

St. Paul Lutheran Church

Sunday Morning Bible Class

Formula of Concord Series

Article 11 – God's Eternal Foreknowledge and Election

The Questions at Issue:

- 1) The fact that God knows all things beforehand means that he elects someone to be saved based on his knowledge that they would come to faith during their time of grace and die in that faith.
- 2) God knows all things beforehand, but his election to salvation is not based on his foreknowledge that someone would come to faith during their time of grace.

Why It Matters

- 1) A correct understanding of both foreknowledge and election can and should be a tremendous comfort to Christians.
- 2) Election based on a foreknowledge that someone would come to faith in time essentially makes the human being his own savior.
- 3) An election by God both to salvation and damnation would lead to fatalism or hopelessness in human beings.

What the Bible Teaches Concerning God's Foreknowledge and Election

- 1) God's foreknowledge is nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen.

Daniel 2:28 There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.

- 2) God's foreknowledge extends to both good and evil people – believers and unbelievers. Yet it is neither the cause of evil or of sin which compels anyone to do something wrong, nor is it the cause of man's eternal condemnation (for which man himself is responsible). God's foreknowledge controls evil, imposes limits on its duration, and forces evil to minister to the salvation of his elect.

Romans 8:28-29 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

1 Timothy 2:3-4 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

- 3) Predestination (eternal election of God) is concerned only with Christians, with whom God, for Jesus' sake, is well pleased. This predestination is the cause of their salvation.
- 4) Rather than to attempt to plumb the depths of these lofty thoughts, we are to turn to Jesus Christ and him crucified for our comfort – for our election is an election of grace in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 1:7-14 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

- 5) Our election should not be judged or understood either on the basis of reason or God's law, which would either lead us into a reckless, Epicurean life or drive us to despair. Our natural human thoughts would draw false conclusions such as: "If God has elected me to salvation I can do as I like, I cannot be damned." Or, "If I am elected to life, whatever good I do is of no avail and everything is in vain." Or, "If I am elected to damnation it also makes no difference what I do here in time."
- 6) The order with which Paul discusses election is important, since a sinner is first directed to repent, to acknowledge sin, to believe in Christ, to obey God, and only then does Paul speak of the mystery of God's eternal election. Thus we learn that these sublime truths are meant only for Christians – those who have been brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ.
- 7) The passage "many are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 20:16) does not mean that God wants only some to be saved. Those who are lost are those who either refuse to hear the Word and be saved, or who hear it and reject it.
- 8) Our comfort in this article should come always and only from the fact that we know that we have been elected to eternal life out of pure grace in Christ without any merit of our own, and that no one can pluck us out of his hand. Our names have been written in the Book of Life.
- 9) We are to continue to do good, according to God's will – especially are we to make every possible use of his revealed Word, which cannot and will not deceive us.
- 10) A correct understanding of election gives all glory to God, who saves us out of pure grace alone, without any merit in or from us. A correct understanding of this doctrine will never give anyone an reason to despair or to live a reckless and godless life.

What the Bible Rejects Concerning God's Foreknowledge and Election

- 1) Any teaching of divine election that causes Christians to despair, or according to which disconsolate Christians can find no comfort. A correct teaching should never strengthen the impenitent in their self-will.
- 2) The idea that God does not want all men to be saved.
- 3) That God is not serious about wanting all men to come to him when he calls.
- 4) That there is any good thing in man that causes God to elect him.