have none of it. He insisted that man's will is not free before conversion, not by virtue of prevenient grace, nor anything else. Rather, Luther taught that the sinner's will is bound, and God alone works salvation in sinners.

The Lutheran Confessions in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, also reject the idea that prevenient grace gives new powers to unregenerate men. Although the Apology does not use the term "prevenient grace," it does oppose the concept. It says:

. . . our opponents require a knowledge of the history about Christ and claim that he merited for us a certain disposition or, as they call it, "initial grace," which they understand as a disposition inclining us to love God more easily. . . Thus they bury Christ.¹⁴⁶

In that statement, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession declares that the doctrine that "initiating grace" empowers unregenerate man to love God is a teaching which "buries Christ." In other words, it does away with Christ as the only propitiation for our sins.

The Apology also teaches that when faith comes into a sinner's heart, "it produces new impulses and new works."¹⁴⁷ That means that a person has new spiritual impulses and powers after he becomes a Christian, but until one has faith in Christ, he does not have new spiritual powers. Prevenient grace does not give them to him.

Scripture, Luther, and the Confessions do not support the

¹⁴⁶Tappert, p. 109:17-18 (Ap., Art. IV.).

¹⁴⁷Tappert, p. 143:250 (Ap., Art. IV.).

doctrine of prevenient grace, as the *intuitu fidei*-ists taught it. But the Council of Trent did. It was the council which condemned Lutheranism. The decrees of the Council of Trent state:

It is furthermore declared that in adults the beginning of that justification must proceed from the pre-disposing grace of God through Jesus Christ, that is, from His vocation, whereby, without any merits on their part, they are called; that they who by sin had been cut off from God, may be disposed through His quickening and helping grace to convert themselves to their own justification by freely assenting to and cooperating with that grace; so that, while God touches the heart of man through the illumination of the Holy Ghost, man himself neither does absolutely nothing while receiving that inspiration, since he can also reject it, nor yet is he able by his own free will and without the grace of God to move himself to justice in His sight. Hence, when it is said in the sacred writings: Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you, we are reminded of our liberty . . .¹⁴⁸

As this statement shows, Roman Catholicism embraced the doctrine of prevenient grace. How ironic that the doctrine which Luther rejected, and which his adversaries embraced, was later taught by the *intuitu fidei* theologians as being Lutheran doctrine! Truly error in the doctrine of election leads to many other errors as well.

Arminianism is a strongly free-will school of theology. Arminianism also employs the doctrine of prevenient grace to explain how sinners can have free will. Arminianism teaches that God uses

¹⁴⁸H.J. Schroeder, Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: Original Text with English Translation (St. Louis, Missouri: B. Herder Book Co., 1955), p. 31-32. Although the English translation employs the phrase "pre-disposing grace," and not "prevenient grace," the original Latin text is "*praeveniente gratia*." Cf. p. 310.

prevenient grace to free the will of man, and then, with new spiritual powers, man is able to cooperate with God in the work of regeneration.

This doctrine of conversion is, of course, heavily synergistic.¹⁴⁹ It is also essentially the same as that of the *intuitu fidei* theologians.

The *intuitu fidei* theologians of the nineteenth century were led by their wrong understanding of the doctrine of election to accept a wrong doctrine about freedom of will in man. Free will theology, in turn, led them to adopt a false doctrine of prevenient grace, and so error led to further error.

Status Medius: Is There a "Middle State" Between
Being a Lost and Condemned Sinner and Being a Christian?

The doctrine that there is a "middle status," or "stages," between being an unregenerate sinner and being a regenerate child of God is another link in the chain of errors which begins with the *intuitu fidei* doctrine. P. Eirich, for example, referred to "several stages" through which a convert must pass. He wrote:

But when prevenient or operating grace is given to a man, it at once begins not to create a mind new in its essence, but to enlighten it, to free the will of its bondage of sin, and to endow it with new powers, so that in the transition of the soul from death to live (sic), several stages of life are reached - the first is the ability or capacity to abstain from

¹⁴⁹ Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, vol. 1 (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 543.

wilful resistance. If the first capability of the will is used in this way, then follows the second stage or grade, namely, the ability in the will to lay hold upon grace, or to exercise faith in Christ.¹⁵⁰

Note in this description how prevenient grace is said to change a sinner. A sinner is said to go through a "stage" of "life" before actually coming to faith in Christ. A sinner only progresses to faith in Christ, if he first uses rightly his free will, and chooses not to resist God's work in him.

Is this true? Are sinners spiritually alive before they have faith in Christ? Does prevenient grace put sinners into a middle stage between being born again and being dead in trespasses and sins?

Franz Pieper, a teacher of the Scriptural and confessional form of the doctrine of election, wrote:

There is no such thing as a **status medius** between death and life, between the converted and the unconverted state.¹⁵¹

Quoting C.F.W. Walther, Pieper also wrote:

Whoever teaches that a man may be converted and yet not be entirely converted, contradicts the Scriptures, which know but two states, death or life. Whoever is not under grace is under wrath; whoever is not in life is still in death; whoever is not on the way to heaven is on the way to hell; whoever is an unsaved person is a damned person. There is no twilight stage, no middle state between light and darkness.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰Eirich, p. 370.

¹⁵¹Pieper, Conversion and Election, p. 109.

¹⁵²Pieper, Conversion and Election, p. 117.

What could be clearer? As these two teachers of the first form, which is the Scriptural and confessional form of the doctrine of election, have so well stated, there is no middle state between spiritual life and spiritual death.

Luther, too, taught that there is no middle state. Luther wrote:

For with God there is nothing intermediate between righteousness and sin, no neutral ground, so to speak, which is neither righteousness nor sin. . . . Paul's whole argument . . . presupposes this division, namely, that whatever is done or devised among men is either righteousness or sin before God: righteousness if faith is present, sin if faith is absent.¹⁵³

The Bible also teaches that there are only two spiritual states.

In John 3:6, it says:

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Until a person is born from above by the Spirit of God, he has only one nature. It is the sinful nature of the flesh with which he was born into this world. Such a person has only a mind of the flesh, which, according to Romans 8:6-7, is a mind of death. It cannot submit to the Law of God, because it is an enemy of God.

However, after a person has been born from above by the work of the Holy Spirit, then he can please God, because then the Holy Spirit dwells in him. Then he shares the mind of Christ.

Scripture nowhere teaches that a person can be half-way born of the Spirit and half-way not. Indeed, Scripture indicates by the clear dichotomy of flesh and spirit, in John 3:6, that such a middle state

¹⁵³LW, 33:264 (The Bondage of the Will, 1525).

does not exist.

The Mystery of Election: Why Are Some Saved, And Not Others?

The *intuitu fidei* theologians said that there is no mystery in election. Some of the pastors and teachers who left the Missouri Synod during the Election Controversy wrote:

. . . the Scriptures say nowhere that election is a mystery in a special sense.¹⁵⁴

They also wrote:

Election is revealed to us in the Scriptures and is no more a mystery than any other article of faith.¹⁵⁵

Leander Keyser, another *intuitu fidei* theologian, found a reasonable answer to the question of why God elected some to salvation but not others. Keyser said that the answer is found in man's free will, given to him by prevenient grace. Because every sinner who hears the Gospel can choose for himself whether or not he will believe in Christ, God merely predestined unto salvation those whom He foresaw as choosing to come to faith.

Keyser wrote:

It is all very simple and plain and reasonable, if we just accept the clear Bible statements. In a state of nature, therefore, man has no spiritual ability; but so soon as the gospel Call and Illumination reach him, he has been touched by a spiritual power, and is not quite the same as before.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴Schodde, *Former Missourians*, pp. 594-595.

¹⁵⁵Schodde, *Former Missourians*, p. 621.

¹⁵⁶Keyser, p. 66.

According to Keyser, everything about election is agreeable to human reason. Keyser wrote that there are no incongruities and no absurdities in the Bible. There is nothing which "shocks the spiritually enlightened and sanctified reason."¹⁵⁷

Yet, in spite of these protestations, it seems that the whole goal of the nineteenth century *intuitu fidei* theologians was to answer the question: Why some, and not others? The proponents of this doctrine did not accept the teaching of the Formula of Concord that election applies only to those who are chosen unto eternal life, and that God did not also elect other sinners to be damned.¹⁵⁸ Rather they sought an answer to the question, Why some, but not others?, which would be agreeable to their reason.

F.A. Schmidt, the foremost *intuitu fidei* theologian of the nineteenth century, showed his discontent with the Scriptural and confessional teaching that election applies only to the children of God. Schmidt wrote:

If, however, one teaches that out of the whole depraved human race God made His election unto conversion, faith, and perseverance, and that this election is also the cause of these blessings, then one also clearly teaches that the rest of the depraved race is, by this election, excluded from the same blessings.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷Keyser, p. 72.

¹⁵⁸Tappert, pp. 494-495 (F. of C., Art. XI.).

¹⁵⁹Schmidt, p. II - "Laerer man derimod, at Gud kun af den lige fortabte Menneskeslaegt gjorde sin Udvaelgelse til Omvendelse, Tro og Bestandighed, hvilken Udvaelgelse tillige er "Aarsage" til disse Gøder, saa laerer man aabenbart, at de Øvrige i den lige fortabte Slaegt ved denne Udvaelgelse bleve udelukte fra de samme Gøder."

The mystery is: Why some and not others? (*Cur alii prae aliis?*) Schmidt, like other *intuitu fidei* theologians, sought to answer the question by saying that there are differences between sinners, resulting from their own free will. God elected those whom He foresaw as freely choosing to believe.

C.F.W. Walther commented:

. . . many desire to explain and make the unsearchable and inexplicable mysteries which the doctrine on predestination contains, agree with reason, by saying: Why the elect are predestinated, may be explained from this that God foresaw their conduct, that they, namely, would accept the Gospel in faith, and remain steadfast in every cross and temptation, and endure in the true faith to their end.¹⁶⁰

Walther's analysis is right. The *intuitu fidei* doctrine is an attempt to make the doctrine of election agreeable to reason. It is an attempt to answer a question which is unanswerable, and will remain so for Christians until they reach heaven: Why some, but not others?

Scripture warns against asking that question. In Romans 9:18-20, it says:

Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?"

The Formula of Concord also warns us against applying reason to the question of why some, but not others. It says:

¹⁶⁰Walther, The Doctrine Concerning Election, p. 7.

But whenever something in the discussion of this subject soars too high and goes beyond these limits, we must with Paul place our finger on our lips and say, "Who are you, a man, to answer back to God?" The great apostle Paul shows us that we cannot and should not try to explore and explain everything in this article.¹⁶¹

Rather than try to answer every mystery, the Formula tells us to content ourselves with what God has revealed. It says:

. . . there are many points in this mystery about which God has remained silent and which he has not revealed but has kept reserved solely to his own wisdom and knowledge. We are not to pry into these, nor are we to follow our own thoughts in this matter and draw our own conclusions and brood, but we are to adhere to the revealed Word.¹⁶²

What, then, has God revealed in His Word? He has revealed two truths. The first is that He has elected some sinners, but not others, to receive faith in Christ, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. The second is that He "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." (I Timothy 2:4)

These statements may seem contradictory, but both are true. If our minds cannot reconcile them, then we must bow before the wisdom of God, and acknowledge that His ways are higher than ours.

The *intuitu fidei* theologians sought to answer the question, Why some, but not others?, by saying that there is a difference in people. Some people choose to believe, and others do not. But that answer results in synergism. Franz Pieper has pointed out the problem with

¹⁶¹Tappert, p. 626:63-64 (F. of C., Art. XI.).

¹⁶²Tappert, p. 625:52 (F. of C., Art. XI.).

it in the following statement:

The synergistic solution of the mystery of election is brought about by a denial of *sola gratia*. It is immaterial how much one subtracts from divine grace. If conversion and salvation do not rest upon divine grace alone, but in some measure upon man himself, upon his "good conduct," upon anything good that man does, or upon anything evil that he omits to do, the problem why only a part of humanity becomes converted and saved is made clear to human reason. In this case only some men have - by acting or not acting - contributed the necessary share required of man toward effecting conversion. Thus the difficulty in the path of human understanding is fully removed, but at the same time a contradiction with the Scriptures is created.¹⁶³

Pieper is right. Human reason, applied to the doctrine of election, leads to synergism and to departures from God's Word.

Human reason cannot fully understand the mystery of election, and it should not try. When reason attempts to understand the doctrine of election, it always errs, and not only on the doctrine of election. It errs also about salvation being by God's grace alone, and about many other articles of doctrine.

George Stoeckhardt wrote:

The doctrine of predestination is a touchstone by which God tests the hearts. He wishes to find out whether we are really serious about the assurance that God's Word is above human opinion, that God's Word should in every respect determine doctrine and confession; whether we really are determined to take our reason captive in obedience to Christ.¹⁶⁴

This is true. A person's approach to the doctrine of election says much about his submission to the authority of God's Word in all

¹⁶³ Pieper, Conversion and Election, p. 31.

¹⁶⁴ Stoeckhardt, p. 70.

areas. When reason is allowed to rule over the doctrine of election, it will also rule over other doctrines, and it will mislead.

But Stoeckhardt also wrote:

Whoever in faith becomes absorbed in this bottomless abyss of grace and mercy of God, for him the desire to find fault with God's wonderful logic disappears.¹⁶⁵

Yes! God's grace in Jesus Christ is the Water of Life for thirsty souls. For those who know that they have nothing in themselves to commend them to God, the doctrines of election and of salvation by grace alone meet every need and still all clamorings of reason.

¹⁶⁵Stoeckhardt, p. 69.

CHAPTER VIII

ELECTION AND THE WORK OF MINISTRY

The first form of the doctrine of election emphasizes that election and salvation are by God's grace alone. The second form, the *intuitu fidei* form, encourages the view that a sinner must work together with God to accomplish his salvation.

As a result, how a pastor understands the doctrine of election, influences how he conducts his ministry. Those who hold to the first form tend to delight in the Gospel.

Such pastors see the Good News of the Gospel as the primary means of grace by which God saves sinners, and they respect and rely upon the sacraments, as the Gospel in visible form, to save souls. Pastors holding to the first form see the work of ministry as being the work of rightly preaching God's Word and rightly administering the sacraments, so that through these means of grace, God Himself will forgive sins and save sinners.

On the other hand, pastors who hold to the *intuitu fidei* form of election often tend to give primary emphasis to the Law in their ministries. The *intuitu fidei* doctrine leads them to believe that a sinner must fulfill certain conditions, make certain decisions, and present certain kinds of conduct to God in order to be elected and be saved. Therefore such pastors feel that they must preach the Law and tell sinners what decisions and conduct God demands of them.

Often pastors who hold to election as taught by the nineteenth century *intuitu fidei* theologians have little regard for the sacraments. They see the sacraments as ineffective in moving the human will to make the decisions and perform the conduct which are necessary for election and salvation. Consequently, although they administer the sacraments, they view them as ecclesiastical customs, not as life-giving means of grace.

Indeed, even the Gospel, with its unconditional declaration of the grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ, is seen by some pastors as ineffective in moving sinners to make the necessary decision to choose to believe. The emphasis of such pastors is on the Law, not just as a preparation for the Gospel, but as the chief instrument for producing salvation.

The two different forms of the doctrine of election encourage, then, two very different views of the work of ministry. Let's note some of the practical differences.

The Two Forms of Election, and The Office of the Ministry

Followers of the *intuitu fidei* theologians see the office of the ministry as the work of persuading sinners to make a decision for Christ. C.F.W. Walther did not hold that view, but he nevertheless has provided a very good description of the free will theology which underlies it. He wrote:

Many people think of conversion as being at a crossroads leading either to heaven or hell. Now a person has the choice between the two: If he picks the right way, he ends up converted; if he chooses the wrong

way, he will be lost. But that robs God of all His glory, for if man has the capacity to choose what is good, then there must be some virtue in him that leads him to do this good work even before conversion.¹⁶⁶

Because pastors, who hold to the *intuitu fidei* doctrine of election, often believe that unregenerate man has free will, they try to persuade sinners to make the correct decision concerning salvation. They think, with logic appropriate to their view, that if a sinner must make a certain decision in order to be saved, then a pastor ought to tell the sinner what that decision is, and he ought to do whatever he can to persuade the sinner to make the proper decision.

The pastor also ought to use whatever means are necessary to obtain the required decision. If emotionalism is effective, use it. If certain kinds of music seem to produce decisions, use them. The main criterion for evaluating any activity of ministry is its perceived effectiveness in leading sinners to declare that they are choosing to become Christians.

On the other hand, if any activity appears ineffective at producing decisions for Christ, then ignore it, even if it is a practice of long-standing in the Christian Church, and even if it is a sacrament instituted by Christ. Give it short shrift, when converts do not point to it as the agent which persuaded them to make a decision to receive Christ.

The work of ministry, in the view of those who follow the *intuitu fidei* theologians, is to persuade sinners to do what they must do in

¹⁶⁶ C.F.W. Walther, Selected Writings of C.F.W. Walther; Convention Essays, translated by Aug. R. Suelflow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), pp. 178-179.

order to be saved. The main tool of their ministry is the Law.

On the other hand, pastors who hold to the Scriptural and Confessional form of the doctrine of election view the office of the ministry as it is defined in Article V of the Augsburg Confession. That article states:

To obtain . . . faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.¹⁶⁷

For a pastor who sees the election of sinners unto salvation as a decision of God's will, based upon God's grace alone, the office of the ministry is the task of rightly preaching God's Word and rightly administering the sacraments. Such a pastor believes that through these means of grace, God gives the gift of saving faith when and where He pleases. As Romans 10:17 says:

. . . faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

A pastor who holds to the first form of the doctrine of election does not see it as his job to persuade the will of sinners to cooperate with God. Rather, his God-given responsibility is to preach the Law which reveals sin, and which destroys the self-confidence of sinners. Also his job is to preach the Gospel which declares the forgiveness of sin to sinners for the sake of Christ and which assures them that God is pleased with him.

The Gospel is the message of God's grace in Jesus Christ. It is

¹⁶⁷Tappert, p. 31:1-3 (A. C., Art. V.).

the declaration that God has settled all of His wrath against us by the death of His Son on the cross. God gives full forgiveness of sins and eternal life for the sake of Christ.

The Gospel is the main tool by which a pastor who holds to the first form of the doctrine of election seeks to minister to needy souls. The Gospel is his tool of choice.

In summary, then, the two different forms of the doctrine of election encourage two very different understandings of what the work of the ministry is. One encourages a pastor to see his ministry as making appeals to the will of man. The other encourages him to see it as carrying out the will of God.

The Two Forms of Election,
and The Place of The Word in Pastoral Work

Leander Keyser, one of the nineteenth century *intuitu fidei* theologians, boasted that his theology was practical and effective. Keyser wrote:

Whether, this was the correct theology or not, it worked.¹⁶⁸

Keyser's comment shows how *intuitu fidei* pastors and theologians evaluate preaching and other activities of ministry. The most important thing is not whether the preaching or activity agrees with God's Word, but whether or not it works. Does it produce the desired results? Does it persuade sinners who possess free will to declare that they are choosing to become Christians?

¹⁶⁸Keyser, p. 104.

Such a criterion for evaluating preaching is based on a misunderstanding of the central place of the Word of God in all true ministry. It is similar to a farmer saying, "I want growth. I don't care if my seed is good or bad, as long as it grows."

On the other hand, pastors who hold to the first form of the doctrine of election also tend to hold that all true and blessed pastoral work can only grow from the good seed of the pure Word of God. Only good seed can produce a good crop. Therefore the preaching of pure doctrine is essential to all sound, pastoral work. As the Formula of Concord declares:

. . . it is God's will to call men to eternal salvation, to draw them to himself, convert them, beget them anew, and sanctify them through this means and in no other way - namely, through his holy Word (when one hears it preached or reads it) and the sacraments (when they are used according to his Word.)¹⁶⁹

A true, spiritual harvest does not come from what appears to human reason to "work." Rather it comes from sowing the good seed of God's Word.

The Two Forms of Election,
and The Place of the Sacraments in Pastoral Work

The *intuitu fidei* doctrine of election encourages free will theology, and free will theology, in turn, robs a Christian of the assurance that he receives God's blessing in the sacraments. Free will theology teaches that the sacraments depend upon the attitudes

¹⁶⁹Tappert, p. 531:50-51 (F. of C., Art. II.).

and actions of the one who receives them, rather than upon the promises of God's grace.

F.A. Schmidt, the leading *intuitu fidei* theologian of the nineteenth century, wrote:

Salvation in Christ is brought to us in Word and sacrament, by the promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation to all who believe, without exception, **if they only will convert themselves and receive God's gift in faith.**¹⁷⁰

In this statement, Schmidt says that Christ is in the sacrament for a sinner, **only** if the sinner converts himself. In other words, Christ's presence in a sacrament depends upon the actions and attitudes of the sinner who receives it. The result of such teaching is that a sinner must bless himself when he receives a sacrament.

Scripture, however, teaches that it is God who works and blesses us in the sacraments. Titus 3:5-6 says concerning baptism:

He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.

That verse says that God saves through baptism. The sacraments are God's work, and God is present in them, regardless of the attitude of the recipient.

Listen to what Luther wrote about the sacraments in the Large Catechism. Concerning baptism, he wrote:

¹⁷⁰ Schmidt, Naadevalg-Strident, p. 58 - "Frelsen i Kristo bringes til os i Ord og Sakrament ved Forjaettelsen om Syndernes Forladelse, Liv, or Salighed til alle Syndere uden Undtagelse, om de blot ville omvende sig og i Troen annamme Guds Gave."

To be baptized in God's name is to be baptized not by men but by God himself. Although it is performed by men's hands, it is nevertheless truly God's own act.¹⁷¹

Concerning the Lord's Supper, Luther wrote:

In this sacrament he offers us all the treasure he brought from heaven for us . . .¹⁷²

For Luther, the sacraments are God's works and gifts of God's grace.

The Formula of Concord also teaches that God's eternal purpose of election included the plan to distribute the blessings of salvation to particular sinners through the means of grace. The Formula states:

. . . in his purpose and counsel God has ordained the following: . . . That this merit and these benefits of Christ are to be offered, given, and distributed to us through his Word and sacraments.¹⁷³

The Formula further states:

. . . Christ has the promises of the Gospel offered not only in general but also through the sacraments, which he has attached as a seal of the promise and by which he confirms it to every believer individually . . . We would be deprived of this comfort completely if we could not determine God's will toward us from the call which comes to us through the Word and through the sacraments.¹⁷⁴

A Christian does not derive assurance that he is elected unto salvation from his own feelings, actions, and reason. Rather, according to the Formula, a Christian derives assurance that he is

¹⁷¹Tappert, p. 437:10 (L.C., Fourth Part: Baptism).

¹⁷²Tappert, p. 454:66 (L.C., Fifth Part: Sacrament of the Altar).

¹⁷³Tappert, p. 619:14 & 16 (F. of C., Art. XI.).

¹⁷⁴Tappert, p. 622:37-38 (F. of C., Art. XI.).

elected unto salvation by hearing the promises of the Gospel and by receiving the sacraments.

A pastor who believes the teachings of Scripture about election sees himself as an appointed steward of divine mysteries. He administers baptism and the Lord's Supper with full assurance that through them God works great miracles of grace and replaces spiritual death with spiritual life.

To such a pastor, baptismal regeneration and the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper are not outdated doctrinal relics. They are not embarrassing doctrines which he avoids in preaching and teaching. Rather these doctrines are magnificent truths. Such a pastor glories in the power and efficacy of the sacraments, and he praises them before his hearers.

The Two Forms of the Doctrine of Election,
and Teaching about Election

Pastors who hold to the first form, the Scriptural and confessional form of the doctrine of election, are much more likely to teach their parishoners about election than are those who hold to the *intuitu fidei* form. The reason is that they see election as supporting the chief doctrine of the faith, the teaching that salvation is entirely a gift of God's grace alone.

On the other hand, pastors who hold to the second form of the doctrine of election, the *intuitu fidei* doctrine, are less likely to teach election to their parishoners. The reason is that they view it

as having little value for persuading sinners to make decisions to receive Christ.

Leander Keyser, a nineteenth century *intuitu fidei* pastor and theologian, wrote:

You cannot build an operative Church on this doctrine of election. It is too academic and scholastic. It is not a practical or a preachable theology.¹⁷⁵

That statement is an invitation to ignore the doctrine of election in parish ministry.

But what does God's Word say? As we saw earlier, the doctrine of election is taught in many places in the New Testament, and it was taught by nearly all of the apostolic writers of Scripture. The Word of God says:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for **teaching**, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:16-17)

The doctrine of election is part of Holy Scripture, and all of Scripture is profitable for teaching. Therefore the doctrine of election is profitable for teaching too. If a pastor wishes to preach the whole counsel of God, then he cannot rightly ignore the doctrine of election.

C.F.W. Walther wrote a book entitled The Doctrine Concerning Election Presented in Questions and Answers From the Eleventh Article of the Formula of Concord of the Evangelical Church. In that book,

¹⁷⁵Keyser, pp. 103-104.

Walther asks this question:

Dare we regard the doctrine of election as useless or even injurious?¹⁷⁶

Walther answers no, and then he quotes from the Formula of Concord:

. . . the doctrine concerning this article, if it be set forth according to the analogy of the divine Word, neither can nor should be regarded as useless or unnecessary, much less as offensive or injurious, since the Holy Scriptures mention this article not only at one place casually, but copiously treat and inculcate it in many places.¹⁷⁷

The doctrine of election, then, has been given to the Church by God, and God means for it to be taught in His Church.

To whom should the doctrine of election be taught? The answer is that it is intended for all Christians for their comfort.

But it is not intended for unbelievers. C.F.W. Walther wrote in his book The Doctrine Concerning Election:

Should this pamphlet fall into the hands of such a reader also who is not yet a living and believing Christian, - we advise him either not to read it at all, or, at least, not before he also has become a living and believing Christian. For before this is done, what this pamphlet contains is not food for him . . . For where the light of a living faith does not yet shine in the heart, nothing else can be expected, but that you will become offended at the doctrine of predestination, just then when it is presented not according to human reason, but according to the Word of God.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶Walther, The Doctrine Concerning Election, p. 16.

¹⁷⁷Walther, The Doctrine Concerning Election, p. 16. See also Tappert, p. 616:2.

¹⁷⁸Walther, The Doctrine Concerning Election, p. 9.

Walther goes on to say that election should always be studied in the proper sequence in a person's spiritual life. That sequence is presented by Paul in the book of Romans.

First, sin should be recognized, and there should be repentance of it. Then the Gospel and grace should be studied and received by faith. Next, there should be striving against sin in the Christian's life. Afterwards, predestination should be studied to comfort and reassure the struggling Christian that his salvation is not in his own weak hands. Rather, it has been decreed by Almighty God.

George Stoeckhardt also identified the proper candidates for study of the doctrine of election. He wrote:

The doctrine of predestination is a doctrine for Christians . . . Only repentant, believing Christians sanctified by the Spirit of God, who earnestly aspire to what is above, are able to comprehend and understand this doctrine.¹⁷⁹

Pastors, then, who hold to the first form of the doctrine of election are willing to teach the subject to Christians because it is a truth of God's Word. Pastors who follow the *intuitu fidei* form often feel that election should be ignored altogether.

History shows that there is a cross to be borne by those who teach the doctrine of election in accordance with God's Word. Dr. Walther was subjected to intense criticism during the Predestination Controversy. One of his opponents referred to him, in print, as "one

¹⁷⁹Stoeckhardt, p. 153.

of the greatest hypocrites who ever lived."¹⁸⁰

Dr. Walther, however, wrote:

We know very well that not all who at present condemn us and call us heretics, are no longer Christians; but, God be praised, we are not the first person who, for the sake of the truth, has been called a heretic and condemned, even by Christians out of ignorance.¹⁸¹

Walther also wrote:

. . . we would rather, on account of our firmly holding fast to our confession, depart from this world cursed as a heretic and condemned by men, and be accepted of God through His grace as His faithful steward, than to be praised by men on account of our unsteadfastness, and, thus praised, to depart as an unjust steward . . .¹⁸²

In these statements, Dr. Walther exhibits well the appropriate attitude for all who confess the correct form of the doctrine of election. The goal should be to teach the truth of God's Word in order to please God and without regard to human opposition.

The Two Forms of Election,
and Reverence for God in Preaching

Pastors who hold to the *intuitu fidei* doctrine of election often focus in their preaching on persuading the will of man to choose to believe in Christ. In so doing, they often lose sight of the glory of God in their preaching. Instead of proclaiming God's majesty and grace, their preaching reflects F.A. Schmidt's view that God takes a

¹⁸⁰ Schodde, Allwardt, p. 777.

¹⁸¹ Walther, The Doctrine Concerning Election, p. 4.

¹⁸² Walther, The Doctrine Concerning Election, p. 3.

"deferential attitude toward the conduct of men."¹⁸³

Dr. Walther's preaching reflects an opposite viewpoint. Note in the following prayer from Dr. Walther how all of the work of salvation is attributed to God alone, and therefore all of the glory for salvation is God's alone. This prayer was prayed by Walther at the beginning of a sermon about election:

Lord Jesus, Thou Son of the living God, who didst come into this world in order to save sinners: thanksgiving and blessing, and glory, and honor be unto Thee on this day of Thy gracious and blessed nativity, because Thou didst not only come into this world, in order to save also us poor sinners, but when we all like sheep had gone astray, as the good Shepherd Thou didst follow us, didst call us unto Thee through the shepherd's voice of Thy sweet Gospel, didst grant us faith in Thee, and hast kept us steadfast in this faith unto the present day. O, how may we ever thank Thee sufficiently in time and eternity? We did not seek Thee, but Thou didst seek us; we did not come unto Thee, but Thou didst come unto us. By what means did we deserve Thy mercy, which Thou has bestowed upon us above millions of other men? Ah, it is only Thy undeserved grace to which we owe all this. Thou didst see us lying in the blood of our sins, when, behold! this sight broke Thy heart and Thou saidst unto us: "Thou shalt live!" Now then, O Lord Jesus, who once on this day didst give Thyself unto us, to-day we give ourselves unto Thee. Here is our heart! Take it, cleanse it and adorn it as Thy dwelling-place, and rule and reign in it, until we die. And with all angels and archangels, with all cherubim and seraphim, with all thrones and dominions, with all the blessed and elect we will give Thee thanks, praise, glory, and honor for ever and ever. Amen.¹⁸⁴

This prayer is worship. It is filled with reverence. There is no exaltation of man or self in it. Rather, Christ is all in all.

¹⁸³Schodde, Schmidt, p. 565.

¹⁸⁴Walther, Sermon on Predestination, p. 3.

Such exaltation of Christ results from viewing election as the gracious work of God alone. It results from a heartfelt acceptance of Christ's words in John 15:5: ". . . apart from me you can do nothing." The first form of the doctrine of election is built upon the truth of those words.

The two forms of the doctrine of election are, then, quite different in their ability to encourage reverence before God. The first form teaches that election is God's work, and consequently it fosters reverent worship of the God who saves by His grace alone. The second form teaches that man's free will is decisive, and so it replaces reverence for God with deference for man.

In summary, then, there are great differences between the understanding of the office of the ministry which is derived from the first form of the doctrine of election, and that which is derived from the *intuitu fidei* form. The *intuitu fidei* form sees the office of the ministry as man's work for God. The Scriptural and confessional form sees it as God's work through man.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMING UP: THE VALUE OF THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

The election of sinners unto salvation is a work of God which He performed before the creation of the world. God foresaw the fall of the human race into sin, and He foresaw man's need of salvation. Because of His mercy and love, God planned for the atoning death of Christ as the grounds for saving all sinners, and God also chose particular persons, from all ages of history, to come to faith in Christ and be saved.

God did not, however, choose anyone to be lost. The wicked are lost because of their own sins. Their condemnation results from their own sinfulness, not from election by God.

On the other hand, the salvation of those who are saved is solely the result of God's grace. His election of them unto salvation causes them to come to faith in Christ.

This manner of teaching about the doctrine of election is called the "first form" of the doctrine of election. It is the teaching of Scripture and of the Lutheran Confessions.

Unfortunately, there is also a second form. It is often called the *intuitu fidei* form. It says that God first foresaw faith in Christ in particular persons, and then God elected those persons unto salvation. Some Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries initially adopted this second form as a way of opposing

Calvinism with its disregard for the role of faith in salvation.

Later, in the nineteenth century, some Lutheran theologians misused the second form of the doctrine of election to teach that God elected particular persons unto salvation because He foresaw faith in them. They said that God foresaw that some people would freely choose to become believers in Christ, and so God elected them unto salvation because of foreseeing their decisions and actions. Thus those theologians made salvation partly a product of man's will.

A bitter controversy took place between those who held to the first form of the doctrine of election and those who held to the second. That controversy, which began in the 1870's and 1880's, caused divisions which still persist in Lutheranism today.

Also the two different forms of the doctrine of election have contributed to two different understandings of the work of a Christian minister. Those who hold to the first form of the doctrine of election tend to view the office of the ministry as the work of administering Word and sacraments so that God will work through these means of grace to save sinners. Those who hold to the second form tend to view ministry as the work of appealing to the will of sinners, so that the sinners will choose to have faith in Christ.

The first form fosters a view of ministry which is Gospel-oriented and based upon grace. The second form fosters a view of ministry which is Law-oriented and based upon synergism. One is evangelical. The other is legalistic.

Thus the doctrine of election has been the focus of much conflict

between Lutherans. But what is its value? What benefit is it to Christians? The Formula of Concord states:

This doctrine gives sorrowing and tempted people the permanently abiding comfort of knowing that their salvation does not rest in their own hands. If this were the case, they would lose it more readily than Adam and Eve did in paradise - yes, would be losing it every moment and hour. Their salvation rests in the gracious election of God, which he has revealed to us in Christ, out of whose hand "no one can pluck" us (John 10:28; II Tim. 2:19).¹⁸⁵

As these words show, the greatest value of the doctrine of election is that it gives the assurance of salvation to sinners.

It also comforts Christians in times of persecution.¹⁸⁶ When Christians are persecuted, the thought of their election gives them the confidence of Romans 8:31 & 33:

If God is for us, who can be against us? . . .
 . . . Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

The doctrine of election also reassures Christians in times of temptation.¹⁸⁷ When a Christian senses the sinfulness of his flesh and how susceptible he is to temptation, when he is painfully aware that his faith is weak, then he is comforted by realizing that his salvation is settled by God's will, not by his own strength.

The doctrine of election also encourages a Christian to make the best possible use of his time and energy in serving Christ and leading

¹⁸⁵Tappert, p. 631:90 (F. of C., Art. XI.).

¹⁸⁶Stub, pp. 39-40.

¹⁸⁷Walther, The Doctrine Concerning Election, p. 54.

others to salvation in Him.¹⁸⁸ Since a Christian's salvation is sure because of God's eternal election, the Christian does not need to waste his time and energy seeking to ensure his own salvation. Instead, he can freely and joyously live a life of fruitful service to Christ.

These and many other blessings come from the doctrine of election which is revealed in Holy Scripture. The value of this doctrine for Christians has been very well summarized by Dr. C.F.W. Walther in the following statement:

Behold, like a thread of gold the doctrine of predestination is drawn through the whole Bible. Christ as well as all the holy apostles make use of this doctrine, sometimes in order to strengthen faith, sometimes in order to enliven hope; now for consolation, now for encouragement, now for humiliation; sometimes in order to incite believers to pray with unwavering faith, at other times in order to warn and guard them against unbelief, sin, and apostasy. How useful and profitable, therefore, must be this doctrine!¹⁸⁹

Yes, all of these purposes are served by the doctrine of election, but they are served only when the doctrine is kept pure from the synergistic notion that sinful man can work together with God to achieve his salvation. The *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election often leads to synergism. For that reason, and also because it has no basis in Scripture, it must be rejected.

But when election is taught purely, when it is presented so as to teach that salvation is all by God's grace alone, then the doctrine of

¹⁸⁸Stoeckhardt, p. 165.

¹⁸⁹Walther, Sermon on Election, p. 7.

election is a blessing to Christians. Robert Preus has written:

One of the great concerns of Luther and the Reformers was to have the assurance of salvation. How do we acquire such certainty? Not by looking to ourselves - as Romanists and synergists taught - but by looking to all the promises of God and firmly relying on them. And among these Gospel promises is this, that He has loved us in Christ and chosen us from eternity to be His ¹⁹⁰own, and nothing can hinder His eternal purpose.

Yes, the doctrine of election is a blessed reminder of God's eternal love for His people.

The doctrine of election also teaches that Christians have the same status before God the Father as Christ Himself. I Peter 2:4 uses the Greek word, *ὁ ἐκλεκτός*, meaning the "chosen one," to refer to Christ. That same Greek word is used throughout the New Testament to refer to all Christians who have been chosen unto salvation through faith in Christ.

The fact that the same title which is applied to Christ is also applied to His people, means that what Christ is to God the Father, that is what every Christian is too. We are God's children, just as surely as Christ is God's beloved Son. We are, as Romans 8:17 says, "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."

The doctrine of election, then, brings infinite blessings to every Christian. It joins us to Christ. It gives us all that Christ has, and it makes us what He is.

¹⁹⁰Robert Preus, "Article XI: Predestination and Election," in A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord, eds. Robert D. Preus and Wilbert H. Rosin (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), p.276.

PART II. FIVE STUDIES ON THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION
AND ITS RELATION TO THE MINISTRY
OF WORD AND SACRAMENTS

PART II. FIVE STUDIES ON THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION
AND ITS RELATION TO THE MINISTRY
OF WORD AND SACRAMENTS

In Part I of this MAP, we looked at what Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions teach about the doctrine of election. We studied the differences between the two different forms of the doctrine of election, and we noted that, since the 1870's, there have been many significant doctrinal differences between theologians holding to the two different forms. We saw that the different forms of the doctrine of election foster two very different understandings of the work of the office of the ministry.

Now, in Part II, five studies will be presented which are based upon the exegetical, historical, and systematic material contained in Part I. These studies were written to explain to Lutheran lay-people what the differences are between the two different forms of the doctrine of election, and to explain why it is important to hold to the Scriptural and Confessional form.

Also the studies were written to help Christians understand and appreciate the blessings which God graciously gave to them by choosing them to be His before the creation of the world. Furthermore, the lessons were written to teach Christians to become sure of their election and salvation by turning to the Word and sacraments.

The five studies presented here were used with a study group of

lay-people at Faith Free Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the spring of 1994. A description of that study group and of the feedback provided by the members will be presented in Part III.

But first, the five studies themselves will be presented in Part II. They will be presented just as they were, one each week for five weeks, to the members of the study group. The only alteration will be to the page numbers for the sake of continuity in this MAP.

These studies proved to be a blessing to the members of the study group. May they also be a blessing to all who read them.

**THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION AND ITS RELATION
TO THE MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENTS**

By Rev. Ralph M. Rokke

STUDY I. WHAT IS THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION?

The Goal of This Session: To begin to understand what Scripture says about the doctrine of election.

Prayer: As we begin, let's pray: Dear Father in heaven, the doctrine of election is a deep mystery. Only by your Holy Spirit can we know and accept what Your Word reveals about it. Guide us by Your Spirit so that we may know the truths which You have revealed about this doctrine, believe them, and receive its blessings. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Beginning Definition: The doctrine of election, also called the doctrine of predestination, is the teaching that God, before the creation of the world, chose particular sinners, whose existence He foresaw, and whom He foreknew with a Father's love, to come to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. By choosing those particular persons, God "elected" them to receive eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ and to dwell with Him in heaven forever.

The English word "election" is derived from the Greek word, *ἐκλέγομαι*, which literally means "to speak out" or "to choose out." The word conveys the idea of choosing one or a few items from among several. The word always contains the idea that many items exist, but only a few are chosen. That aspect of its meaning, as applied to God's people, is seen in Matthew 22:14. There Christ says, "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Election, then, is God's choosing of some fallen and undeserving sinners to be saved. Some sinners, but not all, have been elected by God unto salvation, and therefore those who are chosen are referred to as God's elect.

The Doctrine of Election: The term "the doctrine of election" properly means "teaching about God's choosing of His people." All pure teaching of this doctrine is based upon the Scriptures alone.

Pure teaching of election does not deny any important truth about this doctrine which is taught in God's Word. It also does not add new ideas which are not taught in God's Word. The doctrine of election in pure form consists only of what God has revealed in the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Unfortunately, much false teaching about election has occurred in the Church throughout history, and it continues today. False teaching has caused many Christians to be confused about the doctrine of election, and it has caused some to fear, ignore, and even hate it.

But the doctrine of election is taught in the Word of God, and, like all of Scripture, it is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (II Timothy 3:16-17)

Therefore, let us examine what Scripture teaches about the doctrine of election. Study participants are invited to ask questions, point out Scripture passages, and make comments today and in future sessions. Discussion is welcome. Our goal is to grow together in understanding and appreciation of the blessings of election.

Where Is the Doctrine of Election Taught in Scripture?

There are many, many passages which teach about election, but the main passage is Ephesians 1:3-14. Let's read it together.

1. According to Ephesians 1:4, when did God choose His people?
2. When God chose us, what did He predestine us to become? See Ephesians 1:5.
3. According to Ephesians 1:5, what prompted God to predestine His people? Compare this to Ephesians 1:9.
4. Look at verse 6. What is the result of God's work of predestining sinners to be saved?
5. The salvation for which God chose His people is based upon something which Christ did. What is it, according to verse 7?
6. What does Ephesians 1:11 mean when it says that God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will?"

Now let's look at other passages which give additional information about God's work of election.

7. According to II Thessalonians 2:13, God chose us to be saved **through** something. What is it? See also Romans 5:1.
8. II Timothy 1:9 tells us that God did **not** choose us because of something, but He **did** choose us because of something else. What is it that did **not** cause God to choose us? What is it that **did** cause God to choose us?

9. According to I Corinthians 1:27-28, what kind of people has God chosen to be His own?
10. Why did God choose such people? See I Corinthians 1:29.
11. What does I Corinthians 1:31 mean when it says, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord"?
12. Often Christians feel that they have become Christians because they made a choice to believe in Christ. They feel that their salvation was the result of their own decision, not God's. Is this true? See John 15:16.
13. How do we explain the fact that a Christian may feel that he or she has made the decision to become a Christian, but really God has made that decision? See Philippians 2:13.
14. According to Acts 13:48, which comes first: being appointed to receive eternal life, or believing in Christ?
15. Will everyone whom God has elected to salvation be saved? See John 6:37a.
16. Are there "temporary believers," who trust in Christ for a while, but then quit believing on Him before the end of their lives, and so are lost? See Matthew 13:20-21. See also Luke 8:13.
17. Is it possible for the devil or false prophets to lead God's true elect into eternal condemnation? See Matthew 24:24.
18. What should we do when the devil torments us with thoughts that we may be only "temporary believers" who may yet fall away from Christ? See II Thessalonians 3:3. (In Session 5, we will discuss more about how we can be sure that we are elected unto salvation.)

What Does Scripture Not Teach about Election?

Above all, Scripture does not teach that God chose some people to be lost just as He chose others to be saved. This is called the doctrine of double predestination. Nowhere does the Bible say that God chose anyone to be damned.

19. I Timothy 2:3-4 shows that God does not want anyone to be lost. What does it say?
20. What does II Peter 3:9 say about what God wants for sinners?

Conclusion: Election is the Bible's teaching that God has chosen to save particular sinners because of His own grace and mercy. The Bible teaches that election is based only on the atoning death of Jesus

Christ and on the good pleasure of God's will. It is not based on anything good in the ones chosen. That means that all of salvation is God's work and a gift of His grace.

**THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION AND ITS RELATION
TO THE MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENTS**

By Rev. Ralph M. Rokke

**STUDY II. THE TWO FORMS OF THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION
AND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEM**

Goals of This Session: 1. To become familiar with the two different forms of the doctrine of election which have long been taught in the Lutheran Church. 2. To show that the first form is the Scriptural and confessional form.

Prayer: Dear Father, Your Word says in James 1:5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." Give us wisdom as we study the two forms of the doctrine of election. Make us wise to discern truth from error, and, by Your gracious power, hold us steadfast in the truth of Your Word. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Review: Last time we saw that God elected certain sinners to be saved before He created the world. He did this "in accordance with his pleasure and will" (Ephesians 1:5). God's choosing of particular sinners was not based upon anything good in the sinners themselves. It was based upon God's grace and the merits of Jesus Christ.

Also we saw that God did not choose other sinners to be damned. God is not at fault for the damnation of sinners. Rather sinners themselves are responsible.

Introduction to Today's Topic: In the Lutheran Church, there have long been two different forms of the doctrine of election taught. The first form says that God elected sinners to be saved because of His grace and because of the merits of Jesus Christ, and not because of anything good in any particular sinner. The second form says that God elected particular sinners whom He foresaw as coming to faith in Christ, and some teachers of the second form have even gone so far as to teach that God elected particular sinners to salvation because He foresaw their faith, or because He foresaw God-pleasing conduct in them.

The basic question of our study today is this: Did God foresee that some of us sinners would come to faith in Christ, and did that foreseen faith cause God to elect us to salvation? Or, on the other hand, did God elect certain sinners to be saved, and does His election therefore cause us to come to faith in Christ?

In other words, does our faith cause God to elect us to salvation, or does God's election of us cause us to come to faith?

In the late 16th and the 17th centuries, shortly after the Reformation, many Lutheran theologians used a Latin phrase *intuitu fidei* which means "in view of faith" to describe election. Most of them meant that when God elected His people unto salvation, He had already decided that their salvation would be based upon the death of Christ on the cross and that sinners would be saved through faith in Christ.

The early Lutheran theologians did not mean that God had foreseen faith in Christ in particular sinners and that God elected those particular sinners to salvation because of their foreseen faith. The theologians simply meant that God had decided that salvation, in general, would be based upon the atoning work of Christ and would be by faith in Him.

In the 19th century, however, some Lutheran theologians used the phrase *intuitu fidei* differently. They used it to mean that God elected particular sinners to salvation because He foresaw that they would come to faith in Christ. In other words, some later theologians taught that God elected particular sinners to salvation based upon decisions by the sinners themselves to have faith in Christ. This teaching is false and synergistic. It promotes the idea that man works together with God on salvation.

So the basic question is this: Does election cause faith, or does faith cause election?

The first form of the doctrine of election answers that God's election causes a sinner to come to faith in Christ and be saved. The second form, as taught in the 19th century, answers that a sinner's decision to believe in Christ caused God to elect the sinner to be saved.

What Does the Bible Say?

1. According to II Thessalonians 2:13, did God choose His people because, when He chose them, He saw them as already believing in the truth of the Gospel, or did He choose them to be saved by believing the Gospel?
2. According to Acts 13:48, which comes first, believing in Christ, or being appointed for eternal life?
3. Christians often mistakenly feel that the ultimate decision about whether or not they will be saved is theirs, not God's. This is because God does not save anyone against the person's will. Rather God acts upon the will, so that the will is changed, and so that the person desires to be saved. Often, however, Christians do not

recognize that this change is God's work. What does Philippians 2:13 say about the will of Christians?

4. Is our election unto salvation based upon anything that we do? See II Timothy 1:9.

5. What are the two things upon which predestination is based? See Ephesians 1:5.

Which of the Two Forms of the Doctrine of Election Do the Lutheran Confessions Teach?

The Confessions teach the first form. They teach that God's election **causes** sinners to come to faith in Christ. The Formula of Concord states:

God's eternal election . . . not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but by God's gracious will and pleasure in Christ Jesus it is also a **cause** which creates, effects, helps, and furthers our salvation and whatever pertains to it. (Article XI.)¹

The Lutheran Confessions declare that God's election causes whatever pertains to our faith. Therefore, since we are justified by faith, election causes our faith.

Also the confessions reject the teaching that God based His work of election upon anything which originates in man. The Formula states:

It is therefore false and wrong when men teach that the cause of our election is not only the mercy of God and the holy merit of Christ, but that there is also within us a cause of God's election on account of which God has elected us unto eternal life. (Article XI.)²

This means that faith is not a self-chosen work of man which causes God to elect him to salvation.

6. Faith is not something which originates in man. Where does faith come from? See Ephesians 2:8.

¹Theodore G. Tappert, editor, The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 617:8.

²Tappert, p. 631:88.

A Time for Analysis

Now that we have studied the differences between the two forms of the doctrine of election, see if you can recognize which form of the doctrine of election is taught in each of the following statements.

Read each statement, and decide whether it teaches the first form, or the second form. Information about the source of each quote is given on the last page of this study.

1. ". . . the election of God does not follow our faith and righteousness but precedes it as efficient cause . . . And this election was made before the world began, not in view of our good works, either past, present or future, but according to the purpose and good pleasure of the grace of God . . ."

2. "God's eyes look for faith in Christ, when he elects unto eternal life . . ."

3. ". . . we would not deem it unworthy of the wise and holy God to predestine unto eternal life those who He foresaw from eternity would believe on the Redeemer . . ."

4. ". . . predestination is not only a decree of God according to which He is willing to save men, provided that they persevere in faith unto the end, but it is rather such an ordination of God, which is such a CAUSE of the salvation of the elect, as to "procure, work, aid and promote" at the same time "whatever pertains to it," . . ."

Conclusion: Two different forms of the doctrine of election have long been taught in the Lutheran Church. One is Scriptural, and the other is not.

The first form teaches that God chose certain poor sinners out the mass of lost humanity to be saved, and that His choice was based upon the merits of Jesus Christ and the good pleasure of His own will. The first form is the Scriptural and confessional form.

The second form, the *intuitu fidei* form, is the teaching that God chose particular sinners to be saved in view of foreseeing that they would come to faith in Christ. Some teachers of the second form have also taught that salvation depends upon faith as a decision of man's will or upon conduct which a sinner presents to God. When the *intuitu fidei* form is taught in this way, it is synergistic.

Salvation, however, is by God's grace alone. That fact is best supported by the first form.

Quote # 1 teaches the first form of the doctrine of election. It comes from Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586), who was a very influential early Lutheran theologian. Chemnitz helped to write the Formula of Concord and taught that God's election causes our faith. This quote is found in the following book: Martin Chemnitz, Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion, edited, translated, and annotated by Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), p. 90.

Quote # 2 teaches the second form, the intuitu fidei form, of the doctrine of election. It teaches that our faith caused God to elect us unto salvation. The quote is from F.A. Schmidt (1837-1928). Schmidt was the leading teacher of the intuitu fidei form of the doctrine of election during the Predestination Controversy in the 1870's and 1880's. This quote is a translation by Pastor Rokke of a statement from the following book: F.A. Schmidt, Naadevalg-Striden: Nogle Foredrag til Belysning af den i Synodalkonferentsen opkomne Laerestrid om Praedestination (Chicago: Nordens Bogtrykkeri, 1881), p. 63.

Quote # 3 teaches the second form of the doctrine of election. It teaches that our faith caused God to elect us unto salvation. The quote is from Leander Keyser (1856-1937), who was a seminary professor at Hamma Divinity School in Springfield, Ohio. The quote is from the following book: Leander Keyser, Election and Conversion: A Frank Discussion of Dr. Pieper's Book on "Conversion and Election," with Suggestions for Lutheran Concord and Union on Another Basis (Burlington, Iowa: The German Literary Board, 1914), p. 28.

Quote # 4 teaches the first form of the doctrine of election. It teaches that God's election of us causes us to come to faith. This statement is from a book by Dr. C.F.W. Walther (1811-1887). Dr. Walther was one of the founders of the Missouri Synod, and was the leading teacher of the first form of the doctrine of election during the Predestination Controversy of the 1870's and 1880's. This statement is from the following book: C.F.W. Walther, The Doctrine Concerning Election Presented In Questions and Answers From the Eleventh Article of the Formula of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, translated by J. Humberger and published by the Ev. Lutheran Augustana Conference of Stark and other Counties of Ohio, (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1881), p. 10.

**THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION AND ITS RELATION
TO THE MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENTS**

By Rev. Ralph M. Rokke

STUDY III. THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION AND JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE

The Goal of This Session: To learn about the doctrine of salvation by God's grace alone, and to learn how the first form of the doctrine of election supports the doctrine of grace alone.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that our salvation is Your doing and not ours. Thank you that it depends upon Your grace and strength, not our sin and weakness. Bless us as we study this truth of your Word. Fill our hearts with its joy and peace through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Introduction: What Is the Doctrine of Justification by Grace Alone?

Justification by grace alone is the most important of all doctrines of the Christian faith. It is the teaching that salvation is a gift of God's grace, which He gives to undeserving sinners.

Concerning this doctrine, Article IV of the Augsburg Confession states:

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us . . . (Article IV., sections 1-3)¹

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession calls the doctrine of salvation by grace alone "the main doctrine of Christianity" (Article IV., section 2).² This doctrine emphasizes that sinners cannot do anything to contribute to their own salvation. Rather God does all of the work of saving us, and God's only reason for doing so is His mercy.

¹Theodore G. Tappert, editor, The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 30.

²Tappert, p. 107.

What Does the Bible Say about Justification by Grace?

1. Can we sinners be saved by keeping God's laws and by being good enough to deserve salvation? What does Romans 3:20 say about sinners being saved by keeping God's laws?

If we could be saved by what we do, then we would not need God's grace or Christ's death for our salvation.

2. Why are we not able to be saved by anything that we do? See Romans 3:23.

3. What justifies us sinners in God's eyes, according to Romans 3:24?

4. Now look at Ephesians 2:8. According to this verse, what produces our salvation?

5. We are justified by grace through faith in Christ. Where does faith come from, according to Ephesians 2:8?

6. What does not produce our salvation, according to Ephesians 2:9?

7. Can salvation be partly produced by God's grace and partly produced by human effort? See Romans 11:6.

8. When God elected us to salvation before He created the world, did He elect us on the basis of our works or of His grace? See II Timothy 1:9.

9. Why does God save us by His grace alone rather than by something good in us? See I Corinthians 1:29.

Faith Is a Gift of God

Because salvation is a gift of God's grace, faith too is a gift from God. If a sinner produced his own faith, then the sinner would be doing part of the work to save himself, but since faith is a gift from God, salvation remains entirely God's work.

Faith is a gift of God which He produces and sustains in our hearts by the Word of God, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

9. According to John 6:44, is it possible for a sinner to come to Christ and believe in Him by the sinner's own will-power or strength?

10. According to Ephesians 2:8, what is faith?

11. According to Romans 10:17, how does a sinner gain faith?

12. According to John 3:6, what is the role of the Holy Spirit in

giving us faith?

Salvation is by God's grace alone, and even our faith is a gift of God's grace.

Review: In our last session we learned about the two different forms of the doctrine of election. We learned that the first form is the teaching that God foresaw nothing good in any sinner to induce Him to choose that sinner for salvation. Rather God chose His people for salvation only on the basis of the merits of Jesus Christ and the good pleasure of His own will. This is the first form of the doctrine of election, and it is taught in Scripture and in the Lutheran Confessions.

The second form of the doctrine of election teaches that God foresaw that some sinners would come to faith in Christ, and so God elected them to be saved. This form is also called the *intuitu fidei* form, and it says that election took place in view of foreseen faith.

The first form, then, says that God's election causes man to come to faith. The second form says that man's faith causes God to elect him.

Discussion Questions:

13. Evaluate this statement: ". . . the conditions of salvation are . . . repentance and faith."³ Which form of the doctrine of election does this statement teach? When it speaks of faith as a "condition" for salvation, where does it suggest that faith originates?

14. According to the first form of the doctrine of election, as taught in II Thessalonians 2:13, where does faith originate?

15. Which of the two forms of the doctrine of election supports the teaching that faith is a gift of God, and that salvation is entirely by God's grace alone?

Conclusion:

Dr. C.F.W. Walther wrote the following words concerning *intuitu fidei* theologians:

. . . they regard faith as something (many, perhaps, without being aware of it) that man himself on his part

³Leander Keyser, Election and Conversion: A Frank Discussion of Dr. Pieper's Book on "Conversion and Election," with Suggestions for Lutheran Concord and Union on Another Basis (Burlington, Iowa: The German Literary Board, 1914), p. 32.

is required to fulfill, and really does fulfill, not as something that God gives to man . . .⁴

Dr. Walther also wrote:

The only correct teaching of justification by faith is the one that teaches both that man is made righteous by grace and that faith does not come from him, is not his work, not the product of his decision or of his non-resistance, but is a gift of God without man's cooperation, and so here man cannot boast of anything, here praise of man is excluded (Rom. 3:27), and all glory belongs to God alone.⁵

The Bible teaches that salvation is a gift of God's grace. God gives salvation to us by creating faith in Christ within our hearts, and God creates and sustains that saving faith by His Word, by baptism, and by the Lord's Supper. All of this He does because of His grace alone.

⁴C.F.W. Walther, The Doctrine Concerning Election Presented In Questions and Answers From the Eleventh Article of the Formula of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, translated by J. Humberger and published by the Ev. Lutheran Augustana Conference of Stark and other Counties of Ohio, (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1881), p. 51.

⁵C.F.W. Walther, "Election Is Not In Conflict With Justification," in Lutheran Confessional Theology in America, 1840-1880, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 201.

**THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION AND ITS RELATION
TO THE MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENTS**

By Rev. Ralph M. Rokke

STUDY IV. THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION AND THE WORK OF MINISTRY

The Goal of This Session: To learn how the two different forms of the doctrine of election foster two different views of the work of ministry: The first form encourages reliance upon the Word and sacraments as means of grace; the second form encourages appealing to a supposedly free will in unregenerate sinners.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, thank You for the holy office of the ministry. Thank You that You provide shepherds to feed Your flock with Your Word and sacraments. Bless the stewards of these mysteries. Make them wise and faithful to fulfill their calling according to Your will. In Christ's Name we pray it, Amen.

Do Unregenerate Sinners Have Free Will in Spiritual Matters?

1. Before a sinner trusts in Christ as Savior and receives a new spiritual nature, is the sinner ever capable of doing anything which pleases God? In other words, does an unregenerate sinner ever have a free will in spiritual matters? See Romans 8:7-8.

Salvation is a product of God's will, not man's.

2. What does God's Word say in Romans 9:16 about salvation?

3. What does God say about salvation in Romans 9:15?

4. Whose will made the decision that God would predestine you to be saved? See Ephesians 1:4-5.

5. When a person feels that he has decided to become a Christian and that he has made that decision in the same way that he decided where he would live or whom he would marry, that person is mistaken. Who really causes a person to decide to become a Christian? See Philippians 2:13.

6. Can God's work in calling a person to become a Christian be resisted? What did Stephen say to the leaders of the Jews in Acts 7:51.

7. Who produces the change in a sinner's heart which causes the sinner to quit resisting God's efforts to save him and which causes

the sinner to trust in Christ? Also, who deserves the glory for that change? See I Corinthians 1:30-31.

The First Form of the Doctrine of Election Denies Free Will in Unregenerate Sinners.

The first form of the doctrine of election, which is the Scriptural and confessional form, teaches that God has decided that certain sinners will be saved. Sinners do not have the last word.

8. What does Ephesians 1:11 tell Christians about whose will decided that they would be saved?

9. What did Jesus tell His disciples and all Christians in John 15:16a?

Dr. C.F.W. Walther, a leading 19th century teacher of the first form of the doctrine of election, wrote:

Man is also unable to make a decision for Christ. Many people think of conversion as being at a crossroads leading to heaven or hell. Now a person has a choice between the two: If he picks the right way, he ends up converted; if he chooses the wrong way, he will be lost. But that robs God of all His glory, for if man has the capacity to choose what is good, then there must be some virtue in him that leads him to do this good work even before conversion.¹

The Second Form of the Doctrine of Election Supports Free Will in Unregenerate Sinners.

10. Consider the following statement which was written by an early 20th century *Intuitu fidei* theologian. What is taught in this statement about free will in unregenerate sinners?

. . . since God in eternity elected to create free beings, He must have also in eternity elected to respect their freedom and relate Himself thereto.²

¹C.F.W. Walther, Selected Writings of C.F.W. Walther; Convention Essays, translated by Aug. R. Suelflow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), pp. 178-179.

²Leander S. Keyser, Election and Conversion: A Frank Discussion of Dr. Pieper's Book on "Conversion and Election," with Suggestions for Lutheran Concord and Union on Another Basis (Burlington, Iowa: The German Literary Board, 1914), p. 38.

How Does Each Form of the Doctrine of Election Encourage a Pastor to Do His Work in the Office of the Ministry?

A. The *intuitu fidei* form encourages a pastor to appeal to the free will of unregenerate sinners to decide to become Christians. It does not encourage a pastor to rely upon the sacraments in ministering to the spiritual needs of people, because the sacraments appear to many to have little power to persuade people's wills to choose to become Christians.

The *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election, then, encourages a pastor to try to appeal to a sinner's supposedly free will so that the sinner will choose to trust in Christ. It encourages the pastor to seek a decision from his hearers, rather than to declare Law and Gospel to them, so that the Holy Spirit will produce faith in Christ within them.

B. The first form of the doctrine of election, the Scriptural and confessional form, encourages a pastor to preach God's Word with clear division of Law and Gospel and with reliance upon the Holy Spirit to use the Word to produce conviction of sin and faith in Christ in the hearers. The first form also encourages a pastor to have great confidence in the sacraments. This is because it encourages him to see that salvation is God's work, not man's work, and Scripture teaches that God does His work through the sacraments.

The first form does not encourage a pastor to believe that his unsaved hearers have free wills capable of pleasing God. Thus the first form does not encourage a pastor to press his hearers for decisions to become Christians. Rather the first form encourages a pastor to proclaim God's saving Word and to believe that through it God will do the work of saving sinners as the Law reveals their sin to them and as the Gospel promises them forgiveness in Christ.

C. Analyze the following two sermon endings. Decide which of them would probably be preached by a pastor holding to the first form of the doctrine of election, and which would probably be preached by a pastor holding to the second form.

Decide today what you are are going to do. It's all up to you. You can choose to believe in Christ and be saved, or you can choose to reject Him and go lost. God is waiting for your answer. What will it be? What will you do? Amen.

You are a sinner. You are helpless to save yourself. You are condemned and without hope before God. Yet, in spite of all your sins, God loves you. God has given His Son, Jesus Christ, to bear your punishment in your place. God has also baptized you into Christ and given you a new life in Him. God's Word declares: "He who has the Son has life." Amen.

Conclusion: The two different forms of the doctrine of election foster two very different understandings of the work of the ministry. The *intuitu fidei* form fosters the view that ministry is a human work done for God, and directed at the free wills of sinners who can contribute to their own salvation by choosing to be saved.

The Scriptural and confessional form fosters the view that ministry is God's Work, which God does through human ministers, and which God directs at spiritually dead and helpless sinners to make them alive through faith in Christ.

**THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION AND ITS RELATION
TO THE MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENTS**

By Rev. Ralph M. Rokke

STUDY V. THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The Goals of This Session: 1. To learn that we should turn to the Gospel and to the sacraments for assurance of our election to salvation. 2. To increase our appreciation for how the doctrine of election helps us in our daily Christian lives.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, thank You that You have chosen us undeserving sinners to be your children. Thank You for Christ our Savior. We marvel at Your grace toward us. Guide us so that we always seek the assurance of our salvation in the means of grace which You have provided, the Word and the sacraments. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

A Review of the Basics About Election

1. When did God predestine you to be saved? See Ephesians 1:4.
2. What did God predestine you to become, according to Ephesians 1:5?
3. What were the only two things upon which God based His decision to predestine you to eternal life? See Ephesians 1:11.
4. What will be the ultimate result of God's having predestined you to eternal life? See Ephesians 1:6.

What Mistakes Should We Avoid in Thinking About the Doctrine of Election?

5. Some people err about election by thinking this way: "If I am predestined to be saved, then nothing I do will ever change that fact, and so I might as well sin as much as I please." What does Romans 6:1-2 say about that idea?
6. Some people err by thinking: "If I am not predestined to be saved, then I will not be saved even if I hold to God's Word, repent, and believe in Christ; so I might as well not bother with any of it." What does Romans 10:13 say in response to that idea?

The Formula of Concord states the following about the doctrine of election:

. . . if anyone so sets forth this teaching concerning God's gracious election that sorrowing Christians can find no comfort in it but are driven to despair, or when impenitent sinners are strengthened in their malice, then it is clearly evident that this teaching is not being set forth according to the Word and will of God but according to reason and the suggestion of the wicked devil. (Article XI.)¹

How Can You Know That You Are Elected Unto Salvation?

The Formula of Concord states:

. . . in his purpose and counsel God has ordained the following: . . . That this merit and these benefits of Christ are to be offered, given, and distributed to us through His Word and sacraments. (Article XI.)²

The Formula also states:

. . . Christ has the promises of the Gospel offered not only in general but also through the sacraments, which he has attached as a seal of the promise and by which he confirms it to every believer individually. (Article XI.)³

These statements teach that a Christian derives assurance that he is elected, not from his own feelings, actions, or reason, but from the Gospel and from the sacraments as true and faithful expressions of God's gracious desire to save him.

7. In the first half of John 6:37, Christ teaches that only people who are elected to salvation will be saved. What does Christ say in the first half of John 6:37?

8. In the second half of John 6:37, Christ adds a promise to His statement that all of the elect will be saved. What is the promise?

¹Theodore G. Tappert, editor, The Book of Concord: the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 631-632:91-92.

²Tappert, p. 619:14 & 16.

³Tappert, p. 622:37-38.

9. Putting both halves of John 6:37 together, what do we see to be true about ourselves if we come to Christ by trusting in Him as our Savior?

10. When you wonder whether or not you are elected unto salvation, how can the promise in the second half of John 6:37 comfort you?

In the Gospel, God gives true and faithful promises. These promises include forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Christ. When you trust in God's promises, you can be sure that you are forgiven and that you have eternal life. Therefore you can also be sure that you are elected by God unto salvation. Your assurance of election comes from God's promises in the Gospel.

The sacraments also provide assurance that you are elected. They are God's promises in visible form. In baptism, the promise of new life is joined to water. In the Lord's Supper, the promise of forgiveness of sins is joined to bread and wine. In the sacraments, then, God's promises are given to you as an individual.

11. What does Romans 6:4 say about those who have been baptized into Christ?

12. Can you draw assurance that you are one of God's elect saints on the basis of Romans 6:4? Why?

13. According to Matthew 26:28, what blessing comes to sinners along with Christ's blood in the Lord's Supper?

14. Can you draw assurance that you are one of God's elect saints by partaking of the Lord's Supper? Why? See Matthew 26:27-28.

Even If I Trust in Christ Now, How Can I Be Sure That I Will Not Lose My Faith Later, and Be Lost?

16. Are there Christians who turn away from Christ and are lost? See I Timothy 1:19.

17. When you fear that you might fall away from Christ, what should you do? See the example of Paul in II Timothy 1:12.

18. What promise does God's Word give in Philippians 1:6?

19. What does Christ promise His people in John 10:28-29?

How Does the Doctrine of Election Help in My Daily Christian Life?

20. When the devil troubles your heart with the fear that you might depart from Christ and be lost, what comfort does your election offer? See John 6:39-40.

21. What assurance do you gain about the events of your life from being one of God's chosen saints? See Romans 8:28.

22. When you are persecuted for the sake of Christ, what comfort can you draw from the fact of your election? See Romans 8:31 and 33.

23. When you think about the fact that God has chosen you for the privilege of being His adopted child, what kind of life are you encouraged to live? See Colossians 3:12-14.

George Stoeckhardt wrote:

The one who is sure of his salvation, the one who believes with his whole heart that God has made sure his salvation before ever the world was formed, he makes the best possible use of each day and all the energies of his body in order to help others to salvation. Predestination teaches us to recognize what the grace of God is all about. And the deeper we become rooted in God's grace and in the knowledge of grace, all the more adept, competent, and willing will we be in commending God's grace to others and in proclaiming to our fellowmen God's universal gracious will.⁴

Conclusion: The doctrine of election is a great and wonderful mystery. We cannot understand everything about it. But God has told us enough so that it is a great blessing to us. Above all, election assures us that God loves us. God has chosen us to be His children, and we will dwell with Him for all eternity.

⁴George Stoeckhardt, Predestination Election, translated by Erwin W. Koehlinger (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Press, n.d.), p. 165.

PART III. REPORT CONCERNING THE STUDY GROUP
ON THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION
AND ITS RELATION TO THE MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENTS,
WHICH MET AT FAITH FREE LUTHERAN CHURCH, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA,
APRIL 20 - MAY 18, 1994

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Testing The Thesis

Intuitu fidei theologian Leander Keyser wrote:

You cannot build an operative Church on this doctrine of election. It is too academic and scholastic. It is not practical or a preachable theology.¹

Is that true? Is the doctrine of election unusable in parish ministry? Should a parish pastor ignore the doctrine of election in his preaching and teaching?

This writer believes that the answer is an emphatic "No!" The doctrine of election is a part of apostolic doctrine, and as such it is part of the church's foundation. Ephesians 2:19-20 tells Christians:

. . . you are . . . built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

The doctrine of the apostles is the foundation of the church, and apostolic doctrine asserts again and again that God elected His

¹Leander S. Keyser, Election and Conversion: A Frank Discussion of Dr. Pieper's Book on "Conversion and Election," with Suggestions for Lutheran Concord and Union on Another Basis (Burlington, Iowa: The German Literary Board, 1914), pp. 103-104.

people unto salvation before He created the world. Therefore election should be taught in the church as a part of its foundation.

This writer believes that when the doctrine of election is rightly taught in the church, then it is of great blessing to God's people. It gives Christians increased assurance of their salvation and increased joy in it. It helps to protect them from a number of theological errors. It strengthens their appreciation for the office of the ministry of Word and sacraments, and it encourages them to serve the Lord.

To test this thesis, a study group was formed, and five study sessions on the doctrine of election were conducted at Faith Free Lutheran Church, 140 West 44th Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota, between April 20, 1994, and May 18, 1994. The study group examined and discussed the five lessons which were presented in Part II of this Major Applied Project.

This MAP, then, had a twofold practical function. The first was to be an exercise in Christian education - i.e., a useful Bible study in a discussion group. The second was to study the relationship of a certain doctrine (Election) to the work of the pastoral ministry - the ministry of Word and sacrament.

The purpose of Part III of this MAP is to describe how the study group was assembled, who took part in it, how the sessions were conducted, what the educational goals were for each session, what feedback was received from the participants after the sessions were completed, and what the writer has concluded about the project.

How the Study Group Was Formed

Volunteers were requested from the congregation of Faith Free Lutheran Church at two Sunday worship services a few weeks prior to the beginning of the study group sessions. On those Sundays, inserts were included in the worship folders to inform the congregation about the coming sessions, and to invite people to pre-register for them.

The congregation was told that the doctrine of election is one of the deepest mysteries of the Word of God, and that therefore the sessions were intended only for mature Christians. Also they were told that all volunteers would be asked to pray for God's blessing on the sessions, commit themselves to attending all five of the sessions, and agree to fill out a written questionnaire about the sessions after they were completed.

On the following page is a replica of the bulletin inserts. As the replica shows, pre-registration forms were attached to the inserts. People who wished to volunteer were asked to fill out a pre-registration form and put it in a box on an information table at the church.

SPECIAL STUDY GROUP TO BE FORMED

A special study group is being formed to study the topic, "The Doctrine of Election and Its Relation to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments." This study group will meet for five weeks, on each Wednesday evening, from 7:00 - 8:00 p.m., between April 20, and May 18, 1994.

The doctrine of election is also called the doctrine of predestination. It is one of the deepest mysteries of the Word of God, and so is not a suitable study for those who do not yet know Christ as Savior. Therefore this study group is intended only for mature Christians.

Pastor Rokke has written the five Bible Studies which will be used by the study group. The participants will be helping Pastor Rokke to complete his Major Applied Project for his Doctor of Ministry degree at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.

Three requests will be made of all participants: 1. Pray that God will make these sessions a blessing to you and to every person who takes part; 2. Commit yourself to attend all five sessions; and 3. Agree to fill out a written questionnaire about the studies after they are completed.

Your help in this project will be very much appreciated. Thank you!

- - - - -
Yes, I would like to take part in the study group on the doctrine of election. I agree to pray for the sessions, to attend them as faithfully as possible, and to fill out a written questionnaire which I will return to Pastor Rokke after the sessions are completed.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

Note that the bulletin inserts warned that the study group sessions were intended only for mature Christians. That idea was borrowed from C.F.W. Walther. In a book which Walther wrote in 1881, about the doctrine of election, he said:

Should this pamphlet fall into the hands of such a reader also who is not yet a living and believing Christian, - we advise him either not to read it at all, or, at least, not before he also has become a living and believing Christian. For before this is done, what this pamphlet contains is not food for him . . . For where the light of a living faith does not yet shine in the heart, nothing else can be expected, but that you will be offended at the doctrine of predestination, just then when it is presented not according to² human reason, but according to the Word of God.²

It seemed appropriate to this writer to include a similar warning in the advance publicity for the study group. The writer hoped that the warning would discourage people from attending who were not yet ready to study the doctrine of election, and that purpose was achieved. The writer did not find it necessary to refuse any volunteers.

²C.F.W. Walther, The Doctrine Concerning Election Presented In Questions and Answers From the Eleventh Article of the Formula of Concord of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, translated by J. Humberger and published by the Ev. Lutheran Augustana Conference of Stark and other Counties of Ohio (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1881), p. 9.

Who Took Part

Sixteen people pre-registered for the study group sessions. One did not attend any of the sessions for reasons which were not explained. Another missed all five for health reasons.

Among the fourteen remaining participants, the attendance pattern was as follows: One participant attended only one session before a change in his work schedule prevented further attendance; one attended two sessions; one attended three sessions; three attended four sessions; and eight attended all five sessions.

Those who took part in the study sessions were a disparate group. One was an elderly lady near eighty. Another was an elderly gentleman of about the same age. Both attended all five sessions.

Another gentleman in his eighties attended two sessions. His wife had also pre-registered, but she had surgery before the sessions began and was unable to attend.

Two of the participants were women, approximately fifty years of age. One is a nurse, who missed one session because of her work schedule and another session due to a death in her family.

The other lady is an employee of a company. She is also the wife of a former pastor who has not been active in the ministry for several years due to health problems. She attended all five sessions.

Two of the participants were a married couple in their thirties. The husband was able to attend only one session because of his work schedule. The wife, who also works outside their home, was able to attend four of the five sessions.

Five of the participants were Bible School students. All five

are approximately 20 years of age. Four are young men, and one is a young woman. Three of them attended all five of the study sessions. Two missed one session each.

In addition to the above, two of the participants were members of the writer's own family. One is his wife, and the other is his daughter, who is seventeen years old and a high school senior.

Because of his close relationship to these participants, their comments will not be included in this paper. The writer gratefully acknowledges, however, the participation and support of his family in this project.

As the above summary suggests, the participants in the study group were diverse. Ages and backgrounds varied widely. In spite of their differences, however, the participants interacted well. There was always much courtesy, mutual respect, and good humor in the group.

How the Sessions Were Conducted

Each session was held on a Wednesday evening. All sessions began at 7:00 p.m. and concluded at 8:00 p.m. Effort was made to begin and conclude promptly.

Each session was begun by introducing the topic for the evening and by stating the goals for that particular meeting. The goals for each lesson are printed in the lessons in Part II.

Then a prayer was offered, asking for God's blessing. The prayers are also included in the lessons in Part II.

In general, the sessions followed the prepared study guides very closely. Through past experience, this writer has learned that three

or four pages of theological material is usually the maximum that can be covered effectively by a group in a one-hour session.

This writer acted as group leader. He would read the questions in the study guides, asking the members of the group to provide the answers from the Bible or from material which had already been presented in the class.

Questions and comments from group members were also welcomed. There were two questions which especially seemed to stimulate extensive discussions. The first one was: How can I know that I am one of the elect? This question was asked prior to the last session, in which the lesson dealt with it extensively.

When the question was asked, it seemed appropriate to answer it immediately. This was done by pointing the one who asked it to God's gracious promises in the Gospel. Those promises assure us that God saves all sinners who trust in Jesus Christ. Also the Bible indicates that all who are in Christ should regard themselves, on the basis of God's promises, as being the elect of God.

Christ said in John 6:37:

All that the Father gives me will come to me,
and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

That verse assures every Christian that Christ will never refuse to save a sinner who turns to Him for salvation. Also, if a sinner comes to faith in Christ, it is because the Father has given that sinner to Christ. That means that God has elected that sinner to be saved.

The one who asked the question "How can I know that I am elected unto salvation?" was also pointed to the sacraments. They provide further assurance of God's intention to save the person who receives them.

The answer, then, is this: You can know that you are elected unto salvation because God has baptized you into Christ, because God has promised that He loves you and receives you by faith in Christ, and because God gives you the body and blood of Christ for the remission of your sins in the Lord's Supper. This is how you can know that you are one of the elect.

Perhaps the last point should have been emphasized even more strongly than it was. A statement such as the following could have been made: Since one is elected to be saved through the means of grace, the use of the means in faith assures the user that the plan of election is being carried out in his life.

The second significant question was this: What do you say to a person who asks you how to be saved? Is it appropriate to give an imperative response such as "Believe in Christ" to a non-Christian? Doesn't an imperative response imply that the sinner must do something to be saved, and that therefore the sinner contributes to his own salvation?

That question led to a discussion of the distinction between Law and Gospel. A statement which is grammatically imperative, such as "Believe in Christ," can nevertheless be either Law or Gospel.

If the statement "Believe in Christ" is viewed as something which a sinner must do in order to earn salvation, then it is viewed as Law.

One who sees it as Law and tries to fulfill it in his own strength will miss out on the blessing of salvation by grace alone.

On the other hand, when the Law has already done its work in a sinner's heart so that the sinner is convicted of the fact that he is dead in trespasses and sins, then the words "Believe in Christ" will be a blessed Gospel invitation to him. They will be heard to mean: "Christ is the answer to my dilemma. Christ will do for me what I cannot do for myself. Christ will save me by His grace."

The phrase "Believe in Christ," then, can be Gospel, even though grammatically it is in the imperative mood. One who hears the invitation to believe in Christ and who consequently trusts in the Savior for salvation is saved by God's grace alone.

The answer, then, to the second question is this: Yes, it is appropriate to say to people "Believe in Christ." The apostles did so. Paul, for example, told the Philippian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

A Christian may say to a non-Christian, "Believe in Christ," but this should not be presented as a Law to be fulfilled. Rather it should be presented as a Gospel invitation to trust in Christ, who gives life to needy sinners.

Also in answering the second question, it was mentioned that when a sinner inquires about how to be saved, he should be led through confession and absolution as soon as possible. By the Word of the Gospel, in absolution, God will enkindle faith in the sinner's heart.

As this account suggests, these sessions on the doctrine of

election provided some excellent opportunities to minister to the spiritual needs of the participants. Also the sessions afforded opportunities to prepare the participants to bear witness to Christ in their daily lives.

For example, by discussing how to lead others to Christ and how a person can know that he is elected unto salvation, the participants became better equipped to lead their own children from the faith given them in baptism to a conscious faith (*fides reflexa*), a faith aware of itself. Also they became better able to bear witness to Christ before neighbors and friends.

Christ said to His disciples in Acts 1:8:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Studying the doctrine of election helps Christians to fulfill their responsibility to be witnesses for Christ.

What the Goals Were for Each Session

The educational goals of the five study sessions were as follows:

Session I: To begin to understand what Scripture says about the doctrine of election;

Session II: 1. To become familiar with the two different forms of the doctrine of election which have long been taught in the Lutheran Church; and 2. To show that the first form is the Scriptural and confessional form;

Session III: To learn about the doctrine of salvation by God's grace alone, and to learn how the first form of the doctrine of election supports the doctrine of grace alone;

Session IV: To learn how the two different forms of the doctrine of election foster two different views of the work of ministry: The first form encourages reliance upon the Word and sacraments as means of grace; the second form encourages appealing to a supposedly free will in unregenerate sinners;

Session V: 1. To learn that we should turn to the Gospel and to the sacraments for assurance of our election to salvation; and 2. To increase appreciation for how the doctrine of election helps us in our daily Christian lives.

These were the educational goals which the writer desired to see achieved in the participants in the study group. Comments made by the participants on their feedback forms indicate that most of the objectives were accomplished in the lives of most of the participants.

One or two participants may not have accepted the premise of the goal for Session III, which was that the first form of the doctrine of election supports the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, while the second form does not. At least one of the responses to question 5 on the feedback form suggests preference for the second form.

The feedback forms, however, were unsigned to allow the participants to respond with the freedom of anonymity. Consequently, the writer does not know the identity of the two participants who may have disagreed with the premise for Session III. Even if the writer

did know, however, he would not be able to compel agreement. The reactions of the participants to the material was a variable which was beyond the control of the writer.

One of the participants commented on the feedback form that there are differences in our church body concerning the two forms of the doctrine of election. That observation is correct.

Those differences have led to two different views of what the work of the ministry is. One view emphasizes that, because God's election causes sinners to come to faith in Christ, the work of ministry is to preach the Word and administer the sacraments. The other view maintains that, because the sinner's faith causes God to elect him to salvation, the work of the office of the ministry is to persuade the will of sinners to choose to believe in Christ.

This writer prepared the following diagram to illustrate how the two different forms of election lead to the two different views of the office of the ministry. The diagram expands on ideas which a professor presented in one of the writer's Doctor of Ministry courses.

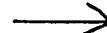
UNDERSTANDING OF
ELECTION



SOTERIOLOGY
(What salvation is)



ECCLESIOLOGY
(What the church is)



UNDERSTANDING OF
THE OFFICE OF THE
MINISTRY

FIRST FORM:

God elected certain sinners based on nothing in them, but only on the good pleasure of His will and the merits of Jesus Christ.

Salvation is a gift of God's grace, provided by Jesus Christ, which God gives to His people by producing faith in their hearts through His Word and the sacraments.

The Church consists of all the saints to whom God has given salvation through His Word and the sacraments. Christians are sinners saved by grace. A good Christian testimony gives all glory to God for the salvation of the sinner.

The office of the ministry is the work of preaching the Word and administering the sacraments. God works through these means of grace to create faith in Christ. One should rely on the Holy Spirit to convert sinners through the Word and sacraments.

SECOND FORM:

God elected people to salvation in view of their foreseen faith (*intuitu fidei*).

Salvation is given to people who choose to believe in Christ. Human decision is essential to salvation. Prevenient grace frees an unregenerate sinner's will enabling him to make the decision to become a Christian.

The church consists of people who have chosen to become Christians. A good Christian testimony stresses a person's decision to become a Christian.

The office of the ministry is the work of persuading people's wills to make a decision for Christ. The sacraments are not very important because they have little power to persuade people's wills to make the decision to become a Christian. One should rely on human persuasiveness to convert sinners.

Although the writer prepared the diagram for use with the study group, he concluded during the discussion that it went beyond the level of interest of the participants in the implications of election for the office of the ministry. Therefore the diagram was not presented to the study group. It is presented here, however, because it summarizes very well the writer's understanding of how the different views of the doctrine of election lead to different understandings of the work of the ministry.

What Feedback Was Received From Study Group Participants

At the end of the fifth and final session, an evaluation and feedback form was given to the study group participants. They were asked to write out answers to the questions on the form, and it took them about ten minutes to do so. Most of the questions required short answers of only a sentence or two, but participants were invited to respond in more detail if they wished.

The evaluation and feedback form was not intended primarily to measure each person's grasp of the historical and theological material presented in the sessions. Rather it was intended to be a means whereby each participant could express his or her subjective response to the material.

Also the questionnaire was intended to give the group leader a further sense of what had been helpful to the spiritual lives of the participants and what had not. The writer also wanted to know what he had presented well and what he should present differently in the future.

The writer did not obtain much specific feedback concerning the last point. Question # 2 asked what the participants would have liked to have had explained more fully or clearly, but not many suggestions were made.

A copy of the evaluation and feedback form is found on the following page.

**EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK FORM
FOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY GROUP
ON THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION
AND ITS RELATION TO THE MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENT**

1. Circle the most appropriate answer to the following statement: Taking part in this study group has increased my understanding of the doctrine of election: 1. A lot; 2. A little; 3. Not at all.

2. Was there anything which we studied which you wish had been explained more fully or clearly? If so, what?

3. What idea or thought which was studied in these sessions has been most helpful to you in your spiritual life?

4. Do you feel that you understand the differences between the First Form and the Second Form of the doctrine of election?

5. Which of the following statements do you agree with: 1. Being elected by God causes people to believe in Christ and be saved; or 2. God elected people to be saved because He foresaw that they would come to faith in Christ?

6. Do you think that Christians ought to study the doctrine of election? Why, or why not?

7. If you were worried about whether or not you were elected to be saved, what would you do?

8. Do you have any other comment that you would like to make about this study group?

Eleven group members filled out the evaluation form. The responses from the writer's family members will not be presented here, but the answers which the other nine participants gave to the eight questions on the questionnaire are listed below:

1. Circle the most appropriate answer to the following statement: Taking part in this study group has increased my understanding of the doctrine of election: 1. A lot; 2. A little; 3. Not at all.

All eleven answered: 1. A lot.

2. Was there anything which we studied which you wish had been explained more fully or clearly? If so, what? The answers were:

"No."

"Only that which there is no way we can understand."

"The study seemed well put together and sufficient enough to broaden my knowledge of this doctrine."

"No - unless I learn Greek - give me a while!"

"It was a thorough study."

3. What idea or thought which was studied in these sessions has been most helpful to you in your spiritual life?

"Knowing that I have been elected to be saved by the grace of God and assured by his promises."

"The fact that "All that the Father gives to me shall come to me and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away. Salvation is ALL of grace."

"God has chosen me. My will has no part in my salvation."

"I hadn't studied this much, but after studying what the Word says I see great comfort in

knowing God has chosen me and that He who began a good work in me will carry it on to completion."

"That election is very important."

"I especially enjoyed the clear presentation of the ability to share the gospel based on this doctrine. I also appreciated the scripture references after each question. Objective truth is a must. Thank you."

"I more fully can glorify God since it was and always will be the grace of a living and merciful, yet holy and just God, who brings salvation to me."

"I always knew this but am reminded that God chose me before the world was created."

"Re-emphasizing the point that I did nothing for my salvation."

4. Do you feel that you understand the differences between the First Form and the Second Form of the doctrine of election?

Five answered "yes" with no further comment. Others offered the following answers:

"Yes, the first form is the right form, by grace alone."

"Yes, but in our church body I see that many don't understand the differences because of extreme emphasis of different things, even when the teachings are essentially the same."

"Better - God elected us and saved us."

"Yes - the first. God did it all. 2. We did it in part, which I do not believe."

5. Which of the following statements do you agree with: 1. Being elected by God causes people to believe in Christ and be saved. Or 2. God elected people to be saved because He foresaw that they would come to faith in Christ.

Seven group participants indicated that they agreed with the first statement. Two indicated the second statement. One of the latter may have meant to indicate the first statement, but underlined the wrong answer by mistake. Elsewhere the same person wrote:

"Yes - the first. God did it all. 2. We did it in part which I do not believe."

The writer believes that the other person who professed to agree with the second form of the doctrine of election articulated preference for that view as early as the first session. This was even before the group studied the second form of the doctrine of election in the second session.

Why did she do so? I think that she spontaneously sought an understanding of the the doctrine of election which would be agreeable to reason, and, on her own, she came up with the concept that God predestined certain people to salvation because He foresaw that they would come to faith in Christ.

This person did not speak up in defense of the *intuitu fidei* doctrine during subsequent sessions, and the writer thought that she had abandoned it. Probably, however, she did not. The goal which the writer had established of leading all of the study group participants to hold to the first form of the doctrine of election was not realized with regard to this participant.

6. Do you think that Christians ought to study the doctrine of election? Why, or why not?

"Yes, understanding God's laws and the grace of God gives Christians reassurance of God's promises."

"Yes, God did it all. I had no part."

"Yes, if it is taught in the right way. It is encouraging to study that God has chosen us and salvation is not based on us coming to him. It gives assurance."

"Yes, because from the pure studying of God's inerrant Word this doctrine can be a great comfort to those concerned about where they stand."

"Yes, may it always be! Because it stands as the intersection from which all other roads of Christian life and ministry originate. Study of this doctrine provides the right road to follow."

"Yes, it's in the Bible, but it must be studied from the proper point of view. It needs to be studied or it will not be understood, and then cause problems."

"Yes, because the understanding it gives, gives one assurance of salvation when/if doubts come along. It's also comforting to know that it's entirely God's work."

"Yes, all Scripture is profitable for teaching, and election is in the Scriptures."

"Yes, it helped me. Do I need to take it again?? I'm serious, somewhat."

7. If you were worried about whether or not you were elected to be saved, what would you do?

"Need more study. Ask the Holy Spirit to be your guide."

"Remember God's promises, that by his grace we are saved."

"Remember my baptism. Remember that my salvation, election is not based on my feelings. Go to the Word, and go back to these 5 Bible studies also."

"I Peter 1:5, John 10:28-30, John 6:37 - You

get the idea. Go to the Word of God."

"Peruse the Word and claim the promises in it."

"Go back to the promises of God. Christ said to come to Him with my sin; I repented and Jesus said He forgave me."

"Cry out to the Lord, study the Word, and talk to the pastor."

"Go to the Word and read and pray."

"Go to John and the verses we studied during class."

8. Do you have any other comment that you would like to make about this study group?

"More people should be interested. More churches should teach it."

"Studying the doctrine of election has given me better insight or understanding that, although I may be a sinner, God has chosen me, and as long as I trust in him and ask his forgiveness, I will never be a non-believer. And all I have to do is ask for forgiveness."

"Possibly the most helpful and important class I have ever been at."

"It was presented in a way that made election easy to understand and to discern between the two forms."

"I thoroughly enjoyed this study, and it also caused much personal study and discussion, which was a lot of fun and good for me."

"I will have to admit that because of my overly-analytical mind I was confused because I could not fit all of the pieces in my mind. It helped though, as always, to take the Word of God for what it says."

"I have appreciated more than I can say the Biblical teaching of these sessions. I think I've grown much. I know I have received

assurance through going through these verses and having them pointed out to me. Praise God that our salvation and assurance are in him alone! Thank you for these sessions."

In addition to the above questions, the young men in the group were also asked to indicate on their questionnaires if they were giving any thought to preparing for the office of the ministry. Three indicated that they were.

Because the study group was comprised of volunteers, it was not possible to anticipate that several Bible School students and possible future seminarians would attend. Therefore it was not an explicit goal of the writer to use the sessions to encourage young men to serve in the office of the ministry.

However, it is the conviction of this writer that God providentially brought some young men to take part in the sessions who may serve as parish pastors in the future. The prospect that these sessions may have encouraged them to do so is a pleasing one, but it is not surprising. God often accomplishes much more through the proclamation of His Word than is anticipated by the one who proclaims it.

When God's Word is preached, God gives the increase. As Paul wrote in I Corinthians 3:7:

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

Conclusions of The Writer

Can the doctrine of election be taught in congregations in a manner profitable to souls? Should a parish pastor teach his flock

what the Bible says about election, and should a pastor assure Christians that God has elected them unto salvation? This writer is convinced that the answer to all of these questions is "Yes."

Comments by members of the study group provide evidence to support that view. Their comments indicate that studying the doctrine of election was very helpful to the spiritual lives of many of them.

What specific spiritual needs or doctrinal problems in the church does the teaching of the doctrine of election help to correct? The writer has noted five, and all of them were addressed in the study lessons.

The first one is the error of synergism. It is the teaching that man can contribute something to his salvation, and so a sinner must "work together" with God to achieve his salvation.

The lessons dealt with that error in Study I on the second page. There it is pointed out that II Timothy 1:9 teaches that God called and saved His people because of His grace alone. The point is made that the doctrine of election, when it is rightly taught, supports salvation by grace alone. II Timothy 1:9 states:

(God) has saved us and called us to a holy life -
not because of anything we have done but because
of his own purpose and grace. This grace was
given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning
of time.

Also the connection between unconditional election and salvation by grace alone was pointed out in Study III on the first and second pages. There the question was asked: "Can salvation be partly produced by God's grace and partly produced by human effort?" Students were directed to Romans 11:5-6 for the answer. Those verses

show the connection between the Biblical doctrine of election and salvation by grace alone by stating:

So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

Man can do no work to contribute to his salvation. Salvation is all by God's grace alone. The doctrine of election, rightly taught, supports that thesis.

A second doctrinal error and spiritual problem for which election serves as a corrective is the idea that faith is a work of man rather than a gift of God. The *intuitu fidei* form of the doctrine of election sometimes leads people to believe that God elected people to salvation **because** He foresaw that they would choose to come to faith, and therefore sinners must produce their own faith as a condition for salvation.

This error was dealt with in Study II on the second and third pages. There it is noted that II Thessalonians 2:13 teaches that God did not choose His people to be saved **because** He saw them as already believing in the Gospel, but rather God chose them to be saved **by** believing in the Gospel. II Thessalonians 2:13 ties election to the idea that faith is a gift of God rather than a work of man. It states:

. . . from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

Session III on the second page also points out the Scriptural teaching that faith is a gift of God and that faith results from the

Father having given particular sinners to Christ for salvation. It asks:

. . . is it possible for a sinner to come to Christ and believe in Him by the sinner's own will-power or strength?

The question refers the students to John 6:44 for the answer. In that verse Christ said:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

In this verse the Scriptural doctrine of election shows that a sinner cannot produce his own faith. It must be given to him as a gift.

A third error and spiritual problem which election opposes is the idea that unregenerate sinners have free wills capable of ceasing to oppose God and of choosing to believe in Christ. This error is dealt with extensively in Study IV. There, on the first and second pages, students are referred to I Corinthians 1:30-31.

In I Corinthians 1, Paul tells how God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. Then Paul tells Christians that they were chosen by God for salvation so that they could not in any way boast that their salvation was their own doing, but rather they must acknowledge that it was God's doing alone. Paul says in I Corinthians 1:28-30:

He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things . . . so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him (God) that you are in Christ Jesus . . .

The doctrine of election, rightly taught, resists the pride which comes from a sinner thinking that he has chosen God and has made himself worthy of salvation.

A fourth error which the doctrine of election opposes is the holding of a minimalistic or contemptuous view of the sacraments. This error is dealt with in Study IV on the third page. There the following statement is made:

The first form of the doctrine of election . . . encourages a pastor to have great confidence in the sacraments. This is because it encourages him to see that salvation is God's work, not man's work, and Scripture teaches that God does His work through the sacraments.

In Study V on the third page, questions are asked which show how God uses the sacraments to create and sustain faith in Christ in those whom He has elected unto salvation. There the question is asked:

What does Romans 6:4 say about those who have been baptized into Christ?

The answer is from Romans 6:4:

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Also the question is asked:

According to Matthew 26:28, what blessing comes to sinners along with Christ's blood in the Lord's Supper?

The answer is from Matthew 26:28:

This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

As Romans 6:4 and Matthew 26:28 show, God gives the gifts of new spiritual life and of forgiveness of sins in the sacraments.

When election is rightly taught, it necessarily includes the teaching that faith is a gift of God. When faith is taught to be a

gift of God and not a work of man, then the way is prepared for teaching that God gives the gift of faith through the sacraments, which are His Word in visible form. Thus the doctrine of election opposes a minimalistic view of the sacraments.

The fifth doctrinal error and spiritual problem which is opposed when the doctrine of election is rightly taught is the idea that the proper task of a minister of the Gospel is to attempt to persuade the free wills of unregenerate sinners to make decisions to trust in Christ as Savior. This error is dealt with in Study IV.

On the second page of that study, students are referred to John 15:16a. There Christ says:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit . . .

According to that statement, Christ chooses his friends. They do not choose Him. Therefore it is not the task of a minister to try to persuade sinners to choose to believe in Christ, for sinners are not capable of such a choice.

Rather the job of a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to proclaim God's Word and administer His sacraments. Then, through those means of grace, God does the work of enkindling saving faith in the hearts of sinners.

This point is expressed explicitly on the third page of Study IV where the following statement is made:

. . . the first form does not encourage a pastor to press his hearers for decisions to become Christians. Rather the first form encourages a pastor to proclaim God's saving Word and to believe that through it God will do the work of saving sinners

as the Law reveals their sin to them and as the Gospel promises them forgiveness in Christ.

These examples indicate that when the doctrine of election is rightly taught, it becomes a hedge against several doctrinal errors. Among them are the following: 1. Salvation is by synergism, by man "working together" with God on his salvation; 2. Faith is a work of man which he fulfills as a condition for salvation; 3. Unregenerate sinners have free wills able to choose to stop opposing God and to believe in Christ; 4. The sacraments are only signs of the faith of Christians and not means of grace; and 5. The office of the ministry is the work of persuading the wills of unregenerate sinners to decide to trust in Christ.

Should the doctrine of election be taught in the church? The answer is "Yes." The doctrine of election, rightly taught, protects God's people from doctrinal errors, and it strengthens their confidence and joy in the blessed truth that salvation is entirely a gift of God's grace alone in Jesus Christ.

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