

Predestination

by Paul Nolting

The Words

We humans can't express a thought or discuss it or even "tell it as it is" without using words. Words are bodies for thoughts and ideas. Words are supposed to make things clear, although they frequently are used to muddy the waters of thought. When we begin to study the biblical doctrine of predestination, we should realize that the Spirit of God used a number of words to express this same truth. Each word has a different shade of meaning, approaching the same subject from a distinctive point of view. The words that the Spirit of God selected were originally Hebrew, but chiefly Greek words. We use English words. In so doing we should realize that meanings of words become colored in translation and also from usage.

There are four nouns and four verbs that may be used interchangeably, for they all express in English the same eternal truth. These words are predestinate and predestination, foreordain and foreordination, elect and election, foreknow and foreknowledge. However, a word of caution must be made concerning the word "foreknowledge." It is used in a narrow or intensive sense as a synonym for predestination. But common usage has made foreknowledge a synonym for God's prevision or prescience, that is, His knowing all things that ever will happen on earth. In this sense foreknowledge must be distinguished from predestination.

The Concept

What is the concept or the reality or the divine truth that lies behind these words? Predestination or foreordination or election is a decision of God's will. Now when God wills something, He does it without fail. He carries it out, for our God is the God "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11). Man frequently wills something but then finds his will frustrated by his own weakness or by circumstances beyond his control. But not so with God! God's will is never frustrated. What God wills, He carries out—with no possibility of ever failing. So we can speak of predestination as an act or action of God's will.

This act of God's will occurred before the world was created—"according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Before time began, before this universe was in existence, before the Word cried out, "Let there be light!" God willed!

What was the nature of that act of God's will? It was an election, a selection, a choosing, a singling out of a definite number of people who should be born and live on earth after the earth had been created and man began to multiply himself. Recall the words quoted above: "... according as he hath chosen us"

What did God have in mind for these people that He chose, that were the objects of the action of His will? God knew that man would fall into sin, lose the image of God, and thus become the victim of death—which ultimately means eternal separation from God. God didn't want this to happen. He wanted all men to be saved. That is why, from eternity already, he planned to send His Son to be the Savior of all men. St. Peter, in his Pentecost sermon, speaks of Jesus as "being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). But predestination dare not be identified with God's universal will of grace. Out of the mass of fallen mankind, for whom Christ died, God chose a certain definite number of individuals "unto the adoption of children," "to be conformed to the image of his Son," "to salvation," "unto

obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ,” “to eternal life.” What God determined to do in eternity, he carries out in time—without fail!

The fact that you and I have been called to faith in Christ Jesus, that we have been justified or have received the forgiveness of sins, that we have been sanctified or set apart for holiness of living, that we have been kept in the faith thus far and have the assurance of being kept faithful in the future, that we will be granted a blessed death and thereby enter into life eternal is *the result* of the fact that God, from eternity, predestinated, foreknew, foreordained, elected us unto eternal salvation. St. Paul writes: “... whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30).

Election Of Grace

In Lutheran circles the doctrine of predestination is more commonly known as the election of grace. In the German—*Gnadenwahl*. Predestination is called the election of grace because grace was the motivating force or the prime cause that moved our God to elect or foreordain or choose or predestinate a certain definite number of people unto eternal salvation. That election is an “election of grace” is obvious from even a casual reading of the Trinitarian doxology, with which Paul began his letter to the Ephesians (1:3-14). That grace is inseparably connected with Jesus Christ, for Scripture knows of no grace apart from Christ. Such grace is also the cooperative enterprise of the Holy Trinity for the benefit of man. By the use of upper case, varying type, and underlining we shall try to cause your eyes to see more clearly election as an *Election of Grace*:

THE FATHER: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places *in Christ*: According as he hath chosen us *in him* before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

THE SON: *In whom* we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself (*in him, i. e. Christ*): That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might, gather together in one all things *in Christ*, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even *in him*: *In whom* also we have obtained an inheritance (a lot), being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted (hoped) *in Christ*.

THE HOLY GHOST: *In whom* ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: *in whom* also after that ye believed, ye were

sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

The Father chose or predestinated us from all eternity. But the Father did not make this decision of His will in an absolute manner, but in harmony with His eternal plan for mankind's redemption through Christ. That is why he chose us *in Christ*—a phrase that reoccurs no less than ten times, the number of completeness.

In eternity already the Father blessed us “in Christ.” He chose us “in him.” That decision was made in harmony with the planned redemption of the world by Christ, “in whom we have redemption.” God’s electing us was something he purposed in Himself, but it was “in him” i.e. Christ. This the Father did because Christ was to administer man’s salvation. When the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son to sum up all things or gather them all together “in Christ.” This was the divine plan: Christ was to be the Mediator of salvation, the Father’s Regent on earth. So even “in him” this was to be done. “In whom” we have obtained a lot, i.e. we have been chosen in Christ. So it is that we are people who have placed and so rest our hope “in Christ.” “In whom” we trusted. Our faith rests upon Christ, the Author and Finisher of our salvation. “In whom” we were sealed, claimed as His own, by the Holy Spirit when we were baptized.

The Father chose us. The Son made that election effective by redeeming us. The Holy Spirit conveyed that election to us by sealing us, i.e. by working faith in our hearts.

What motivated the Holy Trinity to do all this for us? Nothing in us, but *grace alone!*: Grace cannot be commandeered, seized, demanded, merited, or controlled by man. It flows freely where our Savior-God would have it flow. Our response should be an unending doxology “to the praise of the glory of his grace.”

Jesus Speaks of the Elect

We don’t find Jesus discussing the doctrine of eternal election in a lengthy, formal manner as He taught of the righteousness of a child of God in the Sermon on the Mount. We don’t find Him disputing with the Jews over this doctrine as He did over the Sabbath or the question of His own origin and person. We find Jesus, rather, simply asserting the fact that some have been chosen, that there is a definite group of persons, the elect—God’s elect. He takes for granted that His hearers know what He is talking about and will understand. For Jesus presupposes that His hearers know the Old Testament Scriptures, which speak of God’s election.

For example, Isaiah speaks of “mine elect” in three separate and distinct ways. He uses the term in reference to the Messiah (Is. 42:1). He was the Chosen One, the Elect of God in that special sense of being the One who would one day save all people by being delivered into the hands of His people “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,” as Peter proclaimed in the Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:23). Isaiah also uses that extremely intimate designation, “mine elect,” for the nation of Israel (Is. 45:4). God chose Abraham and gave him a son of the promise, Isaac. Isaac had two sons; God chose Jacob. In the course of history God made of Abraham a great nation, endowing that nation with special prerogatives, which Paul lists in Rom. 9:4-5. Israel misused that election of grace by converting it into a basis for religious

racial pride and carnal security. But had they read Moses and the prophets more carefully, they would have observed that “mine elect” was also used of a minority of the nation, a remnant—spiritual Israel, the true sons of Abraham (Is. 65:9). St. Paul speaks of these elect when he says that “they are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Rom. 9:6) and that “there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:5). In brief, a knowledge of God’s election—misused and perverted though it had become—was nonetheless a part of the religious heritage of Jesus’ countrymen. He could and did assume that they knew of God’s election.

Jesus brings the parables of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16) and the Marriage of the King’s Son (Matt. 22:1-14) to a conclusion with a brief axiomatic statement: “For many are called, but few *chosen*.” “Called” is used here in the sense of invited, not effectively called to faith, as in the epistles. Both parables show that the number invited to share in God’s grace by becoming members of His Kingdom is larger than the number chosen or elected. Most reject God’s invitation, but the elect of God accept it.

In the parable of the Unjust Judge Jesus makes the point that “men ought always to pray” by contrasting the unjust judge with our heavenly Father. He asks the rhetorical question: “Shall not God avenge *his own elect*, which cry day and night unto him ... ?” (Luke 18:1-8) God has His elect, His very own elect. They are dear to Him. He cannot but hear and answer their prayers.

In the Olivet Address Jesus discusses the destruction of Jerusalem, which lay in the immediate future, and the end of the world, which loomed in the background. The agony of judgment upon Jerusalem was a miniature of what shall one day be the fate of the world, yea the universe. At the time of the destruction of Jerusalem the fate of one nation hung in the balance; at the end of time the fate of all nations shall be weighed in the divine balances. Jesus said: “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but *for the elect’s sake* those days shall be shortened.” Those were and will be days of furious activity on the part of Satan, as he strains every effort to deceive and so increase his number of victims. Yet his frenzied efforts shall be unsuccessful—“if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” That remains impossible, for the elect rest secure in the eternal decree of God. At the end of time God shall send His angels to “gather together *his elect* from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt. 24:22.24.31.). The elect shall escape every effort of Satan, survive the judgment, and be gathered unto eternal life in heaven.

So the Lord speaks of the elect as a small, but definite number of persons whose salvation was determined already in eternity and is effected in time unto life everlasting.

St. Luke

The Spirit of the Lord moved St. Luke to record the missionary journeys of St. Paul in the book of Acts. On the first missionary journey the first major stopping place on the mainland of Asia Minor was Antioch in Pisidia. As was custom among the Jews Paul was given an opportunity to speak on the Sabbath in the synagogue. He seized the opportunity to proclaim Jesus to be the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies—the Bringer of divine forgiveness for all sinners. After that worship service the Gentiles “besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath” (Acts 13:42). On that next Sabbath almost the entire city gathered to hear the Word of the Lord. When the Jews saw that, they became envious and began contradicting and blaspheming. Paul then turned to the Gentiles, who “were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord” (v. 48). Luke continues by recording the results of Paul’s preaching in this way: “... and as many as were *ordained to eternal life* believed (Acts 13:48).

These few words show the proper relation between God's eternal election of grace and man's faith. When the Gospel is proclaimed, as Paul preached forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation in and through Jesus Christ, those and those only are brought to faith and kept in the faith who have been "ordained to eternal life." In brief—God's eternal election of grace is a cause of man's faith. To get and keep the point clearly in mind it is necessary to keep the opposite clearly in mind: Man's faith is *not* the cause or the reason why God chose the believer from all eternity. Now it is true that God knew from all eternity who would believe and who would reject the Gospel in disbelief. But God did not base His eternal election on His knowing in advance the response and reaction of every single individual to the preaching of the Gospel. God's selection of individuals to be saved was motivated by His grace on the basis of the redemption of all mankind by His Son, Jesus Christ. And so it comes to pass in time, and without fail, that those who are from eternity "ordained to eternal life" are brought to faith by the preaching of the Gospel.

St. Paul—Romans

In the eighth chapter of his letter Paul discusses a very practical human problem—that of suffering, specifically the suffering that befalls a child of God because he is just that—a child of God. He brings comfort with the assurance that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (v. 18). He assures the buffeted child of God that in the hour of utmost need "the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us" (v. 26). Then comes an amazing word of comfort, namely, that "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (v. 28). How can we be so sure of this—that both the good and the evil day, the sufferings and the triumphs, the pain and joy work together in some mysterious way for our good? Our assurance is to be found in our eternal election, for those "that love God" are individuals

... who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (vv. 28-30)

Notice the chain of actions that began in eternity and were carried out in time. God had a *purpose* from all eternity. That purpose had to do with a certain definite number of persons whom God *foreknew*. That doesn't mean that He just knew who they were, but that He knew them as His own from eternity. He claimed them as His own or *elected* them, as Paul puts it in Eph. 1:4. These elected ones He *predestinated*. They were made the objects of His irrevocable decision which He unflinchingly carried out in time. He *called* them to faith in His Son, *justified* them or gave them forgiveness, and *glorified* them. What followed in time was the result of actions taken and decisions made in eternity. So it is that all cannot but work together for good in the life of a child of God. All suffering is as pieces of a puzzle, which when the last piece is fitted in will reveal the picture of a child of God elected from eternity unto salvation and led in time through life to glory.

St. Paul—I Thessalonians

Paul was in Thessalonica less than a month. He was only able to “reason with them out of the scriptures” (Acts 17:2) for three Sabbaths before the Jews again caused such an uproar that Paul was forced to leave the city. He wrote his first letter to this new congregation a short time later. In the opening sentences of that letter Paul wrote— “Knowing, brethren beloved, *your election* of God (1 Thess. 1:4).

How could Paul be so sure that these people in Thessalonica had been elected to eternal salvation by God already in eternity? After all, he had known them but such a short time! This poses the broader question: How can anyone know that he is an elect of God? Paul received no special revelation from the Lord that identified the elect for him. He had no special intuitive powers whereby he could discern just whom God had chosen before the foundation of the world was laid. The point to observe carefully is that Paul never looks back into eternity to determine who the elect are. He never seeks to pry into the inscrutable and forever hidden counsels of God. Scripture never bids any man to seek assurance of his election by seeking to know the unknowable—just whom God elected in eternity. No, Paul looked at the results of his Gospel-preaching. For whom God elected in eternity, He called by the Gospel in time.

Paul knew that the Thessalonians were among the elect because they manifested the Spirit-created identification marks of the elect. They were genuinely affected by the Gospel. When Christ Jesus was proclaimed to them as the Savior from sin, that message was not just a matter of words, not just the offering of another of those many itinerant preachers of that day, but it became for them *the “Good News”* that struck their hearts with power and with the Holy Ghost. They tasted and so experienced personally that the Lord is good (Ps. 34:8). They became willing to take up the cross and follow Jesus, “having received the word in much affliction” (1:6). They became living epistles, personal witnesses for Christ, being “ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad ... ” (1:7-8). They became “new creatures” (2 Cor. 5:17), having “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1:9). They became also “advent” Christians who had learned “to wait for his Son from heaven” (1:10). All these evidences of the power of the Spirit in their lives made Paul certain that the Thessalonians were among the elect of God.

The Spirit of God is extremely practical. He moved Paul to write to the Thessalonians in such a way that what he wrote would be of lasting value to believers of every age. Whenever a person hears or reads of the doctrine of God’s eternal election, he will sooner or later ask himself: Am I one of the elect of God? This question demands an answer especially in times of stress and strain. At such times Satan will try his best to get children of God to seek for the answer in the wrong place. He would have us peer into the forever hidden counsels of God in eternity, knowing that we can never find assurance of our election in that way. We are to find our assurance in the revealed will of God in the Scriptures. God has assured us that all who have been elected in eternity will be called by the Gospel in time and so come under the influence of the Holy Spirit. If a child of God is troubled by doubts as to whether he is one of the elect of God, he is to find comfort in what the God of His salvation has done for him in time—that the Holy Spirit has called him to faith by the Gospel, has made him a new creature and a witness for Christ, has given him the courage to shoulder the cross of Christ, and has taught him to look ahead for the return of his Lord in glory. Every child of God will confess, and that daily, that he is not always what the Spirit of God has made him. The fact of our weakness is no reason to

doubt our election, but rather points to the necessity for daily repentance. In so doing we follow the exhortation of St. Peter who urged the brethren to “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). Our eternal election is sure; our Savior-God would have us be sure of it.

St. Paul—II Thessalonians

Some members of the congregation at Thessalonica were misapplying what Paul had taught them concerning our Lord’s coming again in glory. They expected the Lord’s return within the span of their lifetime, yea at any moment. If this were true—and they firmly believed what Paul had taught them about the Lord’s return to this earth—why there would be no reason to keep on working so hard! What for—if the Lord were coming again so soon? So they quit their jobs, behaved in a disorderly manner, became busybodies, and before long were dependent upon others for their daily bread. The Lord is coming again! Of that there is no doubt. But the proper application of this truth for Christian living is not that children of God become “bums” waiting around for His coming, but that they continue about their God-given tasks, waiting quietly for the Lord with all watchfulness.

But there was another matter which Paul revealed to the Thessalonians. A great anti-Christian development lay in the future at that time but had to come to pass before the return of the Lord. That was the great “falling away” which would bring about the revelation of “that man of sin ... the son of perdition.” This development has now come to pass in the rise of the Roman Papacy, which demands submission to the Pope as a condition for salvation and which has placed its official curse upon the very heart of the Gospel—justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus. Paul revealed to the Thessalonians that the great Antichrist would come as a judgment from God upon men “because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”

When the Thessalonians read these words, they could not but think about their own salvation. Would they become victims of this terrifying anti-Christian power? Had not Paul written that “the mystery of iniquity doth already work”? Paul quieted the fears of the Thessalonians with the assurance of their election. Immediately following his prophecy of the Antichrist Paul wrote: “But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2:13-14).

The “mystery of iniquity” was already at work; the “man of sin” would be revealed. Despite this, Paul is certain of the salvation of the Thessalonians, whom he calls “brethren beloved of the Lord.” What is the basis for his assurance regarding them? “Because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation” Paul points to an act of God in eternity. But how did Paul know what God had done in eternity? By observing what God had done in time for the Thessalonians. For when God made His selection or election in eternity—when He elected a certain definite number from the mass of fallen mankind—He made that choice “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” His election was not “bare” or “absolute.” That is, God did not simply reach down into the mass of mankind and grasp out every tenth or hundredth person by His almighty power. No, He made His selection, but He at the same time determined to carry out or effect His choice “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the

truth.” He determined to send His Spirit to work on the elect through the Gospel, thereby bringing them to faith in the Truth, and so making His election effective in time.

And so it happened in the case of the Thessalonians, as it regularly and unfailingly does in the case of all the elect—that they are called by the Gospel and through that call receive the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Thessalonians and we also can be certain of our election because we have been called to faith in Christ Jesus by the Spirit through the Gospel. The certainty of our election is strengthened in our hearts by our use of that same Gospel. In exhorting the Thessalonians St. Paul was also exhorting us: “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (2:15). Again we are directed to the Gospel, not back to eternity, for the certainty of our election.

St. Peter

In previous articles we have observed how Jesus, St. Luke and St. Paul treat the doctrine of the eternal election of grace. We now come to St. Peter. We find that Peter neither adds anything new nor subtracts in any way from the doctrine that the others teach. There is not a doctrine of God’s eternal election according to Jesus, another according to Luke, still another according to Paul, and then also one according to Peter. On the contrary the same Spirit moved the holy men to write of election in the same manner that Jesus spoke of it. Not all writers emphasize the same points of the doctrine or always use all or the same words, but none in any way contradicts or negates what the others have written. The Spirit of God never moved any of the holy writers to treat the eternal truths of our salvation in a mechanical, stereotyped manner. Each writer selected the details and the words that fit into his thought and purpose. Thus Paul presents the doctrine of election in a doxology at the beginning of his letter to the Ephesians, while Peter uses the doctrine to describe the Christians to whom he is writing: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ . . . ” (1 Peter 1:1-2).

Who are the *elect* of God on earth and how can we know who they are? Peter very freely addressed all the Christians receiving this letter as *elect*. Paul considered himself among the *elect* of God—“according as he hath chosen *us* in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:3). He includes the members of the Ephesian congregation. Neither Peter nor Paul seek to pry into the hidden, inscrutable will of God in an effort to discover some list of the names of the elect. No, they both simply identify the elect with the members of the Christian congregations—the believers, saints, those that love God.

Peter speaks of the “*elect* according to the foreknowledge of God.” Paul had written of the elect: “for whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate” (Rom. 8:29). Both say that God foreknew the *elect*. That doesn’t mean that God just knew their names or knew something special about them, for example, that they would come to faith or that they would persevere in faith unto the end. Of course God knew that: He knows every detail about every single person that ever has or will live on this earth. But when the holy writers speak of God foreknowing the *elect*, they mean that God foreknew, that is, claimed or chose them as His own already in eternity. He foreknew them in such a manner that His love made them lovers of Himself—even before they were born. Peter says that God elected those whom He foreknew; Paul says that God predestinated them. Both terms, elect and predestinate, are synonymous—yet retaining their

distinctiveness. Election emphasizes the choosing or selection of a certain definite number of individuals from the mass of fallen mankind; predestination emphasizes the fact that this selection has been irrevocably set by the will of God. Election calls attention to the motivation of God—His *grace*, for it is always an “election of grace.” Predestination calls attention to the determination of God—His *will*: “according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will” (Eph. 1:11).

“*Elect* ... through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” Peter abbreviates what Paul carries out at length in his doxology to the Ephesians (1:3-14), namely, how God planned to carry out His eternal decree of election. God did not simply reach down into the mass of mankind by His almighty power and snatch some of the lost out of perdition unto salvation. Rather God’s election included the decision to carry out His decree through the work of the Holy Spirit—“through sanctification of the Spirit.” The Spirit works faith in human hearts through the Gospel and so brings the elect “unto obedience,” that is, the obedience of faith. At the same time the elect are sprinkled with the blood of Christ, that is, forgiven or justified. Thus election is according to the order of salvation.

In his first letter St. Peter addresses the “scattered strangers” as “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” In his second letter he calls the elect “Brethren” and exhorts them as follows: “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” (2 Peter 1:10).

There is nothing insecure or uncertain concerning our election as far as our God is concerned, for “whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30). Men fall from faith and lose their eternal salvation, “nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Tim. 2:19). Of His sheep Jesus said, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28). At times of crises in world’s history and especially when the end of all things draws nigh, Satan shall be especially active with his “false Christs and false prophets.” His constant aim and purpose is to deceive and destroy. Shall he be able to snatch any of the elect from the hand of God? Jesus says, “... if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt. 24:24)—but it is not possible! The elect are safe and secure in the hand of the Lord.

What Peter is exhorting is not that God become certain or take extra precautions concerning His elect, but rather that the elect make efforts to become sure and certain of their election. How are the elect to do this? We can understand how we are to become certain of our election only when we keep clearly in mind that God has elected us *unto the obedience of faith*. God’s eternal election works itself out in time when the Holy Spirit calls individuals to faith in the Gospel and preserves them in that faith. A believer’s faith in the Lord Jesus as his personal Savior from sin, death, and eternal damnation in his assurance of his election. The stronger and more active his faith is the more certain will he be of his election.

Here it is of utmost importance to understand the nature of saving faith. Faith is both passive and active. It is both receiving, and that continuously, of the grace of God in Christ through the Gospel, and it is growing, extending itself, exercising itself in all godliness.

St.. Peter lists a string of seven godly pearls that each child of God should be constantly striving, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, to add to his faith: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity—love. Then he adds, “For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge

of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:8). This is the positive spiritual exercise program that Peter sets up for believers.

There is another or negative side of his program. That is continuing to escape “the corruption that is in the world through lust” (v. 4) and not forgetting that one has been “purged from his old sins” (v. 9). Any person who imagines that he can continue in faith in the Lord Jesus and thus be certain of being an *elect* of the Lord while continuing to live in the sin of despising the Lord in His Word or living in some sin of the flesh—is simply deceiving himself. Saving faith does not and cannot coexist with slavery to sin.

“Give diligence to make your calling and election sure!” That is a call to faith in Christ. That is a call to have one’s faith feed on the Bread of Life—the Gospel’s proclamation of unconditioned absolution from all sin. That is a call to exercise one’s faith always in a twofold way: by striving untiringly against the devil, the world, and one’s own flesh and by cultivating, also untiringly, the virtues that spring from faith. “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (v. 11). After presenting the doctrine of election in Romans 8, Paul concludes: “I am persuaded that ... *nothing* ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

St. Paul—Romans 9-11

In these three chapters Paul discusses the history of Israel, both of the Old Covenant and of the New, from the viewpoint of God’s eternal election. He shows how, in the history of Israel, God’s eternal act of election works itself out always according to the principle of *grace* and ever according to His freedom, His justice, and His wisdom.

The dominant principle of *grace* appears first in the basic distinction that Paul makes between Israel as it appeared in history and Israel as seen from the viewpoint of God’s election (9:6): “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.”

To be a member of the Jewish nation did not automatically make one part of the Israel of God. Paul illustrates that by the choice of Isaac, the child of the promise, over Ishmael, the child of the flesh—although both were sons of Abraham. The next generation saw the selection of Jacob over Esau. The principle of grace, acting with complete freedom, is expressed thus (9:11-12): “(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.”

In making His choices God cannot be charged with unrighteousness because God is absolutely free—responsible and accountable to no one but Himself. God elected those whom He chose according to the principle of His free-flowing grace (9:15-16): “For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”

But Israel, as a nation, was being rejected and was rushing headlong towards judgment at the very time Paul was writing. Was God just and righteous in rejecting the nation He had chosen? Yes, indeed! For God elected Israel in Christ. But Israel was determined to by-pass Christ. They were determined to achieve righteousness without Christ—by the works of the law. As previous generations had rejected the promise of Christ, so the generation of Paul’s day was rejecting Christ. In chapter ten Paul vindicates the justice of God in casting off His people because they refused to believe, and so rejected His righteousness.

But God is always the Creator-God. In His wisdom He was and is busy creating the New Israel out of both Jew and Gentile—always according to the principle of grace. There always remains (11:5-6) “... a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”

God’s election of grace works itself out in history according to His wisdom. Grace is transmitted from the Jew to the Gentile, then back to the Jew through the Gentile. The book of Acts narrates the initial development, from Jew to Gentile, and the beginning of the second phase, which continues till the end of time.

All of this is presented under the imagery of the olive tree. Israel is the good olive tree. Some of the branches had to be broken off because of unbelief. Branches of the wild olive tree, the Gentiles, were grafted in. At the same time the possibility of regrafting the broken-off branches of the Jews remains. The hardening of Israel is partial. During the New Testament times, while the elect are being gathered from among the Gentiles, the remnant according to the election of grace is also being gathered from among the Jews. “And *so* all Israel (made up of both Jew and Gentile)* shall be saved! (11:26)” We cannot but marvel at the wisdom of God, as He works His gracious will among the nations. “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! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? (11:33-34)”

Distinction Between Foreknowledge and Predestination

The first distinction is that of extent. God’s foreknowledge or prescience or prevision or omniscience extends over all creatures, both good and evil. But God’s predestination extends only over the elect, the children of God.

From eternity God has known every single event in the history of mankind, every incident in the life of each individual, every occurrence in the world of nature. It is impossible for us even to begin to comprehend the foreknowledge or prescience of our God. Even in our prime we forget so easily, and the fraction of information and facts that any one individual knows, even one with an extremely high IQ, is becoming steadily smaller, God knows all—every single detail. And God knew it all before any of it ever happened! That is God’s foreknowledge or prescience.

In contrast, God’s predestination extends only over the elect, God’s children. It does not extend over the ungodly or wicked. Scripture knows of no predestination or election to eternal damnation or reprobation. This teaching is a figment of man’s imagination as he attempts to answer questions that God left unanswered in His Word.

A second distinction between God’s foreknowledge or prescience and His predestination is in the *relationship* between God’s foreknowledge and what is foreknown on the one hand and God’s predestination and the elect on the other hand. God knows everything in advance of its happening, but not in such a way that He causes it to happen. God knew that Adam and Eve would fall into sin, but His knowing of that tragedy in advance did not cause it to happen. In other words—God’s foreknowledge is not the cause of sin and evil and wickedness in this world. The cause of all sin and evil is the perverse, wicked will of the devil and of men. John Calvin maintained that God predestinated the fall into sin and so was actually the cause of man’s fall into sin. That is blasphemy. Scripture nowhere makes God the cause of sin and evil.

* See the asterisked note on page 26.

On the other hand God's predestination is a cause whereby the eternally elect are brought to faith, justified, sanctified, preserved in the faith, granted a blessed death, and so received into glory.

Here is the way *The Formula of Concord*, Article XI, "Of God's Eternal Election" presents the difference between God's foreknowledge and predestination:

First, the distinction between the *eternal foreknowledge of God* and the *eternal election of His children to eternal salvation*, is carefully to be observed. For *foreknowledge* or *prevision*, that is, that God sees and knows everything before it happens, which is called *God's foreknowledge*, extends over all creatures, good and bad; ...

The *eternal election of God*, however, or *predestination*, that is, *God's ordination to salvation*, does not extend at once over the godly and wicked, but only over the children of God, who were elected and ordained to eternal life before the foundation of the world was laid, as Paul says, Eph. 1,4.5.: *He hath chosen us in Him, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ*. The *foreknowledge of God* foresees and foreknows also that which is evil; however, not in such a manner as though it were God's gracious will that it should happen; ...

However, the beginning and cause of evil is not God's foreknowledge (for God does not create and effect evil, neither does He help or promote it); but the wicked, perverse will of the devil and of men is the cause of evil, as it is written Hos. 13,9: *O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help*. ...

The eternal election of God, however, not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but is also, from the gracious will and pleasure of God in Christ Jesus, a cause which procures, works, helps, and promotes our salvation and what pertains thereto; and upon this divine predestination our salvation is so founded *that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it*, Matt. 16,18 ...

Distinction Between Universal Grace and Predestination

Scriptures teach that our God sincerely and earnestly wants all men to be saved. This is His universal will of grace. But Scriptures also teach that God has elected or predestinated a certain definite number from the mass of fallen mankind unto eternal salvation. This is His election of grace or predestination.

How are these two doctrines similar and in what ways are they dissimilar? First, the similarities:

Both occurred from eternity:

God hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose, and *grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began* (2 Tim. 1:9).

According as *he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world ...* (Eph. 1:4).

Both occurred in Christ. Note the “grace, which was gives us *in Christ*” in the Timothy passage and the “chosen us *in him* [Christ]” in the Ephesians passage.

In both the universal will of grace and in predestination the motivation is God’s love and mercy:

For God so *loved* the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but. have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, *according to the good pleasure of his will* (Eph. 1:5).

In both His universal will and His particular will of election God is most serious:

As I live, saith the Lord, *r have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live ...* (Ez. 33:11).

And shall not God *avenge his own elect ...* I tell you that he *will avenge them speedily* (Luke 18:7-8).

Both have as their goal eternal salvation. The goal of universal grace is that believers might “*have everlasting life*” (John 3:16). God’s goal in election:

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, *them he also glorified* (Romans 8:30).

In both faith is the means or instrument:

that whosoever believeth in him ... (John 3:16).

and as many as were ordained to eternal life *believed* (Acts 13:48).

There are two essential dissimilarities between the universal will of grace and the particular will of election. The former extends over all people, while the latter extends over a certain, definite, but small, number of mankind. Consider John 3:16, also

God our Savior will have *all men* to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

Many be called, but *few* chosen (Matt. 20:16).

According as he hath chosen us ... (Eph. 1:4).

The other difference is that, though eternal salvation is the goal, it is not the absolute result of the universal will of grace, whereas eternal life is the absolute outcome or result of predestination. Man can resist God's grace and so lose heaven. Consider:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, *and ye would not!* (Matthew 23:37).

On the other hand God's election of grace or predestination never fails. Consider Rom. 8:30, cited above, also

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, *if it were possible* (but it isn't), they shall deceive the very elect (Matt. 24:24).

That there is no conflict between the universal will of grace and predestination can be seen from the fact that both will eternal salvation and neither wills damnation.

Cur Alii, Alii Non?

This is the unanswerable and insolvable question in the doctrine of predestination: "Why are some saved, while others are lost?"

On the one hand Scriptures clearly teach that all men, without a single exception, are equally and utterly lost in sin—all having been conceived and born in sin. When St. Paul quotes Psalm 14 in Romans 3, he is recording the judgment of the Spirit of God on all mankind, including each and every individual: "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Romans 3:10-12; Psalm 14:2-3).

On the other hand Scriptures also clearly teach that God earnestly and seriously wants all men to be saved: "God our Savior . . . will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

It would seem on the basis of these two all-embracing truths, universal sin and universal grace, that either all men would be lost since all are sinners or that all men would be saved since God wants all to be saved. But what do we observe? Some are saved while others are lost. Those that are saved were conceived and born in sin and were by nature the children of wrath even as those that are lost. Some that are lost had the same chance and the same opportunity to be saved as those that are actually saved. How can one explain this dissimilar result when all men are similar in their guilt and in the fact that they are the objects of divine love?

Let us say, already at this point, that there is no human answer to this question for the simple reason that Scriptures leave the question unanswered. Whenever and however man seeks to answer this question, he inevitably violates the Scriptures, either denying *grace alone* or *universal grace*.

Saul and David

To make our question concrete let us take some examples from: Scripture. First think of Saul and David. Both were chosen by God to be kings of Israel. Both received the Spirit of God in a special measure. Both sinned grievously against the grace of God. So far everything is similar. But now comes the dissimilar. Saul, despite the efforts of the prophet Samuel to bring him to repentance, persisted in his sin, hardened himself and was hardened, committed suicide and plunged himself into eternal death. David fell from grace when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, Uriah. He persisted in this fall from grace for about a year and would have lost his soul if he had died during this time. But he was brought to repentance through the efforts of the prophet Nathan, is called in the Scripture *a man after the heart of the Lord* (Acts 13:22), became a forefather of Jesus, and was saved eternally. What accounts for the fact that David came to repentance after his fall and was saved, while Saul persisted in his sin and was lost?

The Two Malefactors

Both of these men had, no doubt, been circumcised on the eighth days of their lives and so had entered into covenant relationship with the Lord God of Israel. Both had been instructed in the Law of Moses and the hope of the Messiah as proclaimed by Moses and the prophets. Both had become delinquent, pursuing a life of crime and violence that ended with their being taken captive and being sentenced to death. Both were scheduled to be executed in the same place on the same day that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified. So it was that both carried their own crosses with Him to the place of the skull. Both heard His final sermon to the daughters of Jerusalem. Both heard His prayer for forgiveness for His executioners. It seems as though both at first joined the chorus of those who mocked Him (Mark 15:32). But then a change occurred in the one on the right. He rebuked his fellow thief, confessed his own sin, testified to the innocence of Jesus, called upon the Lord for mercy, and received the assurance of pardon and life. Meanwhile his partner persisted in his sin and died eternally. Why was the one on the right saved, while the one on the left was lost?

Calvinism

John Calvin solved the problem of *Cur alii, alii non?* [Why some, not others?] with his doctrine of a double election or predestination. Here is how he expressed himself in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: “Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which He has determined in Himself what he would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny; but eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others.”

For Calvin the doctrine of predestination was the starting point, as well as the heart and core of all of God’s message. In Lutheran biblical theology the doctrine of justification or the forgiveness of sins is the center of the Christian message. Lutheran theology is a simple reflection of the contents of the Bible, while Calvinism reflects an attempt to systematize and rationalize the teaching of the Bible so that every doctrine falls into a logical place and all questions are satisfactorily answered for the mind of man.

The basic concept that governed predestination for Calvin was the sovereignty of God. God is almighty! So He can do what He wants to do, and no one can withstand His will. This is philosophically true, but not Scripturally true. Thus Calvin's system ended up with a Scripturally perverted theology, as we shall see.

Calvin reasoned that since God is almighty and since man cannot oppose the will of God, it follows that God determines the destiny of every person. Some He wills to save, and some He wills to damn. Hence there must be a double predestination. But Scripture knows only of an election to salvation. It teaches no election or predestination to damnation. This is a figment of man's mind.

Since God is almighty and man cannot oppose His will, it follows that all those whom Christ redeemed must be saved. So Calvin taught that Jesus died only for the elect. Atonement is not universal, but limited. But Scripture teaches that Jesus redeemed all mankind.

Since man cannot oppose the will of God, God's grace must be irresistible. Those whom the Lord calls are unfailingly brought to faith in Jesus Christ. All the others the Lord passes over. If they are exposed to the preaching of the Gospel, the Gospel is only meant to be for them a "savor of death unto death." But irresistible grace conflicts with Scripture which tells us that God earnestly wants to save all men through the Gospel, but that man can and does resist God's grace.

Since God is omnipotent, Calvinists reason that it is beneath His dignity to use a vehicle or means for conveying His grace to man. When the Spirit calls a sinner to grace, He works directly or immediately upon his heart. "Efficacious grace acts immediately" is the way it is put, but Scripture teaches that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Since God's will cannot be resisted by man, it follows that once a person is saved, he cannot fall from grace. This is the doctrine of the inadmissibility of grace, popularly expressed: *once saved, always saved!* But this doctrine forces the Calvinists to say that "backsliders" either never were converted or that mortal sin can coexist with saving faith. This conflicts with the Scriptural warnings against failing from grace and with the Scriptural examples of a Saul and a Judas.

Thus Calvin answered the question *Cur alii, alii non?* by appealing to the sovereign will of God who saves some, damns others; sent His Son to die only for the elect; converts the elect immediately by His irresistible grace; and then holds them in that grace by His omnipotent power. In so answering the question Calvinism violates universal grace. This, in turn, destroys the Christian's certainty of salvation. For no one can find the certainty of his election and salvation in the hidden, inscrutable will of God. We can find that certainty only in His universal will, for if God wants all to be saved, as He most certainly does, then He also wants me to be saved. In times of spiritual distress no one can find comfort in the hidden will of God or in some past conversion experience. Comfort can only be found in the fact that God loves all, Jesus died for all, the Spirit calls all earnestly in and through the Gospel.

Synergism

Some Reformed and some Lutherans have attempted to solve the problem of *Cur alii, alii non?* [Why some, not others?] by means of synergism, which is a denial of grace alone.

The word *synergism* is made up of the prefix *syn*, which means "with" (as in sympathy—"to feel with someone"), and *erg*, which is a unit for measuring work. In the theological sense of

the word synergism means that God and man cooperate or work together to bring about man's salvation. The opposite of synergism is monergism, which means that God alone has worked out man's salvation and gives it to man without man's cooperation.

Monergism is the Scriptural teaching of *grace alone*. Jesus taught monergism in the parable of the seed which took root, grew, and brought forth fruit by reason of the power that is in the seed (Mark 4.:26-29). St. Paul teaches monergism in that familiar verse once written to the Ephesians: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

John Calvin taught monergism in a perverted form (immediate and irresistible grace), but he resorted to double predestination, to salvation and to damnation, to explain why some are saved and others lost. The synergists' answer to that same question is *aliquid in homine*, that is, they find something in man that accounts for the fact that some are saved and others are lost. Down through the ages there have been a variety of expressions used to isolate just what it is in man and how it works that one is saved and another lost.

One of the earliest synergists was Pelagius, a heretic of the fifth century who was opposed by Augustine. He denied original sin and claimed that a child is born without virtue or vice, but capable of both. Whether a person is saved or lost depends upon whether or not he makes proper use of the innate moral germs of his nature. Pelagianism was rightly condemned by the Church of that day.

Pelagianism was condemned, but it didn't die. Error never does; it just springs up in a different form. The new form was Semi-Pelagianism, which believes that man's free will was only partially impaired by the fall into sin. Man needs the help of God's grace. Whether a person is saved or lost depends upon whether or not he makes the proper use of his natural spiritual powers. Man makes the beginning; then God helps him along.

Synergism in both the Reformed (Arminian) and Lutheran churches is different from Semi-Pelagianism in this way, that, whereas Semi-Pelagians hold that man makes the beginning and then God helps along, the synergists contend that God makes the beginning and man responds with innate spiritual powers that are still left to him after the fall into sin.

The father of synergism in the Lutheran Church was Melanchthon, the co-laborer of Luther. Especially after Luther's death Melanchthon began to speak of a *facultas se applicandi ad gratiam* in man, that is, that man had within himself by nature an ability to apply himself or respond to grace. Melanchthon then spoke of the three concurring causes in man's conversion: "The Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the human will, which, indeed, is not idle, but strives against its infirmity." The Lutheran Church is still infected with this germ of synergism introduced by Melanchthon.

Later synergistic Lutherans spoke of man's "right conduct," "self-determination," and "abstaining from willful resistance." All of these formulas posit something in man that makes him different from those that are lost and so accounts for his being saved. Thus the synergist answers the question, *Cur alii, alii non?*, with some decisive *aliquid in homine*. But this answer does violence to Scripture which teaches that all men are utterly and equally lost in sin. That applies to those that are saved as well as to those that are lost, for God is always the God who "justifies the ungodly" (Rom. 4:3). If you or I are saved because we are in the least bit better or not quite as bad as someone that is lost, then we end up as our own saviors. Then also, salvation is no longer by *grace alone*. Synergism is the enemy of *grace alone*, as Calvinism is of *universal grace*.

Scriptural Stance

How does the Holy Scripture answer the question of *Cur alii, alii non?* It doesn't, but simply leaves the question unanswered: This is the proper scriptural stance.

Scriptures give us the definite cause of man's conversion, thus telling us why some are saved. The cause of man's conversion is God's gracious operation alone. Scripture teaches the monergism of grace in conversion on the one hand by testifying to man's total and unqualified impotence in spiritual matters in his natural, unregenerate state:

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14).

... no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 12:3).

On the other hand Scripture explicitly ascribes the conversion of man to the power of God's grace:

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know ... what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power ... (Eph. 1:19).

For unto you it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him ... (Phil. 1:29).

Who by him do believe in God ... Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Peter 1:21 and 23).

Scriptures also give the sole cause of man's nonconversion—his resistance to God's grace

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and *ye would not!* (Matt. 23:37).

Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always *resist* the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye (Acts 7:51).

Now since on the one hand all men are equally and utterly corrupt and lost in sin and so cannot come to faith and on the other hand God sincerely and earnestly desires to save all men but actually saves only a few, it remains a mystery why some are saved and others are lost.

The proper scriptural stance is to confess that we are here confronted. with a mystery which defies the mind of man and will not be solved until we see more clearly in the world to come. The Calvinists attempt to solve this mystery by denying *universal grace*, the synergists by denying *grace alone*. The simple child of God accepts both *universal grace* and *grace alone* and

lets the conflict unresolved by bringing “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

We believe that God wants all men to be saved, but that He has also elected a certain definite number from the mass of fallen mankind unto eternal salvation. We let both His universal will of grace and His particular election of grace stand. In no case does God will the damnation of any man and in no case can man in any way as coming to or remaining in faith. Those that are saved glory in the grace of their Savior-God. Those that are lost have only themselves to blame. So it is, and so shall the mystery remain until the light of heaven clears it up.

Instead of attempting the impossible the child of God stands in holy awe and wonderment and exclaims with St. Paul:

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! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).

May God give each one of us grace to glory in the grace given us—that we are one of all whom God wants to save and one of the few whom He has elected in grace.

Purpose—To Confirm *Grace Alone*

John Calvin and many before and after him have contended that the doctrine of predestination either cancels or limits the doctrine of *universal grace* since all are not elected unto salvation. But the purpose of God’s revealing the doctrine of predestination is not to contradict, limit, or restrict *universal grace*, but rather to confirm and impress on us *grace alone*. There is always need for this because believers are continuously plagued by their flesh which never ceases to suggest that God has chosen them because they are either not as bad or a little better than the unbelievers who are lost. Believers need to be reminded again and again that they are in the same condemnation as unbelievers. We have been elected and are saved by *grace alone* without any merit or worthiness in us. To think otherwise is to fall from grace: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10).

In the Old Testament era God chose Abraham from among the idol worshipers, gave him the promise of the Savior and the seal of the covenant, and then made of him a great nation. Why? Because Abraham was in some way better than the other idol worshipers? Because the nation of Israel was not quite as bad as the heathen nations? No! God was motivated solely by His grace. Speaking as the mouthpiece of the Lord Moses could not emphasize strongly enough that the election of Israel was not because they were any better or not as bad as the surrounding heathen nations, but that their election was due to the grace of God alone.

Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out

from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people (Deut. 9:4-5).

The doctrine of the election of grace or predestination serves this same purpose—to impress upon the elect that their election was not due to anything in them, but is due to *grace alone*. Our God elected us:

... not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9).

... according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace (Eph. 1:5-6).

And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace (Rom. 11:6).

So also *The Formula of Concord* testifies of predestination:

... it establishes very effectually the article that we are justified and saved without all works and merit of ours, purely out of grace alone, for Christ's sake. For before the time of the world, before we existed, yea, before the foundation of the world was laid, when, of course, we could do nothing good, we were according to God's purpose chosen by grace in Christ to salvation, Rom. 9,11; 2 Tim. 1,9. Moreover, all opinions and erroneous doctrines concerning the powers of our natural will are thereby overthrown, because God in His counsel, before the time of the world, decided and ordained that He Himself, by the power of His Holy Ghost, would produce and work in us, through the Word, everything that pertains to our conversion (*Triglot*, p. 1077).

Thus the doctrine of election or predestination is, indeed, terrifying to anyone who trusts anything in himself for his salvation, but it is most comforting to all who have been taught by the Spirit of God to despair of their own righteousness and trust God's grace alone.

Purpose—Comfort

There have been times when godly men became so depressed spiritually that they even doubted the very existence of the Church. Such were the days of Elijah during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel when Baal worship was made the state religion. Despite the fact that the Lord God had most gloriously vindicated his prophet at Mt. Carmel and had exposed the non-reality and non-existence of Baal, yet Elijah became so despondent that he prayed for death, believing himself to be the lone surviving God-fearing man in Israel. St. Paul records his lament and the response of his God while presenting the doctrine of election in his epistle to the Romans:

Lord; they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace (Rom. 11:3-5).

Today the Church is threatened by hordes of anti-Christian forces—secularism, atheism, materialism, emotionalism, organizationalism, and so on and on with an endless variety of “isms.” It appears as though the forces against the Church are overwhelming. As Elijah in his day, so now we may become fearful, but we should never entertain doubts as to the survival of the Church, for “even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” It is God’s eternal election of grace that assures the continued existence of the Church!

It also gives each child of God the comforting assurance of surviving though his faith is attacked from within by his own flesh, and from without by the devil and the world. God has elected each one of us by way of the means of grace. He has called us by the Gospel. Each one of the elect has learned to recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd in the Good News of forgiveness and righteousness given by grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. What does Jesus say to each one that has so heard His voice? “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).

My election and yours, revealed unto each one of us in the voice of the Good Shepherd, is the comforting assurance that we shall overcome and receive the crown of life.

Before the moment of our departure from this vale of tears to the glories of eternity, we will be asked to suffer tribulation—not just that which is common to man, but also that which is special for a child of God. Cross-bearing is the distinctive characteristic of children of God, for “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). When such tribulation comes—in whatever form it may come—it may well appear as though our gracious God has for the moment forgotten us. We may feel so alone, so forsaken, so helpless, so doomed to destruction. Then we need the comforting reassurance of St. Paul: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

But how can we be sure that *all things*, even the sufferings for Christ’s sake will work out for our good? We believe our God, and we learn to look at things with the perspective He has given us. In the midst of suffering we may not be able to see the light ahead because of the surrounding darkness. Our God assures us that there is light ahead because He has revealed the proper perspective that began in eternity when He glorified us. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate . . . Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them He also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Rom. 8:29-30).

From beginning to end our life is in His hand!

Purpose—Exhortation

If I am one of the elect, I have nothing to worry about. My God predestinated me to eternal salvation according to His irreversible will before the world was created. No one can pluck me out of His hands. So . . . I can relax and not worry much about my sins or about being

faithful or using the means of grace or exercising myself in godly works because, after all, I am among the elect. God can't go back on His eternal decision. I will be saved despite myself, as it were. Wait a moment! Hold it! Stop! *This is carnal security*, a gross misuse of the doctrine of God's eternal election!

Where is the error in this reasoning? It is this that a person who so reasons thinks that God chose the elect in an absolute or nude manner, that is, irrespective of the means of grace. God didn't decide that every fourth or tenth or hundredth or thousandth person or every person with brown hair or no hair or blue eyes should be elected. No, He chose those whom He predestinated

... unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself (Eph. 1:5).

... through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth (2 Thess. 2:13).

... through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:2).

If our God chose us according to the order of salvation—that we should be called to faith by the Gospel, justified, sanctified, and preserved in the faith by the Spirit of God through the means of grace—then we cannot use our election as an excuse for despising the Gospel. For the certainty of our election is not to be found in idle dreaming about what God did or didn't do in eternity, but in meditating upon what God has revealed in the Gospel that He has done for our salvation.

Matthew 20 records our Lord's parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. The parable emphasizes the principle of grace and the fact that grace is so widely rejected by man who just naturally thinks in terms of his own merits and works. Jesus brought the parable to a conclusion with the brief remark: "For many be called, but few chosen." Many come under the influence of God's grace in the Gospel call at one time or another in their lives, but only a few of those are among the elect. Therefore, *despise not the grace of God in the person and work of Christ when it is proclaimed unto you in the gospel!*

Matthew 22 brings us the account of the parable of the Marriage of the King's Son. What was the general reaction to the King's invitation? "They made light of it." How did the King react? He sent His armies to execute His wrath upon those who refused His invitation. Then what did He do? He gathered guests from the highways. But one guest had refused the wedding garment. He thought he was good enough as he was. What happened to him? He was cast into outer darkness. The execution of this man, who is a symbol of those who reject the grace of God which brings the righteousness of Christ, brought the parable to a close—except for the general warning statement: "For many are called, but few chosen." You and I have been called. Have we been chosen? Eat and drink at the marriage feast—the Gospel. Wear the wedding garment—the righteousness of Christ—at all times. So shall we become more and more certain that we are among the elect of God.

In brief, the doctrine of election urges us to use the means of grace so that in finding Christ and growing in faith and knowledge of Him we may become more and more certain of our election. This use of the doctrine of election is summed up by St. Peter when he urges all believers to "... give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fail (2 Peter 1:10).

The preceding verses list a chain of virtues that the Spirit of God would work in our hearts and lives through the knowledge of our Savior-God. The more we, through the power and working of the Holy Spirit, strive after godliness, the more certain we become of our election.

Cause of Error

Why has so much error crept into the doctrine of predestination over the centuries? Why did Calvin insist on predestination to eternal damnation? Why do the synergists insist that there must be something in man that moved God to elect those whom He did elect? Why are some people brought to despair by the doctrine of predestination, while others use it as justification for carnal security?

The cause of error in this doctrine, as in any other doctrine of Scripture, can be traced back to the original temptation: “God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and *ye shall be as gods*, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:5).

Man still wants to be God. Man confidently thinks that in matters of religion his own opinions are as good as or better than those that God has revealed in the Scriptures. All errors flow from this same polluted fountain—human pride, the insatiable desire to be God. Practically all so-called Christian churches today and practically all who bear the name of “Christian” today have departed from God’s revelation of the Truth in the Bible. Even those who occupy the position of “Christian” teachers do not want to be bound by the written revelation of divine Truth, as it was given by inspiration of God and recorded for all time by the prophets in the Old Testament and the apostles and evangelists in the New Testament. Man believes that by his own intellectual, scientific, and religious insight and experience, he can arrive at a clearer and truer understanding of divine truths than by simply taking his reason captive in humbly following the plainly and clearly revealed words of God in the Bible. By following his own Ego rather than the Word of God, revealed and recorded in the Bible, man has also erred in the doctrine of predestination.

John Calvin reasoned that if God predestined certain ones to eternal salvation, then He must also have predestined the rest to eternal damnation. That’s logical but contrary to God’s revealed Word.

The synergist contends that since man can reject the Gospel, he must also be able—though it be but in the slightest degree—to accept the Gospel. Otherwise, they maintain, man would not be free. His personality could be limited, and so he would not be completely human. But Scripture teaches that man can say “No” to the Gospel, but is unable to say “Yes.” Yet man is human and is accountable to God.

Man likes to organize the truths of God into a system so that all parts agree logically. John Calvin had such a logical and systematic mind. And so, starting with the sovereignty of God, he made the doctrine of predestination the chief doctrine and key to Scripture. He taught that God predestined some to heaven, some to hell (the latter not taught in Scripture). Then he reasoned that if God predestined some to hell, He certainly didn’t send His Son to die for them, and so Jesus died only for the elect (contrary to Scripture). Since God wants only a few saved, grace cannot be universal (despite the fact that Scripture teaches universal grace so powerfully). Since no man can resist God’s sovereign power, as exercised in predestination, grace must be irresistible (despite the fact that Jesus wept over Jerusalem precisely because they did resist grace). Since God is almighty and since His almighty grace is irresistible, it follows that no one

can fall from grace, and so you have created the fiction of “Once saved, always saved,” despite the fact that David and Peter fell from grace temporarily and Judas fell permanently from grace.

Whenever man tries to force God’s revealed truths into a system that man believes to be logical and without contradiction, he cannot but come up with one error after another. In certain areas revealed Truth defies human understanding. When a child of God comes to those points, he is not to adjust God’s revealed Truth to his way of thinking, but rather he is to adjust his thinking to God’s revealed Truth. We now see through a glass darkly. One day we shall see and understand more clearly.

The doctrine of predestination is clear and simple if one abides by the plain words of Scripture. It becomes muddled, if the mind begins to wander.

Temporary Believers

Strictly speaking, this subject is foreign to the doctrine of predestination because election is pure Gospel, while the warning against a temporary faith is in the area of the law. But the matter of *temporary believers* has and does come up in connection with a discussion of election. For this reason we would treat it briefly.

We must carefully observe the scriptural usage of the words involved. The words, “elect” and those “predestinated” or “ordained” unto eternal life are always used to designate those who are finally saved. To think of anyone as “elected” or “predestinated” who is not finally saved is contrary to Scripture and also human reason. So to think of *temporary believers* in connection with the “elect” is to introduce a foreign subject into the discussion.

In the Scriptures “church,” the “elect,” and “believers” are used synonymously. Thus Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians is addressed to “the church of the Thessalonians” (1:1). In chapter 2:13 Paul addresses these members of the church as “brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” The same people are “church,” “brethren beloved,” ones who have been “chosen,” and ones in whom there is “belief of the truth,” that is, they are believers. So also Peter in his first epistle addresses himself to “strangers,” whom he calls “elect ... through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1:1-2). The elect are the believers.

It should be observed that when Scripture speaks of the “church,” it denotes “believers,” and when Scripture speaks of those believing, it speaks of people who have the quality of saving faith as their distinguishing characteristic. Believers are not thought of as *temporary believers* and faith is not thought of as a temporary spiritual condition unless Scripture specifically so designates and thus applies the law in warning against carnal security or a temporary faith.

Thus in the parable of The Sower Jesus explains that when the seed falls on the rock, He is picturing those “which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for *a while believe*, and in time of temptation fall away” (Luke 8:13). In his first letter to Timothy Paul urges him to hold “faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck” (1:19). And then Paul names two such, Hymenaeus and Alexander. So also the Spirit of God exposed Ananias and Sapphira who pretended to be believers, members of the church, and so among the elect (Acts 5). St. John writes to the church in Smyrna: “Be thou faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10). In those letters to the seven churches the Lord through John repeatedly emphasizes that only those that “overcome” shall receive eternal blessings.

But all these cases are warnings against carnal security. They are directed to the child of God inasmuch as he must contend against the old Adam. So also St. Peter urges the brethren to “give diligence to make your calling and election sure,” and then adds, “for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10). No one needs to or can make God sure that He has elected him. God knows whom He has elected. But each of the elect are to grow in the certainty of their election. How? Through use of the means of grace, the Gospel, for God has elected us according to the order of salvation. As we hear, read, learn, study the Gospel our faith in Jesus Christ is strengthened and we receive the internal witness of the Spirit as to our election. As we grow in the fruits of faith, we gain the Spirit’s eternal witness to our election. The doctrine of election is rightly used as exhortation to guard against carnal security.

We dare not forget that the doctrine of election is Gospel. The holy writers freely speak of the members of the church, the believers, as the elect of God. Believers are those in whom the Spirit of God has begun a good work—not on a temporary basis, but with the intention of continuing that work until it is brought to a conclusion by a blessed death. And so the Spirit comforts all believers with promises such as these:

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6).

For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed (Rom. 10:11).

We can only gain the certainty of our election through faith in our Lord Jesus. We know that some believe temporarily, as King Saul and Judas. In such cases it is alleged that *temporary believers* are urged by Scripture to believe that they are among the elect when in fact they are not. We are assured by the Spirit of God that all of Scripture was written that we through patience and comfort of the Scripture might have hope (Rom. 15:4). The doctrine of election was revealed to give us comfort in tribulation, to give us the assurance of our salvation, and so to give us hope: God has not revealed unto us everything, especially not how His eternal decree of predestination works itself out in time according to His universal will of grace. We are not to speculate on what God has not revealed. We are not to attempt to reconcile the doctrine of election with our reason and experience. We are to believe what has been revealed and wait for a fuller revelation in the world to come.

Our God tells us that He has elected us by way of faith in Jesus Christ, His Son, our Savior. He assures us that the same Spirit who has created faith in our hearts is eager and willing to preserve us in the faith. On the other hand our God knows the wickedness and rebelliousness of our flesh better than we can ever understand it, and so He warns us against falling away and encourages us to strengthen our faith through the Gospel.

*The parenthetical remark equates “all Israel” with the Church made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Further study has made it clear to the writer that this interpretation is inaccurate. There are three possibilities regarding the interpretation of “all Israel”—that it means the Church or the entire number of elect from both Jews and Gentiles, that it means the Jews as an ethnic group of people, or that it means spiritual Israel, the remnant, or the sum total of the elect among the Jews.

In chapters 9-11 of Romans the term “Israel” occurs eleven times (9:3-5, 6, 27, 30-31; 10:19, 21; 11:1, 7, 25-26). In each instance it refers to the Jews in contrast to the Gentiles. However, in the usage a distinction is made between spiritual and physical Israel. Verse six of chapter nine makes that distinction clear: “For they are not all Israel (spiritual sons of Abraham and Jacob), which are of Israel (physical descendants of Abraham and Jacob).”

Verse twenty-six of chapter eleven is a summary of the preceding argument. The hardening of Israel shall continue throughout the entire New Testament era “until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in,” that is, until the last of the elect among the Gentiles shall be gathered before the second coming of our Lord. During this New Testament era God’s saving grace will also be working among the Jews, gathering the Jewish elect or the remnant. “And so all Israel—the entire number of elect from among the Jews) shall be saved.” Thus the Church is made up of two groups, “the fullness of the Gentiles” and “all Israel.” The Jews are the “sheep” of whom the Lord spoke in John 10, the Gentiles “the other sheep.” These two groups are united in the New Testament era, for “there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16).

NOTE: This series on Predestination is the result of a study made in the Adult Sunday School Class at Holy Trinity Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church of West Columbia, South Carolina in the year 1971. Following each discussion a summary was printed in the weekly bulletin, Vol. VII, No. 5 to Vol. VII, No. 33. This series was reproduced and used as a study guide for students at Immanuel Lutheran High School, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Upon request the series has been reprinted in this form for the edification of members of the CLC. PFN.