

The Formula of Concord

Lesson Ten

Concerning God's Eternal Foreknowledge and Election

Introduction

Articles I, II, III, and IV are a necessary backdrop for Article XI

- Man is by nature totally corrupt and, therefore, unable to begin or sustain any ability to move toward God
- Man's salvation is entirely dependent and carried out by the grace of God
- What God accomplishes is a divine purpose laid down already in eternity
- That man becomes a believing child of God is something that lies within the eternal and gracious purpose of God
- If man is lost, he has only himself to blame; God's judgment falls as just payment for unbelief

Historical Background

There has been no public, scandalous, and widespread dissension among theologians of the Augsburg Confession concerning the eternal election of the children of God. Nevertheless, this article has become the occasion of very serious controversies at other places and has involved our people also. Nor have our theologians always used the same terms. Therefore, in order by God's grace to prevent, as far as we can, disunity and schism in this article among our posterity, we have determined to set forth our explanation....so that all men may know what we teach, believe, and confess in this article. (SD XI:1)

Bible Passages for Article XI

Ephesians 1:3-14 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. 9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. 11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Romans 8:28-39 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. 31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written:

*“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God is telling cynics, God is telling battle-weary and sin-sick Christians like you and me, “I love you. I know that’s hard to believe, because your earthly relationships often blow up in your face. This one won’t, not from my side. I promise you. I will love you in Jesus the next year, the next five, the next ten, the next fifty. My grace will move me to ‘be there for you’ all your life. Because, you see, I already loved you forever! I not only loved you before you were a glimmer in your father’s eye. I loved you before my creative power caused the shimmering and glimmering of the stars, the sun and the moon. I loved you with purpose. I set my eyes on you from eternity. I picked you out. I’m not going to change my mind now.” (WELS Pastor Glenn Schwanke)

John 10:27-28 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

1 Corinthians 10:12-13 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! 13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Doctrine of Election – what is it?

We can say that the teaching of election is both

- 1) a very simple doctrine, presenting no difficulties
- 2) and a teaching that raises questions that cannot be answered in this life

Election tells us _____ we are saved, not _____ we are saved

- ❖ This teaching is revealed in Scripture and presented in our Confessions not to confuse or disturb Christians or to stir up needless and sinful speculation but to comfort Christians and deepen their appreciation of God's almighty grace in Christ.
- ❖ View this teaching in its proper context – as something that adds to the comfort of the gospel.
- ❖ After one knows what Christ has done to redeem the human race, after one has received the benefits of Christ offered by the Spirit through the Word and sacraments, after one knows he has been justified and made a child of God through faith in Christ, after one is assured that the Holy Spirit will graciously keep him in that faith – then, then the doctrine of predestination is presented to give him even greater certainty and assurance of God's grace.
- ❖ Election/predestination simply means that everything God has done in time to save us and make us his children and preserve us in the faith, he determined in Christ to do for us in eternity. So my salvation is not the result of any whimsical actions or reactions of God, but of his eternal purpose for me.

To begin with...the distinction...between God's foreknowledge and His eternal election, ought to be accurately observed.

For the foreknowledge of God is nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen, as it is written Dan. 2, 28: There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days.

This foreknowledge extends alike over the godly and the wicked, but it is not the cause of evil, neither of sin, namely, of doing what is wrong (which originally arises from the devil and the wicked, perverse will of man), nor of their ruin [that men perish], for which they themselves are responsible [which they must ascribe to themselves]; but it only regulates it, and fixes a limit to it [how far it should progress and] how long it should last, and all this to the end that it should serve His elect for their salvation, notwithstanding that it is evil in itself. The predestination or eternal election of God, however, extends only over the godly, beloved children of God, being a cause of their salvation, which He also provides, as well as disposes what belongs thereto. Upon this [predestination of God] our salvation is founded so firmly that the gates of hell cannot overcome it. John 10, 28; Matt. 16, 18. (Epitome XI:2-5)

What is the difference between God’s foreknowledge and his eternal election?

FOREKNOWLEDGE



ELECTION

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. But the Word of God leads us to Christ... (Epitome XI:6,7)

What is the point of the confessors?

Doctrine of Election – what it does not say

It does not say that faith can never be lost (1 Corinthians 10:12,13; Luke 8:11-13)

The Bible does not endorse the idea of “once saved always saved”

- 1) We must _____ the complacent, careless Christian of the danger of falling
- 2) In times of doubt, we should look not at our feelings to see if we ever felt saved, but at the truth of _____ which proclaim what Christ has done for us once and for all (John 10:27,28)

It does not say that there is a predestination to damnation – that is, that God chose some for hell (John 3:16; John 1:29; 1 John 2:2; John 6:40)

The Bible does not endorse the idea that God chooses some to go to hell

- 1) God’s call is extended to _____

This Christ calls to Himself all sinners and promises them rest, and He is in earnest [seriously wills] that all men should come to Him and suffer themselves to be helped, to whom He offers Himself in His Word, and wishes them to hear it and not to stop their ears or [neglect and] despise the Word. Moreover, He promises the power and working of the Holy Ghost, and divine assistance for perseverance and eternal salvation [that we may remain steadfast in the faith and attain eternal salvation]. (Epitome XI:7)

- 2) _____ (2 Peter 2:1; Hosea 13:9 Luke 11:49-50, 52; Acts 13:46)

*However, that many are called and few chosen, Matt. 22, 14, does not mean that God is not willing to save everybody; but the reason is that they either do not at all hear God's Word, but willfully despise it, stop their ears and harden their hearts, and in this manner foreclose the ordinary way to the Holy Ghost, so that He cannot perform His work in them, or, when they have heard it, make light of it again and do not heed it, for which [that they perish] not God or His election, but their wickedness, is responsible.
(Epitome XI:11)*

In this sense "many are called, but few are chosen," for few accept the Word and obey it; the majority despise the Word and refuse to come to the wedding. The reason for such contempt of the Word is not God's foreknowledge but man's own perverse will, which rejects or perverts the means and instrument of the Holy Spirit which God offers to him through the call and resists the Holy Spirit who wills to be efficaciously active through the Word, as Christ says, "How often would I have gathered you together and you would not" (Matthew 23:37). (SD XI:40,41)

Application

This article, then, affirms both "by grace alone" and "universal grace."

BY GRACE ALONE

UNIVERSAL GRACE



Doctrine of Election – what is its purpose

This doctrine...affords the beautiful and glorious comfort that God was so deeply concerned about every individual Christian's conversion, righteousness, and salvation and so faithfully minded about it that 'even before the foundation of the world was laid' he held counsel and ordained 'according to his purpose' how he would bring me thereto and keep me therein. (SD XI:45)

This doctrine will also give us the glorious comfort, in times of trial and affliction, that in his counsel before the foundation of the world God has determined and decreed that he will assist us in all our necessities, grant us patience, give us comfort, create hope, and bring everything to such an issue that we shall be saved. (SD XI:48)

Moreover, when people are taught to seek their eternal election in Christ and in his holy Gospel as the "book of life," this doctrine never occasions either despondency or a riotous and dissolute life. This does not exclude any repentant sinner but invites and calls all poor, burdened, and heavy-laden sinners to repentance, to a knowledge of their sins, and to faith in Christ and promises them the Holy Spirit to

cleanse and renew them. This doctrine gives sorrowing and tempted people the permanently abiding comfort of knowing that their salvation does not rest in their own hands... Their salvation rests in the gracious election of God, which he has revealed to us in Christ, out of whose hand "no one can pluck" us. (SD XI:89,90)

Application

How can I be sure that I am one of God's elect?

God does not permit us to peer into eternity to see him at work, choosing us to be his own. We cannot look into heaven either to see ourselves there for eternity. But the Scriptures explain God's actions in this way: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (Romans 8:29,30). In this passage God promises to work in the lives of his people, his elect. In their baptisms, he has "called" them to faith as his children. By his Holy Spirit, he has taught them to trust that they are his "justified" sons and daughters who have Jesus as their brother. What God has done in the lifetimes of his elect is evidence that he will also glorify them in the resurrection from the dead. He will gather his own and give them places in his glorious mansions in heaven. Picture Romans 8:29,30 as a "golden chain" of God's activity for believers from eternity, in time, and to all eternity. This golden chain links what God has done in the lives of believers now to what he did in eternity and will still do for them in eternity. The passage gives believers the powerful comfort of God's gracious activity on their behalf already before they were born, stretching onward to their eternal lives in heaven. You are one of God's elect because God has promised you forgiveness and life in Jesus and made you a believer. *(This We Believe: Questions and Answers)*

If God is going to get all of his elect home to heaven one way or another, why is it so important to share our faith with those who don't know Jesus?

Included in God's election was also the message, means, and method through and by which he would call, gather, and preserve his elect children. Notice in Ephesians 1:9 what was included in his electing love: "And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ." He brings his elect to faith as he makes known to them "his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ." That "good pleasure" is the message of Jesus Christ, the means of grace or the gospel in Word and sacrament. And how does the message reach God's elect? God simply uses those who are already his children to share the message of the gospel. In that way God wondrously gives believers a part to play in the fulfillment of his electing love! *(This We Believe: Questions and Answers)*

God has elected from eternity some who will be preserved in faith to eternal life, and yet it is possible for a believer to fall from faith. How can this be?

A believer of a past generation succinctly and beautifully answered this difficult question:

Reason finds it impossible to see how the man who is convinced that he can fall, that he may fall, that he is in great danger of falling away throughout his earthly life, can also be perfectly sure that he will never fall away.

One answer that Lutheranism gives is that the contradictory heart of man needs a contradictory doctrine...Thus the Christian must learn to live in constant tension between these two. When he begins to lean over to the left, toward pride and presumption and confidence in the strength of his faith, and to trust in his own character, then the warnings against apostasy, the Savior's, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation" pushes him upright once more. But usually man, even the Christian man, whose heart is never fully what it ought to be, begins then to lean over to the right – he becomes afraid and begins to doubt that he will ever make it to the gates of the heavenly city. Once again the Savior comes and stands on the other side to support him and to push him upright once more with his promise, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God (Isaiah 41:10). And he knows that when his pilgrimage comes to an end, "all the trumpets" will be blowing "for him on the other side." (This We Believe: Questions and Answers)

Summary

We must, however, carefully distinguish between what God has expressly revealed in his Word and what he has not revealed. Beyond the matters which have been revealed in Christ and of which we have spoken thus far, there are many points in this mystery about which God has remained silent and which he has not revealed but has kept reserved solely to his own wisdom and knowledge. We are not to pry into these, nor are we to follow our own thoughts in this matter and draw our own conclusions and brood, but we are to adhere exclusively to the revealed Word. This admonition is eminently necessary. (SD XI:52)

How can we criticize God for his gracious purpose when we don't deserve any of it? Rather than criticize God in any way for the way his divine purposes work and are seen, we should only praise him for his unspeakable mercy and goodness that saved me, a lost and condemned creature.

During the Week

Read Article XII of the Formula of Concord, Epitome.

(XII.) OF OTHER FACTIONS [HERESIES] AND SECTS,

Which Never Embraced the Augsburg Confession.

1] In order that such [heresies and sects] may not silently be ascribed to us, because, in the preceding explanation, we have made no mention of them, we intend at the end [of this writing] simply to enumerate the mere articles wherein they [the heretics of our time] err and teach contrary to our Christian faith and confession to which we have often referred.

Erroneous Articles of the Anabaptists.

2] The Anabaptists are divided among themselves into many factions, as one contends for more, another for less errors; however, they all in common propound [profess] such doctrine as is to be tolerated or allowed neither in the Church, nor in the commonwealth and secular government, nor in domestic life.

Articles that Cannot Be Tolerated in the Church.

3] 1. That Christ did not assume His body and blood from the Virgin Mary, but brought them with Him from heaven.

4] 2. That Christ is not true God, but only [is superior to other saints, because He] has more gifts of the Holy Ghost than any other holy man.

5] 3. That our righteousness before God consists not in the sole merit of Christ alone, but in renewal, and hence in our own godliness [uprightness] in which we walk. This is based in great part upon one's own special, self-chosen [and humanly devised] spirituality [holiness], and in fact is nothing else than a new sort of monkery.

6] 4. That children who are not baptized are not sinners before God, but righteous and innocent, who in their innocency, because they have not yet attained their reason [the use of reason], are saved without Baptism (which, according to their assertion, they do not need). Therefore they reject the entire doctrine concerning original sin and what belongs to it.

7] 5. That children are not to be baptized until they have attained their reason [the use of reason], and can themselves confess their faith.

8] 6. That the children of Christians, because they have been born of Christian and believing parents, are holy and children of God even without and before Baptism; and for this reason they neither attach much importance to the baptism of children nor encourage it, contrary to the express words of God's promise which pertains only to those *who keep His covenant and do not despise it*. Gen. 17, 7ff

9] 7. That that is no true Christian congregation [church] in which sinners are still found.

10] 8. That no sermon is to be heard nor attended in those churches in which formerly papal masses have been celebrated and said.

11] 9. That one [a godly man] must not have anything to do with the ministers of the Church who preach the Gospel according to the Augsburg Confession, and rebuke the sermons and errors of the Anabaptists; also that he is neither to serve nor in any way to labor for them, but to flee from and shun them as perverters of God's Word.

Articles that Cannot Be Tolerated in the Government.

12] 1. That under the New Testament the magistracy is not an estate pleasing to God.

13] 2. That a Christian cannot with a good, inviolate conscience hold or discharge the office of magistrate.

14] 3. That a Christian cannot without injury to conscience use the office of the magistracy against the wicked in matters as they occur [matters so requiring], nor that subjects may invoke for their protection and defense the power which the magistrates possess and have received from God.

15] 4. That a Christian cannot with a good conscience take an oath, nor with an oath do homage [promise fidelity] to the hereditary prince of his country or sovereign.

16] 5. That under the New Testament magistrates cannot, without injury to conscience, inflict capital punishment upon malefactors.

Articles that Cannot Be Tolerated in Domestic Life.

17] 1. That a Christian cannot with a good conscience hold or possess property, but is in duty bound to devote it to the common treasury.

18] 2. That a Christian cannot with a good conscience be an innkeeper, merchant, or cutler [maker of arms].

19] 3. That the married may be divorced on account of [diverse] faith, and the one may abandon the other and be married to another person who is of his faith.

Erroneous Articles of the Schwenkfeldians.

20] 1. That all those have no true knowledge of Christ as reigning King of heaven who regard Christ according to the flesh as a creature.

21] 2. That the flesh of Christ by His exaltation has assumed all divine properties in such a manner that Christ as man is in might, power, majesty, and glory altogether, as regards degree and position of essence equal to the Father and to the Word, so that now there is only one essence, property, will, and glory of both natures in Christ, and that the flesh of Christ belongs to the essence of the Holy Trinity.

22] 3. That the ministry of the Church [ministry of the Word], the Word preached and heard, is not a means whereby God the Holy Ghost teaches men, and works in them the saving knowledge of Christ, conversion, repentance, faith, and new obedience.

23] 4. That the water of Baptism is not a means whereby God the Lord seals the adoption of sons and works regeneration.

24] 5. That bread and wine in the Holy Supper are not means through and by which Christ distributes His body and blood.

25] 6. That a Christian who is truly regenerated by God's Spirit can perfectly observe and fulfill the Law of God in this life.

26] 7. That it is not a true Christian congregation [church] in which no public excommunication [some formal mode of excommunication] or no regular process of the ban [as it is commonly called] is observed.

27] 8. That the minister of the church who is not on his part truly renewed, regenerate, righteous, and godly cannot teach other men with profit or distribute genuine, true Sacraments.

Error of the New Arians.

28] That Christ is not true, essential, natural God, of one eternal, divine essence with God the Father and the Holy Ghost, but is only adorned with divine majesty inferior to and alongside of God the Father [is so adorned with divine majesty, with the Father, that He is inferior to the Father].

Error of the Anti-Trinitarians.

29] This is an entirely new sect, not heard of before in Christendom, [composed of those] who believe, teach, and confess that there is not one only, eternal, divine essence of the Father Son, and Holy Ghost, but as God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three distinct persons, so each person has its essence distinct and separate from the other persons of the Godhead; and that nevertheless they are either [some think] all three of equal power, wisdom, majesty, and glory, just as otherwise three men are distinct and separate from one another in their essence, or [others think that these three persons and essences are] unequal with one another in essence and properties, so that the Father alone is properly and truly God.

30] These and similar articles, one and all, with whatever other errors depend upon and follow from them, we reject and condemn as wrong, false, heretical, contrary to the Word of God, the three Creeds, the Augsburg Confession and Apology, the Smalcald Articles, and Luther's Catechisms, against which all godly Christians of both high and low station are to be on their guard as they love the welfare and salvation of their souls.

31] That this is the doctrine, faith, and confession of us all, for which we will answer at the last day before the just Judge, our Lord Jesus Christ, and will neither secretly nor publicly speak or write anything against it, but that we intend by the grace of God to persevere therein, we have after mature deliberation testified, in the true fear of God and invocation of His name, by signing with our own hands [this Epitome].