

# **Predestination**

## **Introduction**

### **I. Introduction to the course**

#### **A. The course content**

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#### **B. What we will try to learn**

1. What election is
2. What our election does for us
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#### **C. How to prepare for each session**

1. Read the chapters from the book.
2. Answer the questions on the handouts.
3. Consider the issues that are being raised by the readings.

## **1. Our Election**

1. What is “total depravity”?
2. What is meant by the phrase “objective and universal justification”?
3. What is meant by the phrase “means of grace”? What is included in it? Why?
4. What is election (predestination)?
5. Why is the doctrine of election important to us?
6. Why was it important that the election took place in eternity?
7. What does being elected “in Christ” mean?
8. How are faith and election connected?

## **2. Election Made Sure**

1. Why do we say that our election is through the means of grace?
2. Why is the Holy Spirit's work necessary in election?
3. What is the nature of faith?
4. Why is election entirely God's work?
5. What are some of the troubling questions about election?
6. Through what steps do the Scriptures make our election sure?
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2. What are the two impacts of original sin?
3. Why is our election certain?
4. Explain why Zechariah doubting God was ironic.
5. What was the teaching of Pelagius?
6. What is the TULIP principle?
7. What is synergism?
8. What was the *intuitu fidei* controversy?

#### **4. This side of the Atlantic**

1. What were the backgrounds of C.F.W. Walther and F.A. Schmidt?
2. What was the issue in the election controversy?
3. Why was the ELS formed?
4. Why did the Common Confession fail to achieve further unity?
5. Why is it important to teach about predestination?
6. In what ways could predestination promote carnal security?
7. How does predestination affect other doctrines?
8. What affect should predestination have on mission work?

## Predestination

### 1. Our Election

#### II. Laying the background

- A. Total depravity – The human heart is by nature totally depraved. There is no good in it. There is nothing in it on which to build upward to reach God. It is truly a bottomless pit of evil. *{The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood.” Genesis 8:21a}*
- B. God’s desire for universal salvation – Already in eternity the LORD saw the pathetic state that man would sink into, and He desired that all should be saved. He did not start out with a list of “bad” people who were assigned to hell before they ever existed. *{This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:3-4}*
- C. Objective and universal justification – When the LORD implemented His plan of salvation, He forgave all the sins of everyone. All were declared totally righteous and can be saved by believing in the justification that God offers. *{He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:2}*
- D. Universal invitation – The LORD has issued an invitation to all to come to the marriage festival of the Lamb. His church has been commissioned to go out and invite everyone. *{“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.’ ” Ezekiel 33:11a}*
- E. Faith, the means of acceptance – The way to get this salvation is simply to believe that you are lost without it and to accept it. It is by faith in God’s grace. *{It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9}*
- F. Faith, God’s work alone – Creation of faith is completely the work of the LORD. There is nothing a person can do to acquire faith because a person, by nature, has no ability to do anything that pleases God, which includes accepting God’s offer of free salvation. *{But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:4-5}*
- G. Unbelief, responsibility of the sinner alone – Whoever does not believe will not get the benefit of what Christ has done. The free pass to heaven will be of no use to the person who does not use it. It is completely one’s own fault for this failure. *{“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.” Matthew 23:37}*

- H. Means of grace – It is only through the means of grace – the Scriptures, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper that faith is worked in sinners and strengthened in believers. No method of man, no matter how clever, can bring people to believe in the saving message. *{Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17}*
- I. Human logic – Human reason cannot understand the LORD’s plan of salvation because all human plans are based on *quid pro quo* or on the assertion of human rights. We have nothing that God has not given us, so we have nothing with which to bargain with God. Moreover, we have ruined everything that He has given us, making it worthless even if we returned it. He owns us, so we have no rights before Him, any more than any of the things we manufacture have rights before us. The inner workings of the mind of God defy our logic and can only be probed at the risk of our souls. *{Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Romans 11:33}*

### III. Our Election

- A. Text: Romans 8:28-30 *{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. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.}*
- B. Background
  - 1. Definition of election – “The truth that God from eternity has in His mercy chosen people to everlasting life through faith in Jesus Christ and that this faith is worked in them by means of God’s word and the sacraments.”
  - 2. Justification by faith – In the first five chapters of Romans Paul points out how we are all, by nature, hopelessly lost and how the LORD has freely redeemed us. His salvation is complete and requires no works from us. *{All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Romans 3:23-24}*
  - 3. Works of love – The LORD’s gift is so great, however, that we want to respond by serving Him in deeds that reflect His love as discussed in chapters 6 and 7 of Romans. But we are still afflicted with the temptations of the devil, the world and our flesh. We fall, and therefore we doubt that we are really children of God. *{So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Romans 7:21-24}*

4. Cure for doubts – In chapter 8 Paul writes to tell us not to fear because our salvation is certain since it has been planned by the LORD from eternity. It is not in our frail hands but in the hands of the Almighty God.

#### C. Explanation

1. For our good {Romans 8:28} – Paul assures us that even though we must pass through many hardships in life because of sin and suffer much at the hands of those who do not welcome the message of Christ; nevertheless, God is in control. The things that seem to be evil now will work out for the good of His elect. We need to set our eyes on eternity and not the present.
2. Chosen from eternity {Romans 8:29} – The timeless God could see everything that would happen in His creation before He ever made it. Some of those whom He saw (we use the word “foreknew”), he determined (predestined) to be brought to match the image of His holy Son, by receiving His righteousness to replace their lack of righteousness. This decision was made by the unchanging God, so that it is certain.
3. The follow-up (Romans 8:30)
  - a. Called – Because the LORD knew that His chosen would never find Him on their own, He called them by placing the saving message before them. He made sure that they would not be missed by the missionaries and fail to hear the message.
  - b. Justified – He changed their hearts so that they would accept the message of full and free salvation (objective justification). He applied the message to them that they would personally be purified from the guilt of all their sins (subjective justification).
  - c. Glorified – He then instilled His spirit in their hearts so that already here on earth they could reflect His glory in their lives. Their full glory, when they will shine like the stars, will occur when they reach heaven.

#### IV. Our Election Is in Christ

- A. Ephesians 1:4-6 – *{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.}*
  1. “Chose us in Him” – God’s choice had nothing to do with us. It was an internal decision of the LORD. It was done “in Christ” solely because of the grace of God. It is far beyond our ability to understand why he chose us or any vile, sinful human being to be His child. *{[God] 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. 2 Timothy 1:9a}*



2. “Before the creation of the world” – The LORD’s plan for us is eternal. It cannot be altered by events in time because God is not a creature of time. Our election was therefore absolutely certain in all its details before the first particles of the universe were created. *{This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. 2 Timothy 1:9b}*
3. “To be holy and blameless in His sight” – We have been elected to be holy in His sight, not because we were holy in His sight. We were selected so that through faith we could do good works to please God through the Holy Spirit working in us and through us. On our own we can produce nothing pleasing to God. *{For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10}*
4. “In love He predestined...will” – God’s wisdom and knowledge are so much greater than ours that we cannot comprehend why He acts as He does. Even when He tells us, we still struggle with our weak minds to grasp what He has said. The reason He gives us for His actions is His love. It is a love that transcends our understanding because it has caused God to do what we would never do for things of our own creation, we who live in a throwaway society. All we can do is believe Him and praise Him that He has elected us in Christ. *{You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. Galatians 3:26-27}*
5. “To the praise...loves” – We stand back in awe of the LORD. How could He who is so great that He can control every sub-atomic particle in the universe be bothered with a rogue creature such as man? He could have destroyed us in a thousand ways in the blink of an eye and created a new race that was far superior to us. Instead He took upon Himself our punishment and elected numerous people, some among the worst we can imagine, to share His eternal kingdom. He did it so all would honor Him and not pat themselves on the back for their own efforts. *{Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! 2 Corinthians 9:15}*

#### B. Election and faith

1. What “in Christ” does not mean – No one will be saved unless they are elected in Christ. On the other hand, one cannot be elected and not be called to faith. Those who never hear of Christ therefore cannot be part of the elect. *{When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. Acts 13:48}*
2. Election’s relationship to faith – We are saved through believing (that is, faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit) that Jesus Christ graciously atoned for the guilt of all our sins and therefore the Father declared us to be justified (objective justification) in His sight. It is faith, not election, that attaches us to this gift of God. Election merely assures us that the LORD’s decision to save us is not dependent on us. *{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. 2 Thessalonians 2:13}*

## Predestination

### 2. Election Made Sure

#### V. Our Election Is through the Holy Spirit

##### A. Through the means of grace

1. Center on the word of God – Whether it is through preaching, Baptism or the Lord's Supper, it is always the word of God that makes the activity effective. Without the word of God everything that we do is worth nothing toward building the kingdom of God. Election is fulfilled through the word. *{I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Romans 1:16}*
2. Do not impress human reason – One cannot cure a person with a serious physical ailment by talking to him. Therefore it seems logical that one couldn't cure a serious spiritual ailment with a simple message. Logic says that actions by the one ailing and/or his caregivers are needed to establish health. The word of God is despised because it appears to be too weak to human reason to accomplish a healing. *{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 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. 1 Corinthians 1:18, 21}*
3. Cannot fail to accomplish the LORD's purpose – Whether it is to save or to witness to the unbeliever of the sinner, the word of God always is effective at accomplishing what the LORD desires. How can the Almighty fail? *{“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.” Isaiah 55:11}*

##### B. The Holy Spirit's work is necessary.

1. We are unable on our own. – Jesus makes it clear that only by an act of God can we come to Christ and therefore be saved. Obviously, if we could find our way to God on our own, then Jesus could not have said this. We must therefore be incapable of doing so. *{“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” John 6:44}*
2. It is part of God's plan. – We can be assured that God's election of us is effective because that plan includes the means to accomplish it, namely through the Holy Spirit, who is God Himself. Who can doubt that God can carry out what He has determined to do! *{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. 2 Thessalonians 2:13}*

C. Faith: God's action in us

1. Only worked by God Himself – The preaching of the saving power of Christ is not merely human words which reason people into believing and being saved. No, reason cannot convince anyone to accept a plan which is inherently in conflict with human reason. Rather the words of the Gospel are effective because the Holy Spirit sails them through our harbor defenses into the port of our heart and conquers it. *{For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5a}*
2. Only through faith – Faith is not an understanding of the mind, nor is it an emotional feeling in the heart. It is rather a hope and certainty that fills heart, mind and soul. It is saving only when it is set on the one object that avails, namely the objective justification won for us by Jesus Christ. *{“For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” John 6:40}*
3. Only through the word – Saving faith is faith which the Holy Spirit has planted in us. The Holy Spirit only works where the word of God is present. Even when that word is preached by those who do it lovelessly, it is effective because it has God's power behind it. Without the word there can be no election to eternal life. *{You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Ephesians 1:13a}*

D. God's work entirely

1. The plan is complete. – When we doing something complicated, like building a house, there are so many details that we fear something important will get neglected. Sadly, it often does, and we end up with less than we had hoped for. Because our election and its implementation are completely the work of God, we do not have to fear that anything will be neglected. The Almighty God who knows everything that can, will or could happen will surely not forget a detail that will keep us out of heaven. *{Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6}*
2. He works through us. – While we are in this world, the LORD carries out His will through us. Once we come to faith, we should strive at all times to work with the Holy Spirit as He tries to sanctify (in the narrow sense) our lives. We fear we will fail, and we should so fear because if our perseverance in the faith were up to us, we would certainly fall away. But He works in us as part of His plan of election so that we will remain in the faith and be saved. *{Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Philippians 2:12b-13}*

## VI. Our Election Assurance

### A. The matter of reason

#### 1. Why some find election troubling

- a. Constant uncertainty – The rational mind always wants to know why. It has a curiosity which far exceeds its need to know. When it learns that God has elected only some, it naturally wonders whether it is included. It also thinks that if it is not, then it ought to be given a fair chance to change God's mind. Once the mind has entered this pathway, it has lost sight of the reason that we can be certain of God's grace, namely, the work of Jesus Christ, culminating in God's decree of complete justification for all mankind. If all people have been declared righteous, what do we have to fear?
- b. Lack of accountability – The rational mind also senses that if nothing people do matters toward their salvation, then people may be saved who are scoundrels. This being the case, how can people be motivated to behave responsibly? They see the world collapsing if the good and evil both have the same chance of being saved. Human reasoning never moves beyond *quid pro quo*; with nothing to be gained, people without faith see no motivation for doing righteous deeds.

#### 2. What if personal questions arise?

- a. Lack of godliness – Some are troubled by the lack of godliness in their lives and are therefore tempted to despair because they think their incomplete sanctification is an indication that they are not part of God's elect. As a result, they struggle to improve their lives to gain the feeling that they are among the elect. We, however, are not saved by feelings but by the grace of God.
- b. Arrogance – Others have become so confident in their election that their belief has turned to arrogance. But arrogance also implies a lack of faith. Saving faith requires the acceptance of total depravity on the part of the believer, giving all glory to God. Acceptance of such humiliation precludes arrogance. In this way we follow in Jesus' footsteps because He, too, completely humbled Himself to save us.

### B. Security in the word (conscience captive to the word)

1. Vicarious atonement – Our salvation rests on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He took our place so that we would no longer be under the judgment of God. So say the Scriptures. {*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* 1 John 2:2}
2. Objective justification – God the Father accepted the sacrifice of Christ in our stead and has declared all mankind righteous in His sight. Therefore there is no reason for anyone to be condemned to hell. So say the Scriptures. {*God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.* 2 Corinthians 5:19}

3. Subjective justification – By faith the Father’s justification has been applied to us so that we are righteous in God’s sight. Because we have Christ’s righteousness covering us, we can enter heaven as God’s dear children. So say the Scriptures. *{There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1}*
4. Omnipotence of God – There is nothing powerful enough to interfere with God’s intent to save us. No scheme of demon or man can destroy our relationship to God which He has established. So say the Scriptures. *{I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 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 8:38-39}*
5. Faithfulness of God – The LORD is faithful to His children, bearing with them even when they fall into sin. He is the Savior-God who can be trusted in all things. So say the Scriptures. *{“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you. Isaiah 54:10}*

C. Loving warnings need to be sounded

1. Neglect – When all is well, one has to discipline oneself to continue to be on guard concerning one’s faith. When one neglects one’s faith and still expects it to endure, one is tempting God. If people fail to care for the gift of faith, they lose God’s assurance that He will sustain it. *{If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! 1 Corinthians 10:12}*
2. Self-reliance – Building one’s faith in a manner that involves materials other than those which are faithful to the Bible is one of the devil’s favorite temptations. He is always looking to lure you off the solid ground of Scripture so He can destroy your faith. *{Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 1 Peter 5:8b-9}*
3. Failing to be in the word – While we cannot make our election sure in the sense of making it more likely that God elected us, we can gain a greater sense of comfort in the fact that He did elect us by working to build our faith through the means of grace. When we better understand the teachings of the Scriptures, we will feel more secure in our faith in the gift of our salvation. *{Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:10-11}*

## Predestination

### 3. Grace versus Reason

#### VII. Our Election Is Entirely by Grace

##### A. The causes of election

1. God's grace – No one can comprehend the mind of the LORD God Almighty. He does what He chooses. Saving a worthless bunch of creatures like human beings seems far below the dignity of God, but He did it anyway. He chosen some to be saved from the eternal destruction they deserved. He did it because He is gracious and full of love. *{So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. Romans 5:11 Who (God) 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. 2 Timothy 1:9a}*
2. Merits of Christ – Salvation was not arbitrarily given, however. Because the LORD is just as well as merciful, He had to exact punishment for the violations of His divine will. Therefore His election had to be through His means of atonement for the guilt of the sins of the human race, that is, through Christ Jesus. Apart from Jesus there could have no election and no salvation. *{This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 2 Timothy 1:9b-10 He (God) chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. Ephesians 1:4}*

##### B. Original sin's impact

1. Total depravity – The result of one sin was the total contamination of the whole human race. There is not an atom of acceptability before God left in the human race upon which it could begin to build a means to reach out to God. Even the best of man's efforts are wholly soaked through by sins.
  - *The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Romans 8:7*
  - *All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. Ephesians 2:3*
  - *Every inclination of his (man's) heart is evil from childhood. Genesis 8:21b*
  - *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. Romans 7:18a*
  - *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Psalm 51:5*
  - *The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men. Romans 5:18a*
2. Total incapacity
  - a. Dead – While still physically alive, sin makes people dead to things spiritual. Efforts to reach out to God are therefore futile. Even to imagine that lifeless limbs could climb the stairs to heaven is fantasy. *{As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. Ephesians 2:1}*

- b. Blind – The natural law written in man’s heart gives false hope of salvation through obedience, but it neither accurately identifies who God is nor how to please Him with certainty. It rather produces a scene like blindfolded children who are swinging sticks to hit a piñata when the piñata is in the yard across the street. Blind people follow leaders who are as blind as they are because they hope that a whole crowd cannot be wrong. {“*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!...Woe to you, blind guides!...You blind fools!*” Matthew 23:15-17a}

C. Only God’s grace keeps us certain

- 1. Jacob and Esau – The grace of the LORD never fails. When it is promised to us, it will be given us because God is reliable. Yet God does not work by our rules or sense of fairness. He bases His decisions upon the good of His kingdom. God elected Jacob to become the source of His people before He was even born. We do not know why He chose Jacob instead of Esau. We only know that having made that choice, He did everything to make sure that it was carried out. He manipulated events so that people would make the decisions and take the actions necessary for His plan to succeed. The LORD knows not only what will happen, but what would happen if He gave people different options. {*The LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”* Genesis 25:23}
- 2. Not man’s efforts – God’s election cannot be derailed by any actions or intentions of people, no matter how clever. God knows control all things at a level that challenges our ability to comprehend. His thoughts are indeed much higher than our thoughts. What God intends cannot fail. {*He (God) says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.* Romans 9:15-16}

VIII. Our Election: Errors before and after the Reformation

A. God’s truth versus human opinion

- 1. Doubting God before Christ
  - a. Eve – The whole problem started with Eve doubting God. Given clear instructions, she didn’t think that God had been honest with her. Considering how close she was to God, this is really a tragedy of incomprehensible proportions. {*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.* Genesis 3:6a}
  - b. King’s servant – Faced with an severe famine in the city of Samaria, the king was ready to kill the prophet Elisha because of his anger against the LORD. When Eli-sha predicted that deliverance would come within a day, the king’s officer ridiculed the prophet and died in the stampede without getting to taste the plentiful food.

*{The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to the man of God, "Look, even if the LORD should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?" "You will see it with your own eyes," answered Elisha, "but you will not eat any of it!" 2 Kings 7:2}*

- c. Zechariah – A priest of the LORD working in the temple of the LORD still could not believe the angel of the LORD who came to him with a message. He was prepared to do what God commanded but not believe what God promised.  
*{Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well on in years." Luke 1:18}*

## 2. Pelagius

- a. Pelagianism – Natural religion tell us what we can make it on our own if we just try hard enough. This was effectively the teaching of Pelagius, couched in Christian terminology. He believed that whether someone was saved or lost was completely in their hands.
  - b. Semi-Pelagianism – Faced with the opposition of the church to Pelagianism, others throughout history have backed off from Pelagius' claim, by claiming that man can make a start on the road to heaven, but God's grace is required somewhere along the road to get him over the final huddle. Man is chiefly responsible for his salvation.
3. Augustine – Augustine placed the whole matter into God's hand, claiming that an omniscient and omnipotent God would run His universe by prescribing everything that was going to happen. The works of man had nothing to do with God's decision. God therefore predestined some to salvation and some to damnation in eternity and then uses His power to enforce His decisions in time. In so doing Augustine went beyond what the Scriptures taught.

## B. Calvinism

### 1. Underlying error –

- a. Calvin placed the sovereignty of God rather than justification at the center of His view of God. He failed to realize that we can only view God through the work of Jesus Christ. He tried to help God along where His revelation was not sufficient to explain all the mysteries involved in our salvation.
- b. Trying to protect God's majesty caused him to ascribe nothing to man himself. But if man could do nothing, either good or evil, then everything in the universe was scripted. There was never any free will, and even man's fall into sin was a required part of the script. This made God reasonable for sin entering the world.

### 2. TULIP principle (Summary of Calvinism view on election)

- a. Total depravity – On this point Calvin stated the Biblical doctrine correctly and was in complete agreement with Luther.



- b. Unconditional election – On this point Calvin started out correctly by denying that God gave any consideration to the good works or intentions of the people He was predestinating. Calvin defended the sovereignty of God to act as He chose. However, he went further than Scripture by claiming that God also predestined to hell all whom He didn't predestine to heaven.
- c. Limited atonement – Because most people were predestined to hell, it was not necessary for Christ to atone for their sins. Therefore He didn't. This means that the Gospel cannot be honestly proclaimed to everyone since many are not covered by it.
- d. Irresistible grace – For those who are predestined to heaven, God grace is an irresistible force. It converts people when they first encounter it, but those who are predestined to hell are not affected by the Holy Spirit. They are not the proper object of His work because they can never come to faith, even briefly. While Calvin was correct that the Holy Spirit must overcome strong resistance to implant saving faith into the heart, and man contributes nothing to this effort, he failed to understand that once implanted, man can and often does reject the faith.
- e. Perseverance of the saints – “Once in faith; always in faith” is a Calvinistic saying. Calvinists believe that the faith of the elect can never be lost, even though it may be beaten down. There can therefore be reconversion. The lost never are converted in the first place, and the elect can never lose their faith. This teaching is a logical conclusion of what went before, but is wholly unbiblical.

#### C. Philip Melanchthon

- 1. Humanism – Like many who had been influenced by Humanism, Melanchthon was unable to put aside reason. He wanted to win the battle for the human soul with arguments that would leave no loose ends. He therefore tried to develop a position that both gave God the final decision on election, but gave man a role too.
- 2. Synergism – The “compromise” was to let God be influenced but not controlled by His foreknowledge of how man would respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. What Melanchthon failed to realize was that he had placed man's salvation back into his own hands.

#### D. Lutheran dogmaticians

- 1. *Intuitu fidei* (with a view to faith being created) – John Gerhard tried to express that God predestined people for the purpose of creating saving faith in their hearts through which they would be saved. He wanted to emphasize that predestination was more than a list of names, but detailed plans to bring people into God's kingdom. The only one responsible for saving faith is God. This is correct, but the expression is sloppy, because of the more literal meaning of the phrase.
- 2. *Intuitu fidei* (in view of faith existing) – The more literal meaning is that predestination occurs because through foreknowledge God sees who will believe and remain in faith to the end. God then confirms that faith which will develop through predestinating that person to salvation. The one responsible for saving faith is man, because man determines whether he will be predestined.

## **Predestination**

### **4. This side of the Atlantic**

#### **IX. Our Election: Errors in American Lutheranism**

##### **A. The Election Controversy**

1. C.F.W. Walther
  - a. President & co-founder of Missouri Synod
  - b. President of Concordia Seminary
  - c. Editor of *Der Lutheraner*
  - d. Moving force behind Synodical Conference
2. F.A. Schmidt
  - a. Member of Norwegian Synod
  - b. Confirmed by Walther
  - c. Representative professor at Concordia (1872-1876)
3. Steps in the controversy
  - a. Walther's paper on election – Paper stressed the independence of God's election from man's actions (1872).
  - b. Smith claimed paper was Calvinistic – The paper said election was unto faith rather than in view of faith (*intuitu fidei*)
  - c. Ohio Synod – The Ohio Synod was impressed by Smith's arguments and left the Synodical Conference.
  - d. Norwegian Synod – The Norwegian Synod was greatly troubled by the dispute, but a substantial majority agreed with its president H.A. Preus and Walther. Eventually about a third of the pastors left the synod over this issue (1887).

##### **B. Norwegian union**

1. The drive for merger
  - a. President H.G. Stub – When he became president, Stub worked to unite all Norwegian Lutherans into one synod.
  - b. Joint hymnbook – A tool to forward this union was a common hymnbook. (The Lutheran Hymnary of 1913)

## 2. Opgjor

- a. Doctrinal meetings – Doctrinal discussions were held among the Norwegian Synod, the Hauge Synod and United Norwegian Lutheran Church in conjunction with the preparation of the hymnal.
- b. Statement of faith – The Opgjor, a joint statement of faith, was produced as a basic for organic union of the synods.

## 3. Cause of rejection and split

- a. Deceitful wording – The Opgjor cleverly worded the section on election to contain the principle of *intuitu fidei* without using the words.
- b. Division – Driven by a desire for Norwegian Lutheran unity in America in response to Norway having gained its independent from its Scandinavian neighbors after centuries of foreign rule, most Norwegian Synod pastors were willing to overlook the election issue. A group of 13 pastors split off to form the ELS (1918).

## C. LCMS and the ALC

### 1. The drive for enlarging the Synodical Conference

- a. WELS (1900) – The Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota synods merged to form the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.
- b. ALC (1930) – The Ohio Synod, which had left the Synodical Conference, joined with the Iowa and Buffalo synods to form the American Lutheran Church.
- c. Common Confession (1950) – The LCMS and the ALC meet for years to attempt to get the ALC into the Synodical Conference and eventually prepared a document called the Common Confession as a basis for this.
- d. Objection to Confession – The WELS and ELS rejected this document because it clouded doctrine of election. Subsequently (1960) the ALC merged with other Lutheran bodies to form TALC (The American Lutheran Church).

## X. Our Election Applied to Life

### A. Our comfort in times of trial

#### 1. Anchored in the Scriptures

- a. Part of the canon – Predestination is a teaching which appears in the Scriptures. Therefore it is necessary that we teach it in the church. If it were not important, the Holy Spirit would not have written it for our learning. {*He (Moses) said to them, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you – they are your life. Deuteronomy 32:46-47a*}

- b. Solid food – Some doctrines in the Scriptures are easy for new Christians to understand, but predestination is not one of them. It is for mature Christians who have an appreciation of the things of God and know that they do not need to satisfy human reasoning. *{Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Hebrews 5:13-14}*

## 2. In the hand of the LORD

- a. Safe sheep – Predestination gives us the knowledge that the LORD will keep us secure. *{“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” John 10:27-30}*
- b. No threat – Knowing that the LORD has a personal interest in us will allow us to within the temptations and trials that the devil and the world throw at us. *{For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 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 8:38-39}*
- c. Not abandoned – If the LORD was willing to seek us out when we were His enemies, He certainly will not abandon us now that we are His children. The Almighty God is Father who will not leave us to fend for ourselves. *{God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8}*
- d. Confidence – The teaching that the LORD has selected us from eternity gives us confidence that we will see Him in heaven, even when we are struggling here on earth. It lets us begin to hear the strains of the distant triumph song. *{Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. 2Timothy 1:12b}*

## B. Not for promoting carnal security

- 1. False faith – Predestination is not a blank check that lets us write in the set of whatever beliefs or deeds to which we are partial. Those who do not hold the correct faith are not part of God’s elect. If we think that we have heaven regardless of what we believe, we do not have it at all. *{“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:10-14}*

2. Careless faith – Even people who have the correct faith can fall away if they become careless. Part of having the correct faith is knowing that dangers have to be faced and cannot just be ignored or trifled with. *{So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 1 Corinthians 10:12}*

C. Position of election among other doctrines

1. Driven to the well of living water – Election is unto faith. The call to accept the water of life is given to all. Only the elect will persevere in the faith with the aid of the Holy Spirit. *{Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. Revelation 22:17}*
2. Affirmation in confirmation – We are reminded of our election at confirmation when we answer for ourselves. We are called upon to be responsible for our own faith and to be ready to defend it against all attacks. *{But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. 1 Peter 3:15a}*
3. Opposing modern day synergism
  - a. Totally dead – Synergism rejects that man is total depraved. Predestination affirms man's depravity because God knew it was necessary to predestine to save. *{As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. Ephesians 2:1}*
  - b. Alive in Christ – Synergism causes people to never be sure of their salvation because it depends on a weak link, namely, themselves. Predestination enhances the assurance that we have in objective justification which we accepted by faith. *{But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of 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 1:8b-9}*
4. How election affects all doctrines – If God did not choose us because He is God, but choose us because of our own actions, then we must work to improve the chances that He would have chosen us. Church teaching would have to place sanctification before justification because God would have to see our good works to predestine our justification. *{You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." Galatians 5:7-9}*

D. Election's bearing on mission work

1. Preaching commanded – We preach the Gospel to all nations because we love the LORD who saved us and He commanded us to do so. *{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." Matthew 28:19-20}*

2. Preaching is necessary – The LORD has made preaching the primary means of grace to bring the lost to faith. As followers of our Savior, we use this tool as best we can to carry out His will. {*“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” 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? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” Romans 10:13-15*}
3. Preaching is effective – Preaching always accomplishes the LORD’s goals. Those goals, however, are His and not ours. Sometimes the goal is to save, and sometimes it is to be a witness against unbelief. {*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so 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. Isaiah 55:10-11*}
4. Preaching may not be fruitful – We should never fail to spread the word because we do not see the results that we would like. In this regard we should remember Jonah. As the end of the world approaches, we will experience more and more determined resistance to our preaching. Church growth is not assured. {*He said: “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says.’ And whether they listen or fail to listen – for they are a rebellious house – they will know that a prophet has been among them. Ezekiel 2:3-5*}