

MAY 2, 2017



WHERE THE DOCTRINES OF ELECTION AND EVANGELISM MEET

PRESENTED BY: TITUS IMMANUEL BUELOW
FOX RIVER VALLEY PASTORAL CONFERENCE – NORTHERN WISCONSIN DISTRICT
Beautiful Savior, Green Bay, Wisconsin

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.¹

My name is Titus Buelow and I am a Christian. How did I become a Christian you might ask? That is a great question. Where do I begin?

I became a Christian by the grace of God poured out on me through the Word of God. This Word of God was administered to me directly when I was only three weeks old through the water of Baptism. In Baptism, the Holy Spirit came to me and made me a child of God by connecting me to God's promise of forgiveness, new life and salvation through Jesus Christ. However, this Baptism didn't just happen automatically, it was administered by someone. That someone was my father, Rev. Timothy Buelow. While I was held by someone else, my father spoke the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." My dad was instrumental in beginning my life with God, but God still got the credit for me becoming a Christian. It is his power that brought me to faith and it was his command that compelled my father to baptize me. My father evangelized me, not simply because he had deduced the truth of the Gospel on his own, but because he, too, had been brought to faith through the Word and water when he was a child. That faith given him and grown by the Word of God throughout his life was shared with me because that is what God had called him to do. Since that time, my parents, teachers, and pastors have continued to feed my faith with the Word of God and with the Lord's Supper. Today, I preach the gospel and administer sacraments to my congregation. Now I have baptized my own son, and I will continue to teach the Word to my family.

In all of this, I see the evidence of God's eternal decisions of grace – preordained *before time* – playing out *in time*. From first to last, God is the source of my salvation—and the source of yours too.

How did I become Christian? God chose to send his Son and he chose to elect individuals from eternity to receive him. He saw to it that the means of grace would be brought by a messenger to my father, to me, and to my children. From Adam and Eve to today, God's election was carried out by evangelism, the preaching of his Word through ordinary people. That's how I became a Christian.

Election and evangelism are really two sides of God's plan to save those who are his. In his great wisdom, God includes us—humans—as part of this process. And while we are unpredictable and weak, God's election and the means of his grace are constant and powerful. His will is done and we marvel at his goodness.

As I think of my story and how I came to believe in Jesus, I see this beautiful relationship between God electing individuals to be his *before time* and evangelism bringing those individuals to him *in time*. God

¹ Martin Luther, "The Creed," *Luther's Small Catechism*; available from <http://catechism.cph.org/en/creed.html>; Internet; accessed April 22, 2017. This section is taken from the explanation to the third article.

uses believers to bring the means of grace to individuals so that his saving plan is carried out. It is this relationship that is the focus of this paper.

Our Starting Point

I begin my thoughts on this difficult topic with great fear and trembling, much like Isaiah before the throne of God. The doctrine of election alone has caused many a theologian and pastor to stray from the confines of what Scripture says and what we can possibly understand with our reason. Election baffles human minds when we try and grasp it tightly. And yet, many have tried because election is a very exciting and curious topic as God gives us a glimpse into the eternal counsel of the Trinity. It can be very easy for human beings to fantasize and imagine the eternal without having the knowledge to paint an appropriate picture. I pray this paper presses the Word of God for its truth but does not go beyond what God has revealed or intended for us to infer. Because of this danger, we must begin with this principle when approaching doctrine:

In studying theology, we must always submit human reason to the Word of God.

Even before the human race fell into sin, human reason could not have hoped to contend with the wisdom and knowledge of God. While we were created as the crown of God's creation, we were not created as equals to our maker. Perfect human reason could only have understood and made sense of that which God had revealed and explained. Why then would any human being after the fall into sin contend that we are able to comprehend or deduce things which God has not revealed or explained? Paul states:

Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Ro 11:33-36)²

The confessors of our Lutheran faith also make this point very clear:

We should not judge this matter according to our reason, nor according to the law, nor on the basis of outward appearance. Nor should we have the temerity to search the secret, hidden abyss of divine foreknowledge. Instead, we are to pay attention to the revealed will of God. For he has revealed to us and "made known to us the mystery of his will," and has accomplished it through Christ, that it may be proclaimed (Eph.1:9,10; 2 Tim. 1:9-11).³

Therefore we submit our human reason to the Word of God which reveals what God has chosen to reveal to us. In His Word, God tells us all that we need to know for our salvation. He does not explain everything or reveal every detail about the universe, himself or his will. He does tell us who he is, who we are, why we desperately need him and how he has graciously saved us. He also states for our joy and comfort that he has elected his chosen people before time in pure grace and carries that election to

² All Bible verses are taken from The Holy Bible: New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984).

³ Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration, Article XI: Election, paragraph 26.

fruition in time through the preaching of His Word and the administering of his sacraments by his ministers of the Gospel.

Where Election and Evangelism Meet, Part I: *Before Time Began...*

Before time began, God knew everything that would happen. He knew how beautiful and wonderful his creation would be. After each of the first six days he would be able to proudly say, “It is very good.” He would be able to rest on the seventh day and rejoice over and with all that he had made. God also knew that the crown of his creation, man and woman, would fall into sin. They would disobey his clear command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He knew this would bring separation between him and what he had made.

Now many ask at this point, “If God knew that Adam and Eve would fall into sin, why did he allow it to happen? Why did he put the tree in the garden or why didn’t he equip Adam and Eve better to deal with the temptation that they would face?” The simple answer to these questions is this: We do not know. From our vantage point and from what we know about God, it seems he would definitely have had this capability. He is all-powerful and all-knowing. However, we recognize we do not have the whole picture nor are we capable of understanding God’s wisdom.⁴

Before time began, God decided to send his Son to save the world. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus “was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake” (1 Peter 1:20). Knowing the evil that the devil would bring into our world and the sins humanity would commit by listening to the serpent, God chose to intervene. God could have simply decided not to create our world in the first place. God could have wiped out what he created as soon as Adam and Eve sinned. But instead, God chose to love his fallen creation even before they were born and despite the fact that they would reject him.

While we may struggle to answer the question of why God allowed the fall into sin to happen at all, we do not struggle to answer why from eternity God decided to send his Son: “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves” (Ephesians 1:4–6). Despite what he knew, he was willing to give everything for people who had not yet been born. Even though by nature humanity would be objects of wrath, enemies of God, and evil in their thoughts and actions, God loved them unconditionally. This is what drove him to prepare his Son for sacrifice to redeem the world. When the fullness of time would come, God’s redemption plan would be unleashed. All the pieces strategically placed throughout time would enact God’s choice before time to pay for the sins of the world.

Before time began, God chose individuals to be called by the gospel, enlightened by the Holy Spirit to faith, connected to Jesus’ redemption by that faith, preserved in their faith by God’s power and providence, and ultimately glorified with God in heaven forever and ever. Without God’s choice before

⁴ There are some things we might consider, however. We know that God desires our love, not our enslavement. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was an opportunity for Adam and Eve to show their love to God. By listening to his command, they showed their trust, love and respect for their God. This thought may be helpful in trying to understand this conundrum: Even if someone has all the power in the world and knows exactly what will happen, can he force someone to fall in love with him? Love is only love when it is freely given. You can try to force someone to love you but you will not receive love in return for your efforts.

time and his power to carry it out from first to last, none of this would have ever happened for any one of his creatures. It is God “who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time” (2 Timothy 1:9). *For our salvation, this act of God is just as important as God’s act to send his Son to redeem the world.*

If God had not chosen to call, enlighten, justify, preserve and glorify his chosen individuals, no man would have accepted or received the benefits of what God’s Son would come to do. Because of the fall, all humans would be sinful by nature and deserving of death in this life and for all eternity and also incapable of doing anything about it. There would be no power in these spiritually dead human beings to understand or take hold of God’s love that would be poured out for them by the Savior.

Thanks be to God that he did choose to love despicable sinners before they were born so that through his power they would be saved. He willed before time that in time his chosen people would be awakened to spiritual life by the power of the Holy Spirit through his Word. “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

By God’s power, the elect would understand and believe that God had sent his Son to die for them. By God’s power, they would be protected from the sinful world around them, the devil who would try to lead them away from God again, and their own sinful nature which would remain hostile to their loving God. By God’s power, the souls of these elect would be carried to their God’s side when their physical bodies were destroyed. Finally, by Christ’s command, these elect would be given a new imperishable body in which they would dwell with God for all eternity. All of this could not have happened had God not chosen to love these individuals. This is God’s election of individuals before time.

Before time began...The Question That Must Be Confronted

At this point many will ask this question: Why did God choose some but not all people to be saved? This is one of the toughest questions concerning election. The simple answer is that God does not give us the answer – at least not an answer that will satisfy our reason. However, we can say some things based on what God does tell us:

1. No one deserves God’s election.

The Bible clearly teaches that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” This does not simply mean that the human nature is wounded but still retains the ability to claw its own way out of the dust to God. It means that all humanity is “dead in their transgressions and sins.” Spiritually, there is nothing any human being can do. No one can come to God or even begin to know him.

This also means that we all deserve God’s righteous judgement. God states clearly that “the wages of sin is death.” No one has anything in themselves that would cause God to take notice of us based on who we are, what we have become, or where we will be. We all have nothing in us to bend God’s ear to us. Because of this truth, no one can claim that God is being unfair by choosing to save only his elect. If God would be truly fair, not one human being would be saved.

God does not elect “good” people. God did not base his choosing on some inherent goodness found in certain human beings by nature. There is no goodness. No one is chosen because they became good on their own or had a desire to know God. There is no spiritual ability in spiritual death. No one is chosen in view of the faith they would have because that faith is a result of their election before time.

2. God loves every human being and sincerely desires the salvation of all.

The first man and woman fell into sin. They deserved the punishment for their rejection of God and his love which is death in this life and for all eternity. However, even though he would have been just and right in wiping out his creation at that moment, God chose to be merciful. God loved Adam and Eve. He loved all of their future descendants. God made known his love for his fallen creatures immediately by giving them a promise: God would send his own Son to save humanity from their punishment by taking that punishment on himself. That promise was made because God desired the salvation of all who would now be bound under the curse of sin and death as Paul proclaims, “God our Savior . . . wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:4). Because of God’s love for all people, he has destined no man for destruction. He earnestly desires that all people will believe in his promise to save them. “Say to them, “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ez 33:11).

As God echoed his promise throughout time, he never limited it to specific people. Everyone sinned and yet God in his love made an open-ended promise to redeem all people at his expense. Peter explains, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pt 2:9).

God did not elect some to damnation. Scripture says clearly that God desires that all be saved. How could he damn some to hell and still sincerely say that he desires the salvation of all? God cannot contradict himself. He has not revealed to us one thing but secretly plotted another. Rather, the cause of an individual’s damnation must lie in his rejection of God’s love. Jesus’ sorrow was genuine when he entered Jerusalem to win salvation for all, including those who would refuse him. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Mt 23:37). God knew beforehand those who would reject his open-ended promise of love and faithfulness, but that does not make him the cause of their free choice to reject him.

3. All people have been redeemed through the blood of Jesus Christ

When it came time for God’s promise to be fulfilled, “God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those under the law that they might receive the full rights of sons.” This redemptive work was not limited to the elect but was given for all those who have sinned—the entire world. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Jesus’ blood paid for the sins of the entire world. God is sincere in his promise to provide salvation for all who turn to him.

Atonement is not limited to some but is universal. The whole reason that we are told to go to all nations is because God loves all people and desires to bring them under his wings. God has proven that he loves all people by sending his son as a sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. Anyone who believes in Jesus’

redemptive work for their sins will be saved. We do not preach a deceptive message, saying that all are saved but really not meaning it for all. While not all are elected by God, all are redeemed by him. He desires that all believe even though he knows not everyone will take his word to heart. God has shown that he values each and every person as a lost soul who needs saving. Therefore, we treat every individual that we meet as someone loved by God and loved by his children.

4. Humans have the ability to reject God's love

Even though Jesus has reconciled all people to God through his sacrifice on the cross, not all people are saved. The reason Scripture gives for this is that the righteousness won for us and freely given to all through Christ must be received by faith. That faith comes from hearing the Word of God and believing it by the power of the Holy Spirit. Since we are dead in our sin, God must draw us to himself. When the Bible talks about conversion, it always gives the credit to God for our believing in him. However, Scripture also makes clear that human beings are capable of resisting the Holy Spirit and refusing God's grace. The Bible does not teach irresistible grace. Therefore, humans get the credit for their own damnation, not God. Just as God did not force Adam and Eve to obey him in the garden, so God does not force those who resist him to love him.

In conclusion to our lengthy answer of this question, "Why are some saved but not others," we hear from others who sum up well what we know from Scripture and what we must leave in tension until God chooses to enlighten us further:

If one asks why some are saved and not others, Scripture offers only one answer. If we are saved, it is all to God's credit. If we are lost, it is all our own fault. Here we must take our reason captive and allow this seeming paradox in Scripture to stand. How can you reconcile the universal grace of God with a particular election? How can God be sincere in his desire to save all when he has only chosen some to be saved? According to human reason we cannot reconcile these teachings without falling into false doctrine. We believe both doctrines because God's Word clearly teaches them. The apparent paradox must stand. We must hold our reason captive to God's Word and let God be God.⁵

Scripture teaches that God's grace is universal, he truly wants all to be saved and therefore he sent his Son Jesus to die for and atone for the sins of all. Simultaneously, it teaches that man is saved by God's grace alone. Salvation can only come by God's grace since all by nature are dead and can contribute nothing. But if salvation comes by God's grace alone and God truly wants all to be saved, why then are only some saved while others are lost? Some have suggested that the difference lies in God. "God, by an act of his sovereign will, elected some to salvation and some to damnation and sent a Savior to atone for only those in the former group." (Calvinist) But by such teaching they deny universal grace. Others have said the difference lies in man. "Some people exercise their will to choose salvation" (a good choice or good work) "while others do not." (Arminian) But by such teaching they deny salvation by grace alone. Both erroneous answers solve the puzzle (why some, not others) according to human reason, but in the process say something contrary to Scripture's teaching about grace. As Robert Koester writes, "Breaking the paradox places a person outside of grace." Therefore there is a place and time when we

⁵ John M. Brenner, "The Doctrine of Election and Mission Work" (Mequon, WI: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, May 21, 2012), 4.

must tell our reason to close its questioning mouth and simply listen to the voice of God. Only there can sinners find true comfort. Only then can we truly praise God for his glorious grace, his grace that saves entirely apart from us, and his grace which wants entirely all to be saved.⁶

The doctrine of election is a doctrine of the gospel. It is a wonderful assurance given to us that our salvation in Christ is not a matter left up to chance. Rather, our salvation rests securely in the sure hands of our gracious God. Election assures us that already in eternity God loved us and chose us to be his own. In eternity he chose to send his Son in the fullness of time to redeem the world. He sent the Holy Spirit to bring us to faith so that through faith we possess the righteousness and forgiveness Jesus secured for all. Election assures us that the same God who did all this for us will not abandon us to our own resources to remain faithful to Christ to the end of our lives. Rather, he who chose us, redeemed us, converted us, and clothes us in the righteousness of Jesus Christ will preserve us in faith to eternal life.⁷

Summary of Part I: Before time began... God knew everything that would happen, he chose to redeem the world through his Son and he chose to elect individuals whom he would call, enlighten, justify, preserve and glorify as his own for all eternity. All of this God did because of his grace and mercy. God does not reveal to us everything that happened before time. He only shares what we need to know for our salvation and for our comfort. God knew each one of us before time and he loved us so much to carry out our salvation from beginning to end.

Where Election and Evangelism Meet, Part II: In Time...

In time, the things God had decided before time are carried out. From this perspective, we see very clearly what God has done and continues to do to accomplish the salvation of his elect. The Bible gives us a bird's eye view of God's providence from beginning to end. From God's creation of the world and his first promise of redemption to John's vision of the end the world, the return of Jesus, and the rebirth of heaven and earth, we know God will fulfill his timeless decisions. While this concept of decisions before time defies what we can fathom, we marvel at God's greatness and give thanks for his goodness and love.

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.⁹

In time, God does much without any human knowledge or assistance to accomplish his good and perfect Will. He uses good and evil to affect his plan in time. He does not will evil or cause it to happen but he uses even the corruption of the natural world, the efforts of the devil, and the desires of twisted men to accomplish his ultimate purpose for his people. Many who do not know God cannot help but feel that

⁶ Adam Horneber, "To the Praise of His Glorious Grace – What Election Means for Me, My Member, and My Non-Member," (Seminary Essay File, 2012), 14.

⁷ Lyle W. Lange, *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 2005), 429.

⁹ Paul Nolting, "Predestination." (Seminary Essay File, 1971), 5.

there must be destiny or someone or something directing things behind the scenes. Many speak of coincidence, luck or fortune. They speak of what they do not know.

What they are feeling and what believers can easily see is an omnipotent and omniscient God acting in time for the good of those who love him. Paul tells us “that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Ro 8:28). God weaves even the most complex of situations into a beautiful masterpiece centered around the work of his Son and the preaching of that gospel promise to his elect.

In time, throughout the Old Testament era, God promised and reiterated the promise that he would send his Son to save the world. He gave details about what would happen long before those events happened in human history. God strategically gave glimpses of the future when and where he willed them to be so that his people in previous times could cling to the future event of redemption. He also gave prophecies of the eventual gathering and safety of all his chosen people in glory forever..¹⁰

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Gal. 4:4-5). Some 2000 years ago, the time had finally come for God’s eternal love to be demonstrated *in time*! God knew exactly the right time to send Jesus into the world. All the pieces of his puzzle were in place for him to suffer and die precisely as foretold and for the gospel to go out into the world.

The entire history of the world is one executed plan of God which obviously has as its goal the building of the kingdom of God... whatever we know otherwise of profane history belongs under this head: how in politics, language, communications, in social, religious, moral affairs, through economic advancement and moral bankruptcy the entire world was in such a condition that the Gospel could go out from Jerusalem to the world..¹¹

Using the efforts of the devil to thwart him, the pride of powerful men, and the sensitive consciences of broken human beings, God led his own son to the slaughter. Without knowing it and without forcing them to do anything, God accomplished his will. The Son of Man suffered, was crucified, died and was buried. On the third day he rose again.

In these last days, God does much that human beings can know and become a part of through the calling and enlightening of the Holy Spirit. In his wisdom, which often seems like foolishness to us, God chose to carry out his specific mission of carrying the good news of salvation through his Son to all nations through people. Jesus commanded his disciples, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:19–20).

¹⁰ Prophecy is not difficult or strange when we acknowledge that the true God who is outside the confines of time can speak of future events – from our perspective – as if they have already happened (for him a thousand years is like a day and a day like a thousand years). For when God wills something to happen, even before the action happens in time, it is as good as done because God cannot lie or be thwarted.

¹¹ John Philipp Koehler, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, a commentary* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1957), 107-108.

Considering the magnitude and wisdom of God’s plan, why would he choose weak, frail and inconsistent human beings to carry the most important mission of preaching the gospel to all the world? This is a very good question. The simple answer to this question is: We don’t know. However, we do know that God in his wisdom has linked our own salvation with our own proclamation of that message to others. We also know that since God is the one who gives faith through the means of grace, he is the ultimate cause of our faith and the faith that he will bring to those whom we serve. Here finally we see the amazing and beautiful intersection between election and evangelism. This is what we know and can learn from what God has revealed to us:

Where Election and Evangelism Meet, Part III: The Means of Grace

God Has Chosen to Use The Means of Grace Alone to Gather His Elect

In God’s wisdom, he chooses to bring spiritual life through the means of grace, the gospel in word and sacrament. Of course, God could work and give faith apart from means, and in the past he has directly revealed himself to his messengers on special occasions, but in these last days God has directed us to his word and sacraments alone as the method by which he gathers his elect. “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Heb 1:1–3). We learn about what God’s Son has said and done in the Word of God. God tells us that this Word is “the power of God for the salvation of all who believe” (Ro 1:16). Through the Word, the Spirit comes to spiritually dead people and gives spiritual life. Jesus said, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63). These are not simply words on a page or off the tongue of a preacher. When someone reads or speaks the Scriptures, they unleash the Holy Spirit who has the power to bring someone to faith. “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Ro 10:17). Jesus also instituted two special ways, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, through which the Word of God may be used with visible elements to give faith, strengthen faith, and sustain faith:

The sacraments are the “visible” word in distinction from the proclaimed word. The Confessions declare that the “visible” word is intended for the eyes, as the audible or spoken word is intended for the ears. The effect of both is the same – to incite the heart to believe. It has been said that the sacrament serves as a sign and seal of the grace of God to the individual and may be viewed as the “individualized word.” A true sacrament contains the promise of God’s grace in Christ. It offers to all who receive it the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. The blessings offered and provided in the sacraments are not something in addition to, or beyond, the promises of the gospel, but the identical blessings. The sacraments are means of grace, which create faith in the promises they make, faith in the gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Christ. Through them the Holy Spirit works regeneration and conversion. And where faith already exists, there the Holy Spirit, through the sacraments, strengthens and preserves such faith.¹²

Because God has given us these means and these alone to bring people into his kingdom, then these means must be at the center of what we do as churches, as pastors, to reach those who do not know

¹² Richard A. Krause, “Worship Wars at the Dawn of a New Millennium: Lutheranism and the Means of Grace vs. the “Success Story” of American Evangelicalism.” (Seminary Essay File, 1998), 4.

God. It was by these means that God called us. It is only by these means that God will call his elect to himself. If we are to evangelize at all, we must use the gospel to do so. Only the gospel in word and sacrament can bring anyone to faith and into God's kingdom. Through these means, God makes his election a reality in time.

Any evangelism plan that seeks to gather God's elect must rely on the gospel to bring lost souls to Christ. (A self-evident statement). Simply assuming the gospel is already understood is not enough. Pushing the word and sacraments to the side in order to cater to people's "felt needs" has shown itself capable of adding numbers to the church roster, but not to the Body of Christ. Some don't seem to agree. David Valleskey quotes W.Charles Arn: "People today who respond to the Christian faith.... are those who respond to the love and caring of Christ's people, not to a set of ideas or theological statements. People are not talked into the kingdom. They are loved in. Reflecting God's unconditional love is the essence of the Christian Gospel."¹⁵ But Valleskey correctly states: "The truth is, people are 'talked into the kingdom.' The Holy Spirit does the work. He carries it out, however, through the words Christians speak...."¹⁶ While I will reflect Christ's love in my actions to my friend, he needs, above all, to hear the loving talk of the kingdom. And when my unbelieving friend (or any prospective member) visits my church, what he sees and hears should be the best vehicles possible for conveying the gospel of the kingdom in our hymns, our preaching, our liturgy, and the administration of and teaching about the sacraments. Christus pro nobis should be "center stage".¹³

"Loving people" is not evangelism and does not gather the elect. There is a lot to be said about the importance of pre-evangelism, those things we can do to encourage people to give the Gospel an audience. Building a good relationship with your friends and neighbors goes a long way to establishing trust. In such a charged political and cultural setting, there needs to be a lot of trust for someone to open up about their religious views and to listen intently to yours. There are events that the church can do to get people on the property so they feel comfortable and welcome. Community service shows the community that the people at your church do really care about others. These are great things and may lead to a good reputation, guests at your door, and a comfortable atmosphere. More importantly, the Scriptures directs us to be loving, hospitable, and charitable to all. Peter told the church to "live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Pt 2:12). God will also use these efforts to create opportunities for evangelism. However, these efforts in and of themselves are not evangelism.

As good and as right it is to live a godly life, love people, be approachable, hospitable, and charitable, these things do not bring people into the kingdom of God. We cannot make Christians. The Holy Spirit alone creates and sustains true faith and he does that through the means of grace. For that reason, we must continue to keep the word and sacraments at the center of what we do. This is the strength of our church body, that the word and sacraments are our most treasured possessions. For when the means by which God calls his elect are present, we know that God is gathering his elect among us in time.

Though the church does not consist in external things such as ceremonies and rites, and though her true essence remains unknown to the unbeliever, the presence of the church is established by the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Lutherans insist that

¹³ Horneber, 12.

the church is not upheld by the piety of the believers but by the external means of Word and sacrament. As Luther said, “Where the gospel is, there is Christ. Where Christ is, there is the Holy Spirit and his kingdom, the true Kingdom of heaven.”¹⁴

Where Election and Evangelism Meet, Part IV: Messengers with Purpose

God Has Chosen to Use Human Messengers to Gather His Elect With the Means of Grace

Now, God does not call apart from means. He calls through the Word, which he has commanded us to preach, the word of repentance and the forgiveness of sins [Luke 24:47]. St. Paul also testifies to this very thing when he writes, “We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20)]. The guests whom the king wants to have at his son’s wedding he calls through servants whom he sends out (Matt. 22:2-14)]. Moreover, he called some at the first hour, some at the second, third, sixth, ninth, and even at the eleventh hour (Matt. 20:1-16).¹⁵

God doesn’t *need* people to accomplish his mission of gathering his elect in time. However, God has chosen not only to use means to convey his power but he has also chosen to use human vessels as his messengers to bring those means to the ends of the earth.

Here’s the sobering and energizing reality: *Because he has chosen to work in and through humans to evangelize, we therefore are necessary for the implementation of Election in time.* This gives immense importance to God’s command for us to preach the gospel to all nations. “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14). God has put his plan into our hands. Now at first glance, that seems like a very foolish decision. Why would God entrust his perfect and immutable plan into imperfect and very mutable hands?

The security of God’s plan coming to its fruition is not in our ability but in the ability of our faith that comes from God himself. He is working in us and has called us for a purpose. Our faith has as its source the living Savior. He must accomplish everything that his Father has given him to do. Jesus made clear his work of gathering his flock was not finished when he said, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16). Jesus has entrusted this ministry of gathering his elect to his followers, especially those who are called to the public ministry. We can take great comfort that it is the Holy Spirit who holds the power to use our feeble attempts to convey the Word of God and our dirty hands that administer the sacraments for eternal good. We cannot make that power any less or any more than what it is by its very nature.

God works behind the scenes to create opportunities and to prepare people’s hearts to actually listen to the word when presented, but he then gives us the immense privilege to be the carriers of the one tool that shocks life into the walking dead. Because the word doesn’t work magically, pastors and teachers spend time preparing sermons and lessons that communicate what the Word says so that it may be understood.

¹⁴ Krause, 5.

¹⁵ FC, SD, XI, 27.

“Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is not without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me” (1 Co 14:6-11).

God’s Word is not a magic talisman or charm that we hang on our walls or around our necks to ward off evil or bring us good luck. God’s Word addresses our minds in language we can understand to bring us God’s blessings.¹⁶

At the same time we must remember that the Word works supernaturally. It is not because of clever words or because of superior style that the elect are finally called.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength” (1 Co 1:18-24).

Since the God’s plan of salvation is foolishness to people by nature, it is a miracle when people come to faith in Jesus as their Savior. Since every human being is dead in transgressions and sins, it is a miracle when they are born again. A miracle is a supernatural occurrence, one that goes beyond the laws of nature. The means of grace, therefore, work supernaturally.¹⁷

As ministers of the gospel, we recognize that we are a part of something that is far beyond us. We will therefore treat God’s Word with reverence and respect, strive to faithfully proclaim it to the best of our ability, and give thanks to God when it is communicated and when it is effective. We will also take comfort when it seems that our preaching and teaching are not effective. God’s decisions before time will come to pass. We cannot stop his will from being carried out. God’s Word is always effective—as Isaiah says: “[S]o is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa 55:11).

God’s Election Brings Us to Faith With a Purpose

God does not give his elect an inactive faith reclining in a spiritual lazy boy. The faith given by the Holy Spirit is active and alive. That life lives! And God gives that life purpose: to live out that faith and to share

¹⁶ Brenner, 9.

¹⁷ Brenner, 8.

it. Jesus told his followers, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and *appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last*” (John 15:16). Peter declared to the church, “you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, *that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*” (1 Pt 2:9).

All believers have been called to share the gospel that has taken root in their hearts. However, not all have been called to be public ministers of the gospel. “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:11–13).

When pastors near the end of their schooling at the Seminary, we prepare to receive a divine call. This call comes directly from God through human means. When we begin work at our new calling, we take comfort that it is God himself who has led us there and who will see his ministry succeed. We also take comfort that the God who brought us there has been preparing us for our role in his gathering of his elect. He called us to faith when we were baptized. The Holy Spirit gave us spiritual gifts specific to the ministry and he fanned them into flame through our parents, our teachers and pastors, our ministerial education, and our constant gathering around the word and sacraments. Empowered by him, we can confidently take up our torch in the long line of those who have carried the gospel to lost souls whom Jesus loves.

When Paul presents the doctrine of election in the eighth chapter of Romans he lays out the order of salvation. God chose and predestined people in eternity. He foreordained that they would believe. In time he sees to it that they are called, justified, and ultimately glorified. To accomplish his eternal purpose God sees to it that each of the elect comes into contact with other people whom God uses to bring them the gospel. God gives a variety of gifts to individual Christians and to those who serve in the public ministry. God sanctifies these gifts and abilities and uses them in the ways he sees fit. To some God has given a winning personality that makes people naturally like them and to be drawn to them. To others he gives the ability to think quickly on their feet. To some he gives a powerful voice and pulpit presence. Others have the ability to be an especially engaging teacher. Some have tremendous energy and capacity for work. Some have a unique ability to understand the problems of others and to apply appropriate Christian counsel. To others he gives the ability to survive and thrive in another culture. Some are particularly gifted to work with little children while others are very good with teenagers or the old and infirm. These gifts do not make the gospel more powerful but God uses them to accomplish his purpose with the elect.¹⁸

Our Election Leads Us to Evangelize to All People

We do not know who is elect by God and who is not. We cannot see into men’s hearts or peer into the book of life where the names of the saints are written. That knowledge was not given to us by God and I think he did it for good reason.¹⁹ Regardless of whether someone is part of God’s chosen people or not,

¹⁸ Brenner, 11.

¹⁹ We do not need to know if an individual is elect or not to know that God wants us to share his love for them. If we knew who the elect were, would we be as sincere in preaching to those who are not? God, in his unending love, poured out his blood even for those whom he knew would never enter his loving embrace. In God’s wisdom, he left this knowledge hidden in him so that we would sincerely preach to all as sincerely as he loves all.

God's election brings us to a faith that listens to Jesus' command to "go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). God loves all people and he sincerely desires the salvation of all. We also know that everyone we meet is not destined for destruction but is a lost soul that Jesus paid a price for.

The Formula of Concord states: "We should not think of this call of God, which is made through the preaching of the Word, as a juggler's act...The Holy Spirit wants to be effective through the Word, and to strengthen and give power and ability. It is God's will that we should receive the Word, believe it, and obey it" (SD, XI, 29).¹³ Therefore, since God is sincere in his gospel call, I also earnestly preach the good news to all. I won't approach my friend with the gospel of life, all the while wondering if God really had death in mind for him. I sincerely proclaim, "Jesus died for all. He is your salvation. Believe it!"²⁰

Election Does Not Make Us Lazy In Our Evangelism

It can be easy for us to think, "If God has elected individuals from eternity, and they will be gathered no matter what, we do not need to do mission work. God will see to it that the elect will come to us." This is a fatalistic view of the world: Since everything has been decided, my actions make no difference. This is the same argument that was made against Luther's free grace. They claimed that if you taught that a person's salvation is in God's hands from first to last, people would become complacent. However, both of these arguments are looking at things without factoring in what faith actually is.

Salvation is by grace alone without any merit or works on our part. Therefore we will work as if it all depended on us because that is what faith leads us to do. Our new man wants to do God's will and loves those means through which the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and helps us in our struggles with the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. This may seem like a paradox, but it is an expression of scriptural truth.²¹

Faith is a living power from the Holy Spirit that drives us to serve God with our entire being because we love everything he has done for us. Our faith is what compels us to reach out to everyone around us. While God has chosen those that are his before time, he works through the gospel in us and proclaimed by us to carry out his election in time. *We do not know the details of how our actions will fit into the big picture, but what we do know is that we have been called to be a part of God's plan.*

A correct view of election will not lead to a fatalistic view of mission work, i.e., "If God has already elected those who will spend eternity in heaven and his plan cannot fail, why do mission work at all?" We are taught that God has elected people to be called to faith and justified. The Holy Spirit calls them through his Word. His great commission directs us as his messengers to go to all nations with that Word. We do so remembering that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. That gospel is meant for all people because it tells all people that Jesus died to save them. So we will not wait for the elect to come to us. But as the Lord sent Jonah out to the great, ungodly city of Nineveh, so he sends us out to "preach the good news to all creation"

²⁰ Horneber, 11-12.

²¹ Brenner, 7.

(Mark 16:15). “A single great commission Compels us from above To plan and work together That all may know Christ’s love.” (CW 566:1)²²

The Purpose of the Doctrine of Election for Us and for Our Prospects

When we go out to reach the lost, we share with them the law and the gospel. The law reveals to them their need for a Savior. The gospel reveals what their Savior has done for them so that they could be reconciled to God. The doctrine of Election is not the first thing that we try to explain to our prospects. Paul gave us a good outline of the order of teaching we should follow.

In Romans, it was after preaching the law, then the Gospel, then the new life of a Christian that the apostle broached the topic of Election to bring comfort when Christians face trials from within and without. Our new life in Christ is far from picturesque and the world around us will attack us for our faith. In such a climate, it is easy to be afraid and lose hope. Paul brings up election to bring immense comfort to Christians that they are not alone or forgotten. The one who began a good work in them will see it through to the end. Paul writes:

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. (Romans 8:28-39)

The doctrine of Election is meant to bring comfort to Christians when they suffer, especially for the sake of the gospel. It is a reminder that despite the tragedy and destruction we see all around us, nothing the world, the devil, or our sinful nature brings against us can hinder or divert God’s eternal plan for his chosen people. Because God has decided to save his chosen people before time, he will save his people in time no matter what.

While this doctrine is not meant for those who have not yet believed in the Lord Jesus, it can bring comfort to those who are evangelizing. Despite the opposition and the anger many retaliate with when the gospel is presented to them, if God has chosen them, he will break down their walls through the power of his Word. Despite the persecution God’s messengers face for bringing the message of reconciliation, God will protect and preserve them in this life or the next. Even if we are killed for what

²² Horneber, 13.

we believe and teach, we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Conclusion

Evangelism brought me in contact with the Gospel. This came to me through my Baptism, administered by my father, Rev. Timothy Buelow. I have been strengthened in the faith through the preaching and teaching of my pastor and my parents. After I was confirmed, God continued to build me up in the gospel through the Lord's Supper. Throughout all my years, God has used human beings to speak the life-giving Gospel into my heart and to administer the sacraments that truly give the forgiveness of sins, build up my new man, and empower me to live out and preach the gospel to others. Through individuals sharing the means of grace, God has been working out my salvation in time because of his election which was decided before time. All of this is because of God's power and love for me and countless sinners like me. I met my loving God because election and evangelism...met.

Election and evangelism: the two are unquestionably linked. However, they are linked to different perspectives and different purposes. Election is God's choosing of individuals *before time* whom he would call, justify, preserve, and finally glorify. Evangelism is the manner in which God calls, justifies, preserves and finally glorifies these individuals *in time*. Election reveals to us a glimpse of the eternal perspective of God. It is revealed to us to give Christians comfort during trials and in response to doubt and fear over our own sinful nature and our efforts in gospel ministry. Evangelism is easily seen from our perspective wherever the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered. Through these means and through us, God's vessels, God has chosen to bring his timeless grace to his elect in time.

Where election and evangelism meet, there God's Church will be. In those individuals whom God has elected, evangelism is a fruit of faith that naturally flows out of a thankful Christian's mouth as he speaks about what the Lord has done in him. Let us continue to find peace and comfort in the means of grace that assure us of God's love and purpose for us. In that personal assurance of God's grace to us, let us carry out joyfully our privileged callings in humility trusting in God's guiding hand and unlimited power. God's will is always done.

In his counsel, intention, and preordination, God did not only prepare salvation in general, but he also graciously considered each and every one of the elect, that is, those who would be saved through Christ, and he chose them for salvation. He also preordained that in the manner just described he wills by his grace, gifts, and activity to bring them to salvation, and to aid, assist, strengthen, and preserve them to this end.²³

To God alone be the glory.

²³ FC, SD, XI, 23.

Bibliography

- Brenner, John M. "The Doctrine of Election and Mission Work." Mequon, WI: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, May 21, 2012.
- Habeck, Irwin J. "God's Eternal Election: A Sermon Study on Ephesians 1:4-6." *Seminary Essay File*.
- Horneber, Adam. "To the Praise of His Glorious Grace – What Election Means for Me, My Member, and My Non-Member." *Seminary Essay File* (2012).
- Hussman, Andrew. "The Antecedent and Consequent Will of God: Is This a Valid and Useful Distinction?" *Seminary Essay File* (2012).
- Koehler, John Philipp. *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, a commentary*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1957.
- Krause, Richard A. "Worship Wars at the Dawn of a New Millennium: Lutheranism and the Means of Grace vs. the "Success Story" of American Evangelicalism." *Seminary Essay File* (1998).
- Lange, Lyle W. *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 2005.
- Luther, Martin. "The Creed." *Luther's Small Catechism*; available from <http://catechism.cph.org/en/creed.html>; Internet; accessed April 22, 2017.
- Nolting, Paul. "Predestination." *Seminary essay file* (1971).
- Tappert, Theodore G. *The Book of Concord: the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.
- The Holy Bible: New International Version*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.