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# Comfort and Encouragement

## Which a Pastor May Derive from the Doctrine of Election

By VICTOR MENNICKE

When we speak of our eternal election or predestination, we are dealing with a clearly revealed doctrine of Holy Scriptures. For this reason we confess in the Formula of Concord (Ep. XI, 5): "This (predestination of God) is not to be investigated in the secret counsel of God, but to be sought in the Word of God, where it is also revealed." "It . . . must be learned from the Holy Gospel" (Ep., XI, 9).

Holy Scriptures teach that our election is "the eternal purpose and decree of God to do what He actually does for us in time; converting, justifying, preserving, and glorifying us" (*Popular Symbolics*, p. 124). "Our election is founded . . . alone upon the merit of Christ and the gracious will of His Father" (F. C., Th. D., XI, 75). "This eternal election is an efficient cause and immovable foundation of our salvation and of everything pertaining thereto, including faith" (F. C., Th. D., XI, 8).

The purpose of the teaching of election is our "glorious consolation." In particular, the doctrine of election affords the consolation and the assurance that we shall finally be saved despite the devil, the world, and our flesh. In affliction, predestination affords the special comfort that God does not merely supply the power for our perseverance, but actually keeps us unto salvation. Predestination also guarantees that the Church shall finally prevail against the portals of hell (cf. F. C., Th. D., XI, 45—50). This comfort is for *every* Christian.

Our present topic, however, is concerned with the comfort and encouragement a pastor *as pastor* may receive from the Scriptural doctrine of election. In treating this topic we shall refer to specific Scripture passages and apply them.

Outstanding is the use of the word "elect"—*ἐλεκτοί*, with that of its synonyms *προεγνωσμένοι* and *προωρισμένοι*. The meaning of the word is simple. It denotes those whom the Lord has chosen, elected, out of the *massa perditā* "to be members of His family or Kingdom" (Hodge). John 15:19 Christ says: *ἐγὼ ἐξελεξάμην ὑμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου*. Now as to its use.

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In the congregation at Colossae were people who were practicing false asceticism (Col. 2:16, 21, 23). There were even those who were tainted with false doctrines, e. g., philosophical speculations tending toward gnosticism (2:8), and the spiritistic leanings (2:18, 21); and yet, when the Apostle spoke to them, what a wonderful name he gave them: ἐκλεκτοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ! Yes, Paul realized that they were sinners, and yet, when he had to deal with them, they were the "elect of God." Many of us will undoubtedly have problem cases in our congregations. There are the overdeveloped pietists on the one side; the extremists of personal freedom on the other. Unscriptural opinions will ever be present. We are in danger of viewing our members particularly as suffering from these weaknesses. How easy to classify them as the ignoramuses, blockheads, weaklings, people with screwy minds, etc. The Apostle had just such people in his congregation, yet to him they were "elect of God." Unless we have definite proof that a member of our congregation is "a heathen man and a publican" who must be excommunicated from our church, we are to treat him as an "elect of God" in spite of his shortcomings. When we truly realize that our members are "elect of God," persons whom God from all eternity has foreordained to be His own, and in time called them by His Gospel and preserved them as His own and will glorify them with us in heaven, they will not so much be the thorns in the flesh we like to view them. A new zeal will overtake us to work for them, on them, and with them.

In his doxology 2 Thess. 2:13 the Apostle Paul says of the Thessalonians εἰλατο ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός — God chose you. These are words given by inspiration. Now, the congregation was not only disturbed by eschatological aberrations, but moral deficiencies were prominent in congregational life (1 Thess. 5:13-14; 4:1-7). Yet the Apostle, while correcting the members of the congregation, says that they were chosen by God. Inasmuch as they accepted the preaching of the Gospel, and professed faith in their Savior, the Apostle regards them as elect and deals with them as such. May we do likewise.

As we turn to Titus 1:1, we find the Apostle's direction for pastoral work. He calls himself "an Apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect," κατὰ πίστιν ἐκλεκτῶν θεοῦ. "Κατά," says the old commentator Scultetus,

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“*hic finem notat.*” Thus Paul considered himself an Apostle *with respect to the faith* of those whom God had chosen, or *in order* that they might be led to believe the Gospel. God had chosen them to salvation *through faith* (Walther: *Berichtigung*, p.147). Inasmuch as God had, from eternity, decreed to save His elect *through faith*, the Apostle views his task as preaching the Gospel through which the Holy Ghost would work this faith. Thus he was an Apostle according to, or for the sake of, the faith of God's elect. Paul did not regard his calling as a job of preaching so many sermons and turning out a certain amount of routine work. His was the joy of being a co-worker with Christ. Christ had wrought the atonement. Paul preached the atonement, and the Holy Spirit through this preaching worked the faith. This work made Paul an “Apostle according to the faith of God's elect.” In this respect we stand on the same plane with Paul. God has chosen elect to salvation through faith which the Holy Spirit works through that Gospel which you and I preach, as co-workers with Christ! It was in this sense that Paul wrote to Timothy (2 Tim. 2:10): “I endure all things for the *elect's* sakes, that they may also obtain salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”

These same thoughts the Lord expressed in the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, where He discoursed on the “Good Shepherd”; especially in v.16, where He says: “and other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd.” Dr. Stoeckhardt remarked (*Bibl. Geschichte des N.T.*, p.174): “The other sheep, who are not of this fold, not of (the house of) Israel, are those who should come out of the Gentile world. Those Gentiles which He had in mind He regards as His sheep even before they come to Him, while they still are going astray. They are His sheep, belong to Him according to God's foreseeing and decree. These words show us that throughout this entire passage the Lord speaks of His elect children. Those whom God from the beginning had chosen to eternal life and had handed over to His Son, and who in (this) life had come to faith, are the sheep of Jesus. That Christ gives His life for just these sheep, does not exclude the fact that He is the Propitiation for the sin of the whole world. The re-

demption through Christ reaches its final purpose and object in the elect who are finally saved. The sheep which are not of this fold, the elect out of all people and nations, Jesus, the Shepherd, 'brings' through the service of His disciples, His preachers; He calls, converts them through His Gospel, and the elect children hear His voice and recognize Him as their Shepherd and Redeemer."

As we view our pastoral work in our congregations, we may well consider the doctrine of election, which definitely includes that the Lord has chosen the elect in our congregations to come to faith or be strengthened in their faith through our preaching of the Gospel. What dignity this adds to our work! What encouragement to continue our work cheerfully! Such consideration of the doctrine of election is the proper method, as the Formula of Concord says (Sol. Decl., XI, 33): "With this *revealed* will of God we should concern ourselves, follow and be diligently engaged upon it, because through the Word, whereby He calls us, the Holy Ghost bestows grace, power, and ability to this end."

One of the most famous passages on election is found in Romans 8, beginning with the words of v. 28. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate," etc. Dr. Stoekhardt has summed up the answer as to who the "called" are by saying (*Roemerbrief*, p. 390) "κλητοί ist bei Paulus, ueberhaupt in den apostolischen Briefen, durchweg Praedikat der glaeubigen Christen, gleichwie dieselben anderwaerts — ἐκλεκτοί genannt werden." Briefly the argument is as follows: All things work together for good to God's elect. All things — this includes even the unpleasant situations and the unwelcome happenings. The truth expressed in these words again places the pastor's work upon an entirely different plane from every other profession. Persons engaged in other professions must always operate with the danger of defeat. As loyal Americans we are desirous of having our country emerge victoriously out of every conflict, yet our statesmen and the officers of our armed forces must ever reckon with the possibility of defeat. Many a competent naval architect has designed majestic ships only to have them sent beneath the waves. Firemen are possibly fighting the flames. Not all things work out together

for the good of their task. A shift in the wind's direction may make a major conflagration out of a little fire. In this manner every mundane profession must face the danger of failure due to circumstances. How entirely different the work of the pastor! Even the most untoward conditions cannot prevent a desirable consummation of his work. We mention war, persecution, plague, and famine. Yes, they may disrupt the organization of the local congregation; they may expose unsuspected hypocrites; they may even crucify the pastor on his own altar, as was the fate of the Lutheran Estonians at the hands of the "Red hordes"; but defeat of his work, never! When the Lord from eternity chose in Christ those elect to whom we preach the Gospel, He took into account even the severest exigencies to which they would be exposed and so decreed that no one and nothing should take them out of His hand. Our preaching the Gospel to them is not in vain. Since God has decreed that all things must work together for good to His elect, our work is bound to succeed, not only in spite of, but even as a result of, all things that happen to the elect.

Another aspect of the doctrine of election bears out this same ultimate success of our pastoral work. In 1 Peter 1:2 we read: "Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to the . . . elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." To this passage Luther remarks: "Daraus sollen wir kurz diese Lehre nehmen, dass die Versehung . . . in Gottes Hand steht . . . und auf seine Barmherzigkeit, die unwandelbar und ewig ist . . . gegruendet; daher sie auch Gottes Versehung heisst und derhalben gewiss ist und nicht fehlen kann." We are dealing with assured success. The elect under our care have from all eternity been marked off and have been begotten in love by God the Father, and sanctified by the Spirit within the bounds of time "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." A firmer assurance does not exist. Accordingly, there is only one attitude, which we, the mouthpieces of the Holy Spirit, can take regarding our pastoral work — forward in joy and courage.

The Scriptural end and aim of election gives us comfort and encouragement in our work as pastors. God has chosen His elect "to be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:9), "unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ," "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Eph. 1:6). In 2 Thess.

2:13 we read that God chose His elect "to salvation." In the Book of Acts 13:48 we are told that they are ordained to eternal life. Accordingly, the Formula of Concord, Sol. Decl., XI, 14, states: "The entire doctrine concerning the purpose, counsel, will, and ordination of God pertaining to our redemption, call, justification, and salvation should be taken together." When we deal with our parishioners, thanks to the doctrine of election, we present to them the redemption through Christ, the conversion and sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and also the final preservation. We can go all the way and tell them, inasmuch as the Lord has brought them to faith through the Gospel, they hereby also have the assurance that He has predestinated them unto eternal life. Especially when they are in doubt about their soul's salvation, we may use this doctrine to good advantage, as did John Staupitz with his parishioner young Martin Luther. Luther later wrote (St. Louis Ed., II:180) that he certainly would have died of doubt and fear had he not received this comfort. That comfort we may bring to our members by applying this doctrine to them. How this lightens our task and cheers us in our work!

In conclusion, let us recall that when the Apostle Peter had addressed the believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia as *ἐκλεκτοί*, he exclaimed: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The truth that these people with whom he had to deal were *ἐκλεκτοί*, with all this term implies, was so wonderful that he could not consider this fact without expressing a doxology. Similarly the Apostle Paul, before presenting the doctrine of election, writes to his congregation at Ephesus: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places in Christ." And again, after the longer dissertation on election in the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul breaks forth in the well-known hymn of praise: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! . . . To whom be glory forever. Amen." May the same enthusiasm and joy which filled the hearts of the Apostles as they contemplated the doctrine of election and what it meant to them, be granted unto us.

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