

Predestination Revisited:

**Is the sinner predestined unto salvation
unto faith or in view of faith:**

- ▶ **What are the implications of this for preaching and teaching, absolution and liturgy?**
- ▶ **How shall we preach predestination or election when we are addressing sinners with the Gospel?**

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I will open this paper on *Predestination Revisited* as I will close it, with a quote from the Lutheran Confessions, specifically the *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article XI [on] Eternal Foreknowledge and Divine Election*:

“...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 of this article in this document so that all men may know what we teach, believe, and confess in this article. If the teaching of this article is set forth out of the **divine Word** and according to the example it provides, it neither can nor should be considered useless and unnecessary, still less offensive and detrimental, because the Holy Scriptures mention this article not only once, and as it were in passing, but discuss and present it in detail in many places. In the same way, one must not bypass or reject a teaching of the divine Word because some people misuse and misunderstand it; on the contrary, precisely in order to avert such misuse and misunderstanding, we must set forth the correct meaning on the basis of Scripture.”¹



This opening quote forms the basis and theme of my paper, for the teaching, preaching, and administering of the doctrine of Eternal Election must always be exclusively centered on and directed by God’s holy word found in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible if one is to have any hope of doing any of those tasks in a God-pleasing manner. This pure unadulterated Christian doctrine is also clearly expounded upon throughout the Lutheran Confessions, and precisely presented in the Formula of Concord based wholly on God’s divine word as recorded throughout holy scripture. During the course of this paper I hope these unquestionable proofs of holy scripture will clearly demonstrate to you that the teaching portrayed in our Confessions is nothing new or novel, but simply a faithful adherence to what the one catholic church has taught and practiced since its earliest days.

Before we go any farther I want to present a precise definition of “predestination” in an attempt to guarantee that we are all of the same understanding regarding the topic at hand. For this I will reference the Christian Cyclopedia by Erwin Lueker:

- I. According to the Bible, all that God does in time for our conversion, justification, and final glorification is based on, and flows from, an eternal decree of election or predestination, according to which God, before the foundation of the world, chose us in His Son Jesus Christ out of the mass of sinful mankind unto faith, the adoption of sons, and everlasting life; this election is not based on any good quality or act of the elect, nor is it *intuitu fidei* [in view of faith], but is based solely on God’s grace, the good pleasure of His will in Christ Jesus. The Bible does not teach reprobation, i.e.², an election of wrath for those who are lost; God earnestly desires the salvation of all; the lost are lost by their own

¹ *The Book of Concord the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert, 616 (Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press, 1959)

² i. e. Lat. *id est*, that is, namely

fault. The Bible does not solve the problem that exists for the human mind that tries to harmonize the doctrine of universal grace and the doctrines of election and salvation by grace alone. The doctrine of election by grace, properly used, will not foster carnal security, but will make the believer conscious of the matchless glory of the grace of God, serve as a constant incentive to sanctification, comfort him in the ills and tribulations of this life, and give him the blessed assurance of final salvation. Since the doctrine of election by grace is clearly taught in the Bible, it is written for all Christians to learn.

II. The decree of predestination is an eternal act of God (Eph 1:4; 3:11; 2 Th 2:13; 2 Ti 1:9), who, for His goodness' sake (Ro 9:11; 11:5; 2 Ti 1:9), and because of the merit of the foreordained Redeemer of all mankind (Eph 1:4; 3:11; 2 Ti 1:9), proposed to lead into everlasting life (Acts 13:48; Ro 8:28–29; 2 Ti 1:9; 2:10), by the way and means of salvation designated for all mankind (Ro 8:29–30; Eph 1:4–5; 1 Ptr 1:2), a certain number (Mt 20:16; 22:14; Acts 13:48) of certain persons (Jn 13:18; 2 Ti 2:19; 1 Ptr 1:2), and to procure, work, and promote what would pertain to their final salvation (Mk 13:20, 22; Ro 8:30; Eph 1:11; 3:10–11).



III. Formula of Concord, Epitome XI 5-7: “Predestination or the eternal election of God ... is concerned only with the pious children of God in whom He is well pleased. It is a cause of their salvation, for He alone brings it about and ordains everything that belongs to it. Our salvation is so firmly established upon it that the ‘gates of Hades cannot prevail against’ it (John 10:28; Matt. 16:18).

We are not to investigate this predestination in the secret counsel of God, but it is to be looked for in His Word, where He has revealed it.

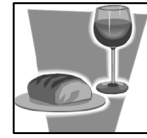
The Word of God, however, leads us to Christ, who is ‘the book of life’ in which all who are to be eternally saved are inscribed and elected, as it is written, ‘He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world’ (Eph. 1:4).”

As most of us have vowed to uphold the doctrines contained in a document commonly called *The 1580 Book of Concord*, let’s also look at the Solid Declaration’s own definition of this most blessed doctrine of predestination that it, in its eleventh article, proposes to explain in very precise and specific terms:

Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration XI 14-23: “This means that we must always take as one unit the entire doctrine of God’s purpose, counsel, will, and ordinance concerning our redemption, call, justification, and salvation, as Paul treats and explains this article (Rom. 8:28 *ff.*; Eph. 1:4 *ff.*) and as Christ likewise does in the parable (Matt. 20:2–14), namely, that in his purpose and counsel God has ordained the following:

1. That through Christ the human race has truly been redeemed and reconciled with God and that by His innocent obedience, suffering, and death Christ has earned for us ‘the righteousness which avails before God’ and eternal life. [Simply put; Jesus Christ justifies the sinner before God purely by grace and without any merit or assistance from the sinner.]

2. That his merit and these benefits of Christ are to be offered, given, and distributed to us through His Word and sacraments. [In other words through the Office of the Holy Ministry and its delivery of God's "Means of Grace."]
3. That He would be effective and active in us by His Holy Spirit through the Word when it is preached, heard, and meditated on, would convert hearts to true repentance, and would enlighten them in the true faith.
4. That He would justify and graciously accept into the adoption of children and into the inheritance of eternal life all who in sincere repentance and true faith accept Christ. [3 & 4: The "Means of Grace" will bring to faith and salvation those within whom the Holy Spirit is actively working to accomplish such.]
5. That He also would sanctify in love all who are thus justified, as St. Paul says (Eph. 1:4). [Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.]
6. That He also would protect them in their great weakness against the devil, the world, and the flesh, guide and lead them in His ways, raise them up when they stumble, and comfort and preserve them in tribulation and temptation. [God preserves the sinner by grace and through the effective "means" of that grace.]
7. That He would also strengthen and increase in them the good work which He has begun, and preserve them unto the end, if they cling to God's Word, pray diligently, persevere in the grace of God, and use faithfully the gifts that they have received. [God by grace strengthens the believer using the "Means of Grace."]
8. That, finally, He would eternally save and glorify in eternal life those whom He has elected, called, and justified.



In this His eternal counsel, purpose, and ordinance God has not only prepared salvation in general, but He has also graciously considered and elected to salvation each and every individual among the elect who are to be saved through Christ, and also ordained that in the manner just recounted He wills by His grace, gifts, and effective working to bring them to salvation and to help, further, strengthen, and preserve them to this end.”³

In light of this text I believe one of the greatest challenges to correctly presenting the doctrine of God's holy predestination is overcoming and controlling our own sinful desire to corrupt the doctrine with human reason and man's innate lust for self-righteousness. This lust for self-righteousness (or desire to be God) was the source of the fall and is the root of every sin and heresy throughout history. If that sounds simplistic, it should because we are simplistic creatures of base instinct that have nothing good within us, that God has not graciously placed there through Christ. If you disagree I do not want to argue with you and will simply point you to scripture and allow you to argue with God's word rather than wasting my limited time and energy, because "as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.' ...

³ Erwin L. Lueker, *Christian Cyclopedia*, ed. Erwin L. Lueker, electronic ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000)

there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”⁴

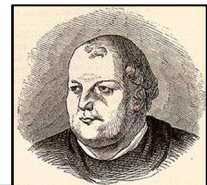
Continuing now with the Confessions we read:

²³ In this His eternal counsel, purpose, and ordinance God has not only prepared salvation in general, but He has also graciously considered and elected to salvation each and every individual among the elect who are to be saved through Christ, and also ordained that in the manner just recounted He wills by His grace, gifts, and effective working to bring them to salvation and to help, further, strengthen, and preserve them to this end.

²⁴ According to the Scriptures all this is included in the teaching of the eternal election of God to adoption and to eternal salvation. It should be understood as included therein and never be excluded or omitted when we speak of the purpose, foreknowledge, election, and ordinance of God to eternal salvation. When we follow the Scriptures and organize our thinking about this article in this light, we can by the grace of God easily orient ourselves in it.⁵

As this quote testifies, it is only by the grace of God that we can even attempt to understand this precious doctrine, and thus it is also only by His grace that we can hope to correctly engage in the proper administration of this doctrine through the preaching, teaching, absolution, and liturgy of our called vocation within His church. Accordingly, the only way that we can offer or educate pertaining to predestination or election when we are addressing sinners is through God’s grace found in Jesus Christ and His Gospel. Attempting to explain or present this holy mystery of our Lord by using human philosophy, reason, or psychology will only result in turning the gospel into the law; or worse yet: attempting to turn God’s grace and mercy into man’s works and self-righteousness.

Luther credited Staupitz with placing him on this same path that leads to understanding predestination exclusively through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross. In his book entitled *Luther Discovers the Gospel*, Dr. Uuras Saarnivaara comments regarding Luther and his coming to properly understand predestination thusly:



Johann von Staupitz
c. 1460 – Dec 28, 1524

Election and predestination was another problem in which Luther credits the counsels of Staupitz with delivering him from difficult doubts and afflictions. In a letter to the Count of Mansfield in 1542 Luther says: “If Doctor Staupitz, or rather, God through Doctor Staupitz, had not helped me out of it, I would have succumbed therein and been in hell long ago.” The great Commentary on Genesis contains the statement: “Listen to the Incarnate Son, He offers Himself freely. Then predestination follows immediately. With these words Staupitz consoled me, Why do you torture yourself with such speculations? Look to the wounds of Christ and His blood, shed for you. From them shines the predestination.” Several similar statements by Luther are to be found in his *Table Talks*.

⁴ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.*, Ro 3:10-12, 22b-24 (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001)

⁵ *The Book of Concord the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert, 619-20 (Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press, 1959)

“Once I complained to my Staupitz of the fact that predestination is so sublime. He answered me: Predestination is understood and found in the wounds of Christ, nowhere else, because it is written, listen to this....”

“Doctor Staupitz said to me, when one desires to discuss predestination, it is better not to think of it, but to start with the wounds of Christ and to set Christ carefully before the mind’s eye. That takes care of predestination - God foresaw the sufferings of His Son for sinners. He who believes in Him is predestined, he who does not believe is not.”⁶

At this point I would like to return to the definition found in the Christian Cyclopedia which I presented in the opening of this paper and review a number of scriptural references listed in that definition of predestination that we quickly skimmed over which reinforce the position just presented that all aspects of predestination will and must be understood through the wounds of Christ. In the second point of the Cyclopedia’s description of the doctrine of predestination it was stated that: “the decree of predestination is an eternal act of God” and listed several passages (Eph 1:4; 3:11; 2 Th 2:13; 2 Ti 1:9).

We will look at the passages in detail now to better understand this doctrine of God’s eternal election. Ephesians 1:4 and 3:11: “even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love ... This was according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.” No mention of human works or the merit of the believers due to their great faith, just an uncompromising proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ as our Redeemer from before the beginning of the world and unto eternity. Second Thessalonians along with Second Timothy reinforce this statement of God predestining the elect prior to their existence in time when in them the Apostle Paul declares: “But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first-fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ... who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.”

Where exactly is the confusion or misunderstanding coming from that would lead me to believe that I somehow warrant my own election, or contribute to my own predestination to salvation by some merit found in myself or some work I have done in this sinful life that as the Psalmist declares begins with me being “brought forth in iniquity, [because] in sin did my mother conceive me?”⁷

The definition continues by explaining that God does these things that lead to our election purely for His goodness’ sake according to God’s decree presented in the Old Testament and repeated in Romans 9:11: “though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of Him who calls.” This divine Old Testament reality is then expanded on by the apostle through his pointing out in Romans 11:5 God’s continuing work in order that “So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.”

⁶ Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel*, 20-21 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003)

⁷ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.*, Ps 51:5 (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001)

2 Timothy 1:9 is also once again referenced with its message of God saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of some righteous works done by us but because of His own merciful purpose and loving grace, which He gave us in His Son Jesus Christ before the ages began. Again there is nothing mentioned of merit found in the extraordinary faith of the believer, or wonderful works done that justified their being elected unto salvation before the throne of God. The only thing presented once again is the gracious selection by God of specific individuals unto salvation in eternity for the sake of the atoning sacrifice by Jesus Christ.

No mention of any merit based on the foreknowledge of God that someone **would believe** or **would not resist**, just simply the merit of the Redeemer of all mankind Jesus Christ. Now in the definition there are also scriptures listed as proofs of the proper understanding of eternal election and its proposed purpose “to lead into everlasting life” - these are Acts 13:48; Romans 8:28 & 29, and 2nd Timothy 2:10.

Let’s look at each of these individually and see what they each claim is the source of one’s election unto eternal salvation.

- Acts 13:48 “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” As many as “were appointed to eternal life” believed, not “as many as believed” were appointed to eternal life. You do not even need to read Koine Greek, all it takes is the ability to read and understand basic English.
- How about 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. 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.” Does not sound like a love of God leads to God working all things for their good, but instead it is the purposeful calling of God and His predestining them to the image of His Son that leads to His working good for them, as well as their having a love for God.
- Perhaps 2nd Timothy 2:10 will give us some evidence of man somehow meriting his election unto salvation? Paul in this epistle declares: “Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” The salvation that “is in” Christ Jesus, not because someone “believes in” Christ Jesus. Nothing that would lead me to believe that I can somehow bring about my own election by praying, singing, babbling in imaginary tongues or some other made up “spiritual exercise.”

Nowhere in these texts do we hear that someone is the elect “because of” their faith but rather we are repeatedly told that someone has faith and believes in Christ Jesus “because they are” the elect.

Election unto salvation comes from God as a gift of grace that produces in the recipient saving faith that clings to its Redeemer Jesus Christ. It is a difficult doctrine for us to accept in our sinful flesh because our flesh wants to glory in itself and our sinful self-desires to place itself at least equal to God, if not above Him. All errors that develop around the doctrine of predestination have some kind of self-worth or self-righteousness

at their core, for this misplaced egotism that is in essence the same sin of Adam and Eve leads to synergism as a minimum. Anything that places merit or worth on man and/or his deeds or thoughts detracts from God and will eventually lead to a misunderstanding/misstating of the scriptural doctrine of eternal election. As the Confessions repeatedly declare in various ways: we must submit our will and desire to God's will and word in all things spiritual or we will always go astray to a lesser or greater degree, for Holy Scripture must remain our only rule and norm for faith and life or we shall ultimately lose both.

It is God who determines who is the elect of God, not man. God brings to faith and strengthens in that faith by the way and means of salvation He has designated for all mankind. There are numerous passages from God's Holy Writ that make this point very clearly and to which our Confessions repeatedly point us:

- “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. 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. And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified.”⁸
- “even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.

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, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. 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, Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.⁹

- “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”¹⁰

⁸ *Ibid*, Ro 8:28–30

⁹ *Ibid*, Eph 1:4–14

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 1 Pe 1:2–5

Scripture also tells us that God has predestined a certain number of specific individuals to eternal salvation, but offers no specific number for our knowledge in this life. While we apparently are not to know the exact number of the elect, it is obvious that God knows exactly how many are predestined to eternal election in His Son Jesus Christ for the sake of His atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world:

- “So the last will be first, and the first last.”¹¹
- “For many are called, but few are chosen.”¹²
- “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”¹³
- “I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate My bread has lifted his heel against Me.’”¹⁴
- “But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”¹⁵
- “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.”¹⁶

We are also assured that God will do what is necessary to procure, work, and promote what would pertain to the final salvation of those He has predestined to eternal election: “And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days.”¹⁷

- “For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.”¹⁸
- “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope”¹⁹
- “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,”²⁰
- “so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him.”²¹

¹¹ *Ibid*, Mt 20:16

¹² *Ibid*, Mt 22:14

¹³ *Ibid*, Eph 1:4–14

¹⁴ *Ibid*, Jn 13:18

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 2 Ti 2:19

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 1 Pe 1:2

¹⁷ *Ibid*, Mk 13:20

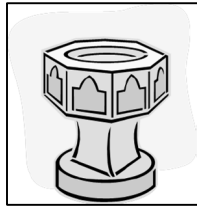
¹⁸ *Ibid*, Mk 13:22

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Ro 8:20

²⁰ *Ibid*, Eph 1:11

²¹ *Ibid*, Eph 3:10–12

If any of our preaching, teaching, or administering attempts to present or explain predestination outside the wounds of Christ and the atonement they offer for our many



sins we run the risk of either sending our audience into the dismal abyss of work righteousness or the happy clappy asylum of once saved always saved. The doctrine of predestination is a doctrine with a sacrificial and sacramental foundation that is rightly delivered and understood only within the context and reality of God's chosen Means of Grace: Word and Sacrament. In support of this fact I offer a quote from Dr. Saarnivaara's book on Luther's Discovery of the Gospel:

By assisting Luther to a proper understanding of the doctrine of predestination, Staupitz provided him with a way to escape from the afflictions of his conscience relative to this doctrine. The new light Luther received was significant in a threefold sense.

1. Foreseen merits are not the foundation and cause of election. Such is solely the undeserved mercy and love of God. Since salvation depends entirely upon the grace of God, man should not attempt by his own efforts and merits to prepare himself for grace. God does not elect man on the basis of his conduct and worthiness. The love of God toward sinners is revealed in the sacrifice of his Son and in the Sacraments. Man is to put his hope and trust in the "present predestination" revealed in the wounds of Christ and in the Gospel and not to meditate upon the hidden decree of God.
2. Anguish and terror of conscience is not a sign of reprobation, but of election, for they are the means by which God draws His elect to Christ. Also the anguish of hearts which one experiences because of the temptation to blaspheme is a sign of election, since it shows that man is still in harmony with God and cannot consent to such thoughts. The sufferings of Christ make it clear that the way to glory which God has ordained is the way of afflictions. Through patience in suffering the Christian is conformed to the image of Christ and shows himself a true follower of his Master. Also in this sense sufferings and afflictions are a sign of election.
3. We know the heart and will of God toward us through Christ. The divine love for sinners is revealed in the fact that God gave His only Son to be the propitiation for our sins. The dealings of God with men are determined by His fatherly love. Thus Staupitz gave Luther a new understanding of God and Christ: God is not a fearful judge, but a merciful Savior. Whoever clings to Christ and trusts in His atoning sacrifice and in the divine promises of grace will be saved.

In short, Staupitz helped Luther to victory in his struggle with the doctrine of predestination by leading him not to discard the whole doctrine, but to understand it in a new way, so that it brought him comfort instead of affliction.

Luther himself testifies to the fact that the most important practical significance of Staupitz was that he led him to a personal faith in the forgiveness of sins in Christ.²²

²² Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel*, 31-33 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003)

We see this same evangelical understanding of the doctrine of predestination presented in the 19th Century sermons of the American Lutheran pastor, Reverend Frederick Kuegele:

Therefore, instead of troubling our minds with the mysteries of predestination we shall much rather examine ourselves, whether we be walking in the way of salvation. If we are not walking in that way we have all reason to tremble at the things to come; but if we are walking in that way we have all reason to rejoice over the inheritance laid in store before the foundation of the world. May the God of grace lead us in the way everlasting. Amen.²³

We hear that Paul, after treating in three chapters of God's election and mysterious ways, ascribes praise and honor to Him for His unsearchable judgments. That we shall do concerning God's mysteries; we shall bow to Him, saying, Thou art the Lord. But that shall be our aim, to live up to what He has told us in His Word. Now, that Word tells us on every page that Christ is the book of life. In Him is the election of the Father. There we shall seek it. If we have Christ, we have all things. Amen.²⁴

This is the doctrine of predestination presented throughout Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and there is absolutely no reason for us in the 21st Century to attempt to explain this doctrine in any different terms than the church catholic has used throughout its history. The Lutheran Confessions are but one in a series of creeds produced by God's people in an effort to clearly present the doctrine of the Lord. We as Lutheran pastors are called to teach, preach, administer, and practice this doctrine in no other way than the way it is precisely presented in Holy Scripture and our Confessions. We may not go beyond what they say, nor add to or subtract from them. The doctrine is easy to understand and confess if we are willing to accept what God says and does not say about predestination. The trouble and danger begins when we start to go beyond what He has revealed in His holy word and attempt to peer into the mystery of God. We must focus only on the scriptural revelation of predestination that is abundantly presented throughout the books of the Old and New Testaments. This will require our focus regarding the doctrine of predestination be only on Jesus Christ and Him crucified for sins, and this is the only thing we can present to those whom we are called to oversee as the Lord's under-shepherd.



Fortunately our Lord has not left us without clear instructions and guidance regarding our vocation on this specific doctrine, for He Himself lays it out very clearly in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew:

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give

²³ F. Kuegele, “Sermon III,” *Sermons on Predestination: With a Few Remarks on the “Eight Points”*, 22 & 23 (Baltimore: Stuerken, Bookseller, 1881)

²⁴ F. Kuegele, “Sermon IV,” *Sermons on Predestination: With a Few Remarks on the “Eight Points”*, 29 (Baltimore: Stuerken, Bookseller, 1881)

you.’ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.

And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They said to him,

‘Because no one has hired us.’

He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’

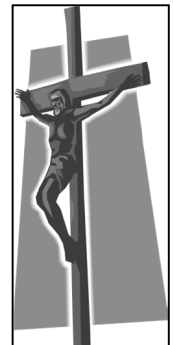
And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.

Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’

But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’

So the last will be first, and the first last.”²⁵

We, because of our fallen nature, always want to look in the wrong place for answers to spiritual questions, and the questions about predestination are no different. We need to lift our eyes from ourselves and up to God. We must turn our gaze from looking inwardly to ourselves, and redirect it outward to the One true God of heaven and earth found in the Means of Grace purely proclaimed and rightly administered through the Office of the Holy Ministry. There is only one answer for His choosing me or you. It is that word “grace,” a word that means something given to someone completely and totally without merit, free and undeserved. God in His infinite love sent His only Son to pay for the sins of the world, absolutely everyone’s sins. In His grace He sends His Spirit through the Means of Grace to bring sinners to faith in the salvation already won and prepared by His Son. Already in eternity His grace chose to do such wonderful things for those who have absolutely no hope of doing the same for themselves. God’s amazing grace and the merits of Christ are the cause of election, for it is as Paul says in Romans: “So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened.”²⁶ Paul clearly testifies that all that are the elect are made so purely by grace, and not by human effort or intellect. You cannot work nor reason yourself into election, it only comes from God through Christ in grace by faith.



I have attempted to not stray far from the Holy Scriptures and Confessions during this paper and will conclude with a quote from the close of the *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article XI, Eternal Foreknowledge and Divine Election* that must be the

²⁵ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.*, Mt 20:1–16 (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001)

²⁶ *Ibid*, Ro 11:5–7

final word on this topic, as well as all topics of doctrine and practice, for anyone who wants to claim the name Lutheran:

“This will suffice concerning the controverted articles which have been disputed among theologians of the Augsburg Confession for many years and in which some have erred and serious religious contentions have arisen. From our exposition friends and foes may clearly understand that we have no intention (since we have no authority to do so) to yield anything of the eternal and unchangeable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and outward harmony. Nor would such peace and harmony last, because it would be contrary to the truth and actually intended for its suppression. Still less by far are we minded to whitewash or cover up any falsification of true doctrine or any publicly condemned errors. We have a sincere delight in and deep love for true harmony and are cordially inclined and determined on our part to do everything in our power to further the same. We desire such harmony as will not violate God’s honor, that will not detract anything from the divine truth of the holy Gospel, that will not give place to the smallest error but will lead the poor sinner to true and sincere repentance, raise him up through faith, strengthen him in his new obedience, and thus justify and save him for ever through the sole merit of Christ, and so forth.”²⁷

If we adhere to this clear confession without compromise or deviation we will assuredly be most effective in rightly proclaiming the holy Christian doctrine of predestination through the administration of our calling and office in its preaching, teaching, absolution, and liturgy.



²⁷ *The Book of Concord the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert, 632 (Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press, 1959)