

Election & Conversion

A. The course content

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2. From Eternity – *Creation*~Chapter 2
3. The Need for Divine Help – *Predestination*~Introduction & Chapter 1
4. Divine Election – *Predestination*~Chapter 2, 3 & 6
5. Ancient Heresies – BookofConcord.org~FOC Art. 11, *Predestination*~Chapter 7
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B. What we will try to learn

1. What election is
2. What our election does for us
3. Errors associated with election
1. What conversion is
2. Why only God can effect conversion
3. Results of conversion
4. False teachings about conversion

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.

Election & Conversion

1. The Human Predicament

A. God's Creation

1. The Lord God called the universe into existence by His Word. Moses recorded, *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"* Genesis 1:1.
2. His creation was perfect. *"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good"* Genesis 1:31.
3. He created man in His own image. *"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"* Genesis 1:27. This gave man a free will, so his service of God would be voluntary.

B. The fall into sin

1. God warned man of the consequences of disobedience. *"Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"* Genesis 2:17.
2. Eve and Adam did not listen; soon they fell for Satan's temptation and tried to make their own way in the world apart from the LORD's way. *"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate"* Genesis 3:6.

C. God's Curse on Man

1. True to His word, the LORD brought severe consequences upon mankind. Physical hardship was the immediate burden imposed, but the curse of man's disobedience would extend much further.
 - a. *To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you"* Genesis 3:16.
 - b. *To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return"* Genesis 3:17-19.
2. The curse would follow whenever God's Word was despised.
 - a. Moses wrote, *"If you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you...."* Deuteronomy 28:15-68.

- b. Jesus said, *“The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born”* Matthew 26:24.

D. The Depth of Man’s Depravity

1. Original, or inherited, sin came from the corruption caused by Adam’s sin.
 - a. Paul wrote, *“As sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”* Romans 5:12.
 - b. Paul also wrote, *“One trespass led to condemnation for all men”* Romans 5:18.
 - c. With the fall into sin, mankind had lost God’s image and was left with only his own image to transmit to his children. That image had been corrupted by sin. Moses recorded *“When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth”* Genesis 5:3.
2. Corruption begins with childhood.
 - a. People are evil from conception. David wrote, *“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me”* Psalm 51:5.
 - b. This corruption disturbed God. He said, *“The intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth”* Genesis 8:21.
3. Man’s depravity is total.
 - a. The evil in all of us is total. Isaiah wrote, *“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment”* Isaiah 64:6.
 - b. The LORD recognized that man could not accept His call to repentance when He said, *“‘Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction. Then your dwelling would not be cut off according to all that I have appointed against you.’ But all the more they were eager to make all their deeds corrupt”* Zephaniah 3:5.
 - c. The corruption is deep in the heart of everyone. Jesus said, *“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’”* Matthew 15:19-20.
 - d. The corruption runs through all mankind. Everyone has completely turned his back on God. Paul wrote, *“As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one’”* Romans 3:10-12.
 - e. Paul summarized the plight of man succinctly, *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* Romans 3:23.

E. Man’s Hopeless Condition

1. Man is spiritually dead.
 - a. The Lord God promised Adam and Eve that the day they ate of the fruit of the Tree of the

Knowledge of Good and Evil they would surely die. In fact, they did immediately die spiritually and no longer acted as the children of God. That is the natural condition of man, as Paul wrote, *“You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air”* Ephesians 2:1-2.

- b. Paul reiterated the same message to the Colossians, when he wrote, *“You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh”* Colossians 2:13.
- c. Paul also gave the same message to Timothy, when he wrote, *“But she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives”* 1 Timothy 5:6.
- d. The very heart of everyone is a rotten mass of sin. Solomon said, *“One who wanders from the way of good sense will rest in the assembly of the dead”* Proverbs 21:16.

2. Man is in blind rebellion against God.

- a. Paul pointed out that there is no hope of man changing because he does not naturally have what is needed to do the changing. *“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned”* 1 Corinthians 3:3.
- b. The sinful nature cannot recognize what the LORD rightfully demands of man and therefore cannot undertake any positive action toward God. Paul declared, *“The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God”* Romans 8:7-8.
- c. There is no way because of his nature that a human can please the LORD. The writer to the Hebrews noted that the individual, being wholly corrupted, can only contemplate his fate with dread, *“Without faith it is impossible to please God”* Hebrews 11:6.

F. God's impending judgment

1. The judgment is certain.

- a. All people who have failed to keep God's Law will be cursed by that Law as Paul stated, *“All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law’”* Galatians 3:10.
- b. There will be no credit given for doing a “pretty good” job of trying to keep God's Law. James wrote, *“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it”* James 2:10.

2. The judgment is severe and eternal.

- a. Because God's standards cannot be met by natural man, the LORD will condemn sinners to eternal punishment, which will be utterly terrible. Jesus said, *“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’”* Matthew 25:41.

- b. Paul noted that the wrath of God will fall on all human sin when he wrote, *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth”* Romans 1:18.
- c. There is nothing more horrifying than a person experiencing the wrath of Almighty God, a God so powerful that we cannot even imagine His attributes and power. The writer to the Hebrews is very pointed, *“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* Hebrews 10:31.

2. From Eternity

A. God is One

1. One in essence

- a. Moses reminded the people of Israel who their God was, *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one”* Deuteronomy 6:4. The great Jewish prayer called “The Shema” begin with these words because “shema” is the first Hebrew word of the prayer.
- b. The psalmist Asaph wrote, *“That they may know that you alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth”* Psalm 83:18.
- c. Isaiah recorded that God has always been the only God, *“‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me’”* Isaiah 43:10.
- d. God is emphatic about His being. *“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god’”* Isaiah 44:6.

2. One in action

- a. Isaiah wrote that God is alone in His actions because there is no one who can challenge Him. *“For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?”* Isaiah 14:27.
- b. David explained why the LORD is so awesome. *“For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God”* Psalm 86:10.
- c. The LORD has not been bashful about declaring His power. *“I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”* Isaiah 46:11.
- d. Jeremiah echoed the LORD’s claim that nothing can challenge His power. *“Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you”* Jeremiah 32:17.

B. Eternity

1. Eternity is not a form of “time.”

- a. ***Eternity is not a length of time but a condition of existence that is outside of our concept of time.*** The Levitical chorus sang, “*Stand up! Bless the LORD your God, who is from eternity to eternity*” Nehemiah 9:5.
- b. We define time in terms of change, but God is “immutable” or “invariant.” “*Certainly I, the LORD, do not change*” Malachi 3:6. We can get an imperfect sense of this by considering people in photos who do not age. We might say they are “frozen in time.”
- c. A psalmist wrote, “*Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end*” Psalm 102:25–27. Anything created changes, but not God. This section of the psalm is quoted in Hebrews 1.

2. Eternity cannot be part of God’s creation.

- a. If eternity were some type of entity, then it would have had to have been created by God, because God’s act of creation brought everything into existence. “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*” Genesis 1:1.
- b. A psalmist made God’s creation of everything clear. “*Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever*” Psalm 146:5–6.
- c. Paul also claimed God was the creator of everything. “*We bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them*” Acts 14:15.

3. Eternity is therefore an attribute of God.

- a. God dwells in eternity as we dwell in space and time, except eternity was not created by God. The LORD is always the same and is always dwelling in this “eternity.”
- b. But, because only God is uncreated, eternity must be an attribute of God like His omnipotence or His mercy. If it were an independent entity, then it would confine God, and He would not be omnipotent. The angel Gabriel said, “*For nothing will be impossible with God*” Luke 1:37. Therefore, He literally dwells in His attributes.
- c. We have no way to examine eternity apart from the revelation given in the Bible. St. Paul wrote, “*Who [God] alone has immortality, who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or is able to see*” 1 Timothy 6:16.

C. The Son of God.

1. The position of the first son in Middle Eastern custom.

- a. The firstborn son, even if he was firstborn only by a few minutes, had a right by birth to succeed (become the equal of) his father as the head of the family. This birthright was highly prized. *So he [Esau] swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob*” Genesis 25:33.

- b. When Jesus said, *“I and the Father are one”* (John 10:30), He was making the claim that as the only begotten Son of God, He was equal to God the Father and therefore also God.

2. God’s Son was begotten.

- a. The person of the Father begat the person of the Son. This act of begetting happened in the realm of eternity. We do not understand it because the preincarnate Son, the second person of the Trinity, had no mother.
- b. The apostle John introduced Jesus with the words, *“The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth”* John 1:14.
- c. Jesus said, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life”* John 3:16.
- d. John later wrote, *“This is how God’s love for us was revealed: God has sent his only begotten Son into the world so that we may live through him”* 1 John 4:9.

D. The Holy Spirit

1. Equality with the Father and the Son

- a. The Holy Spirit was introduced in the Old Testament. David wrote, *“Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me”* Psalm 51:11.
- b. Isaiah told us that this person of God could be troubled by the actions of man. *“But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them”* Isaiah 63:10.
- c. Jesus gave the Holy Spirit equality in the Godhead when He said, *“Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* Matthew 28:19.

2. The Holy Spirit is spirated.

- a. God in the persons of the Father and of the Son “spirated” (breathed out) the person of the Holy Spirit. This act is also called “procession.” We do not understand how it occurred in eternity, but we have solid biblical statements for it.
- b. Jesus said, *“The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I told you”* John 14:26.
- c. St. Paul wrote, *“But you are not in the sinful flesh but in the spirit, if indeed God’s Spirit lives in you. And if someone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to Christ”* Romans 8:9.

E. Decree of creation

1. Drafting the plan

- a. God's plan of creation, like God Himself, existed from before the creation was begun. Moses wrote, *"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God"* Psalm 90:2.
- b. As any builder, God drafted His plans for the universe before He started the project. He emphasized this to Job when He said, *"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone"* Job 38:4-6. God used the language of building according to a plan in His interaction with Job.
- c. St. Paul also alluded to God's planning when he wrote, *"From one man, he made every nation of mankind to live over the entire face of the earth. He determined the appointed times and the boundaries where they would live"* Acts 17:26.

2. Implementing the plan

- a. The LORD Himself claimed that He had created the universe when He gave the Ten Commandment to Israel. *"For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day"* Exodus 20:11.
- b. The LORD understood what he was doing when He created, and He did it based on the wise counsel existing within the Trinity from eternity. *"How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all"* Psalm 104:24.
- c. A psalmist wrote, *"To him [the LORD] who by his understanding made the heavens"* Psalm 136:5.

F. Decree of redemption

1. The reason for the decree

- a. According to His eternal will, God declared to Adam, *"of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"* Genesis 2:17. God knew his creature man would fall into sin, and Adam did eat of that tree.
- b. The LORD told Ezekiel precisely who would die. *"The soul who sins is the one who will die"* Ezekiel 18:4.
- c. St. Paul explained the implications of these declarations of the LORD. *"As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"* Romans 5:12.
- d. Yet, the LORD also told Ezekiel, *"Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live"* Ezekiel 33:11.
- e. To satisfy His divine wrath while showing His divine mercy, the LORD made a decree that would permit Him to promise mankind eternal life. St. Paul wrote, *"In hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began"* Titus 1:2.

2. Universal and objective justification

- a. God's plan of salvation called for God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, to take on a human nature and become man's substitute before God's throne of judgment. St. Paul wrote, "*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons*" Galatians 4:4–5.
- b. God's plan of justification was both objective and universal, completely forgiving all the sins of all people. St. John wrote, "*He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*" 1 John 2:2.
- c. God's plan called for the transference of the righteousness that Jesus would earn under the Law to all believers so they could stand righteous before God. St. Paul wrote, "*the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe*" Romans 3:21–22.

3. The Need for Divine Help

A. Man could not reason spiritually

1. Arguing with God

- a. Nothing could be more ridiculous than thinking that man can deceive God or win an argument with Him, yet this is what Adam and Eve attempted to do. "*The LORD God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.' He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.' Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate'*" Genesis 3:9–13.
- b. Saul had been told to completely destroy the Amalekites and their possessions, but he had allowed his soldiers to spare the best livestock as plunder. Samuel called Saul to account for his actions. "*And Saul said to Samuel, 'I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.' And Samuel said, 'Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king'*" 1 Samuel 15:20–23.

2. Putting God to the test

- a. Soon after Jesus had fed four thousand men with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish, His enemies ignored this great miracle and pressured Him for a sign. *“The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven”* Matthew 16:1.
- b. The message of free salvation through Jesus Christ was not what worldly people wanted to hear about. *“For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles”* 1 Corinthians 1:22–23.

B. Man would always view God’s plans as foolishness.

- 1. The Israelites rejected God’s leadership.
 - a. When the spies returned from Canaan, they terrified the people concerning the current inhabitants of the land. The people rebelled against the very idea that God could give them the land that He had promised them. *“Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, ‘Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?’ And they said to one another, ‘Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt’”* Numbers 14:1–4.
 - b. When people become unhappy with God’s providence for their lives, they claim that He cannot exist. David wrote, *“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good”* Psalm 14:1.
- 2. Rejecting God’s plans continued even after Christ came.
 - a. To the natural man, the idea that God would send His Son to die for them to win for them free salvation was like a fairy tale. *“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned”* 1 Corinthians 2:14.
 - b. Even those who sensed there was a divine being didn’t consider him worthy of honor or of acceptance of his ideas. *“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools”* Romans 1:21–22.

C. Natural religion

- 1. Physical idols
 - a. Not only did the LORD warn the Israelites from Mount Sinai not to make and worship idols, but He also repeated that demand numerous times in their wilderness journey. *“You shall not make idols for yourselves or erect an image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land to bow down to it, for I am the LORD your God”* Leviticus 26:1.
 - b. Isaiah remarked on the situation in Judah as it existed at his time. *“Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made”*

Isaiah 2:8.

- c. After Isaiah, the situation among those who were supposedly God's people became even worse as people turned to other gods in mass. *"For he [Manasseh] rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had broken down, and he erected altars to the Baals, and made Asheroth, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them"* 2 Chronicles 33:3.
- d. Jeremiah preached to the people after they had given up listening to the LORD and sought their salvation elsewhere. *"They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands"* Jeremiah 1:16.

2. The appearance of godliness

- a. Even the nominally faithful Jews who followed the temple rituals did not think that God had given them enough to do to earn their salvation, so they added regulation after regulation to their religious life. *"For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches"* Mark 7:3–4.
- b. Every natural (i.e., human) religion is based on rules that are supposed to earn the favor of the god being served. Often is a progression of works so the faithful can move through levels of favor before their god or gods. *"Why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—"Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh"* Colossians 2:20–23.

D. Seeking help in the wrong places

1. Unprescribed places

- a. Fearing that his people might return to serving the king of Judah if they went to Jerusalem to worship the LORD, the king of Israel decided to create his own places of worship. *"So the king [Jeroboam] took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, 'You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.' And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan"* 1 Kings 12:28-29.
- b. King Ahaz of Judah wanted to find as much divine help as possible to defend him against his powerful enemies. *"And he [Ahaz] sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree"* 2 Kings 16:4.
- c. Even the wise men of the east came to the capitol of Judah, rather than to Bethlehem, to find the newborn king of the Jews. *"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where*

is he who has been born king of the Jews” Matthew 2:1–2.

2. Places of fantasy

- a. Jesus warned His followers that phony Jesuses would come and try to associate special places with their worship. He said, “*So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it*” Matthew 24:26.
- b. God has revealed the way of salvation in the Scriptures, and we need to seek no other place to find it. “*Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)*” Romans 10:6–7.

4. Divine Election

A. What is election?

1. Before God created the world, He chose some to come to faith in His Son Jesus Christ and be saved. Paul wrote, “*So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. He (God) chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight*” Ephesians 1:4. This act of God is called “predestination” or “election.”
2. The selection of who would be saved was completely an exercise of God’s free will. He did not need or seek advice from anyone else. Paul wrote, “*For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?*” Romans 11:34.
3. Election is a reliable promise to those who have been elected that their election will be fulfilled at the proper time. “*Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior*” Titus 1:1–3.
4. Moreover, God’s actions cannot be bounded by man’s sense of justice, nor can God be required to reveal His reasoning to man. The LORD said to Moses, “*I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy*” Exodus 33:19.

B. The causes of election

1. God’s grace – Just as God had no human reason for issuing His Decree of Redemption, so He had no human reason for issuing His Decree of Predestination. Without this latter decree, however, no one could have accepted God’s plan of salvation and could have been saved. Nevertheless, this was not the cause of the decree. The first and essential cause of the decree was God’s grace and His love for fallen mankind.
 - a. Paul wrote, “*So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace*” Romans 11:5.

- b. *“And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls” Romans 9:10–11.*
 - c. Jesus said, *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit” John 15:16.*
 - d. Paul wrote, *“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. The merits of Christ – Salvation was not arbitrarily given, however. Because the LORD is just as well as being 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 been no election and no salvation.
 - a. Peter said, *“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” Acts 4:12.*
 - b. Paul wrote, *“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.*
 - c. Jesus said, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” John 3:16–18.*
 - d. Paul wrote, *“This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord” Ephesians 3:11.*
 - e. Luke wrote, *“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.*
- 3. God’s foreknowledge – God did not just draw names out of a virtual hat, nor did He choose birth positions from the order in which people would be born. He elected them according to His eternal intent on an individual basis. Because God is omniscient, He had a complete fore-knowledge of every human He would create. He knew them before He created them and, based on His foreknowledge, He did His election.
 - a. Paul wrote, *“For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” Romans 8:29.*
 - b. *“To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” 1 Peter 1:1–2.*

- c. *“God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? ‘Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.’ But what is God’s reply to him? ‘I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal’” Romans 11:2–4.*
4. Not on human merit – God’s election was not affected by what He saw in a person through His foreknowledge. If He had been influenced by the quality of individuals, then why would He have chosen tricksters like Jacob or persecutors of the church like Paul? Since all were spiritually dead because of their sins, no one was more deserving than anyone else.
- a. Paul wrote, *“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.*
 - b. Jesus told the following parable. *“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other” Luke 18:10–14.*
 - c. Paul wrote, *“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” 1 Corinthians 1:27–29.*
- C. Election is only “to” eternal life.
- 1. The Lord God is merciful and wants all people to be saved. His Decree of Redemption applied to all people, as has been previously discussed. God is completely truthful. His Decree of Predestination can therefore hardly annul part of His Decree of Redemption. God is faithful. He does not give with one hand and take away with the other.
 - a. *“Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?” Ezekiel 18:23.*
 - b. Paul wrote, *“This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” 1 Timothy 2:3–4.*
 - c. *“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” 2 Peter 3:9.*
 - 2. The LORD’s judgment on the unrepentant does not fall on them until their death. They are not preordained to eternal punishment.
 - a. The writer to the Hebrews wrote, *“Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” Hebrews 9:27.*

- b. At the final judgment Jesus “*will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food....’ And these will go away into eternal punishment*” Matthew 25:41–46.
- c. “*Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless*” Isaiah 13:9–11.

D. Election is a detailed plan

- 1. When the LORD elected someone to be saved, He foresaw everything in the world that would affect the person’s whole life. He determined in what manner He would call the person to faith and how He would provide for all the physical and spiritual needs that that person would have throughout his or her whole life, both before and after conversion. Paul wrote, “*We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose, because those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called. Those he called, he also justified. And those he justified, he also glorified*” Romans 8:28-30.
- 2. In particular, the LORD foresaw all the temptations that the hosts of hell would throw against the person and how He would have to intervene to preserve the person in the saving faith. Paul wrote, “*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it*” 1 Corinthians 10:13.

5. Ancient Heresies

A. Doubting God before Christ

- 1. Eve – The whole problem started for Eve and the rest of us when she began to doubt God. Given clear instructions, she didn’t think that God had been honest with her. Considering how close she was to God, this was really a tragedy of incomprehensible proportions. Moses recorded, “*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.
- 2. The report of the spies – “*The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them.’ So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the LORD*” Numbers 13:1–3. Moses recorded that the spies reported, “*We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very*

large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there....We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are” Numbers 13:27–31.

3. King’s servant – Faced with a severe famine in the city of Samaria, the king of Israel was ready to kill the prophet Elisha because of his anger against the LORD. When Elisha 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.
4. Ahaz – Ahaz, the king of Judah, was threatened by an invasion of Israel and Syria. The LORD speaking through the prophet Isaiah, had promised to prevent the invasion from happening. Ahaz did not believe Isaiah. *“Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: ‘Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.’ But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.’ And he said, ‘Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel’”* Isaiah 7:10–14.
5. Zechariah – Zechariah, a priest of the LORD working in the temple of the LORD, still could not believe an angel of the LORD who came to him with a message. He was prepared to do what God had commanded in temple service, but he still did 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.

B. The Pelagian heresy

1. Pelagius was of Celtic British origin and moved to Rome about 380 AD. He was also highly educated, and he spoke and wrote Latin and Greek fluently. He believed in the austere monastic life and felt the church was allowing people to live loosely by granting them forgiveness for their sins if they merely repented of them.
2. Pelagianism – Natural religion tells us that we can please God 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. In Jesus’ parable, *“the Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get’”* Luke 18:11–12.
3. Semi-Pelagianism – Faced with the opposition of the church to Pelagianism, others throughout history have backed off from Pelagius’ claim, by maintaining 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 hurdle. *“A man came up to him [Jesus], saying, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ And he said to him, ‘...you shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ The young man said to him, ‘All these I have kept. What do I still lack?’”* Matthew 19:16–20.

4. Augustine – Augustine placed the whole matter into God’s hands, 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 decisions. 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. Paul wrote, *“This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* 1 Timothy 2:3–4.

C. Calvinism

1. Calvin and his theology

- a. John Calvin was French by birth and was originally trained as a Humanist and a lawyer. He joined the Protestants after reading some of Luther’s writings. He fled France for Switzerland, where in 1536 he published the first edition of his dogmatic text *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He spent much of the rest of his life in Geneva, which he turned into a Protestant theocracy.
- b. 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. As a result of his training in Humanism, he tried to help God along where His revelation was not sufficient to explain all the mysteries involved in our salvation. Paul wrote, *“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ”* Colossians 2:8.
- c. Trying to protect God’s majesty caused Calvin 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 responsible for sin entering the world, which is contrary to Scripture which states that God hates sin. David wrote, *“For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man”* Psalm 5:4–6.

2. TULIP principle (Summary of the Calvinistic view on election)

- a. Total depravity – On this point Calvin stated the Biblical doctrine correctly and was in complete agreement with Luther. God said, *“The intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth”* Genesis 8:21.
- 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 predestining. 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. Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, *“This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* 1 Timothy 2:3–4.

- 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. Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, *"He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised"* 2 Corinthians 5:15.
- d. Irresistible grace – For those who are predestined to heaven, God's 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. Scriptural rebuttal: Concerning that grace may take time to work, Paul wrote, *"If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him....For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?"* 1 Corinthians 7:12–16.
- 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 cannot therefore be reconversion. The lost never were converted in the first place, and the elect can never lose their faith. This teaching is a logical conclusion of what when before, but it is wholly unbiblical. Scriptural rebuttal: Concerning the ability to fall from faith, Paul wrote, *"You, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister"* Colossians 1:21-23.

D. 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 that gave man a role too. Paul wrote, *"For the word of the cross is folly 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, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe"* 1 Corinthians 1:18–21.
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 man's own hands. When God establishes the agenda, people are always eager to alter it to their advantage, as the prophet wrote, "*When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts*" Malachi 1:8.

E. Lutheran dogmatists of the 17th century

1. *Intuitu fidei* (with a view to faith being created) – John Gerhard tried to express that God predestined people for the purpose of creating 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 there is a more literal meaning of the phrase.
2. *Intuitu fidei* (in view of faith existing) – The more literal meaning is that predestination occurs because through His 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.

6. Election and the Synodical Conference

A. The early players in the drama

1. Martin Stephan (1777-1846) – Pastor Stephan and his followers found themselves at odds with the Rationalism prevalent in the churches of the German kingdom of Saxony during the 1830's. While Saxony was not a part of Prussia, the effects of the Prussian Union were felt there nevertheless. In 1838 Stephan led 600 to 700 Saxon Lutherans to the United States, and they settled in St. Louis and in Perry County, Missouri. Stephan was initially bishop of these Saxon Lutherans, but after he became dictatorial in non-religious matters and was charged with sexual misconduct, he was expelled from the community.
2. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm (C.F.W.) Walther (1811-1887) – Pastor Walther was a member of the Lutherans who came over with Pastor Stephan from Saxony. He replaced Stephan and was instrumental in gathering other Lutherans from the Midwest to form the Missouri Synod in 1847. Walther became its first president. Walther showed almost superhuman energy. He founded Concordia Lutheran Seminary (1839) and was its first president. Walther was pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Louis (1841). He founded and edited *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre*. He wrote various theological works and even a hymn. He was the moving force behind the establishment of the Synodical Conference.
3. Friedrich A. Schmidt (1837-1928) – Pastor Schmidt was born in Germany but moved to the United States and was confirmed by C.F.W. Walther. Schmidt later joined the Norwegian Lutheran Synod and became a professor at Luther College in Iowa. He served as the Norwegian Synod's professor at Concordia St. Louis for four years, before being called back to

teach in the Norwegian Synod. After that, a feud broke out between Schmidt and the Missouri Synod, which would have long and serious repercussions.

4. Matthias Loy (1828-1915) – Pastor Loy was born in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, and was trained at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. He was a pastor in Delaware, Ohio, and then professor and later president of Capital University. For many years Loy edited the *Lutheran Standard*, the official periodical of the Ohio Synod. He founded the *Columbus Theological Magazine*. He also served as president of the Ohio Synod for 32 years. He wrote English hymns and also translated numerous German hymns.
5. Adolf Hoenecke (1835-1908) – Hoenecke was trained at the University of Halle and sent to Wisconsin by the Berlin Missionary Society. He repudiated religious unionism and became president of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1866 where he taught dogmatics. For many years he was editor of the *Gemeindeblatt* and was instrumental in founding the *Theologische Quartalschrift*. He also wrote a 4-volume dogmatic series called *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*.

B. The Election Controversy

1. The Synodical Conference

- a. A large number of Lutheran groups existed in America in the middle of the 19th century because Lutherans had immigrated from many places in Europe and had settled in diverse places in the United States. These Lutheran groups (synods) were divided by language and confessional history, as well as by geography and internal organizational structure. More theologically conservative synods saw a need to work together to create a network of theologically sound congregations that would span the growing nation.
- b. The Synodical Conference was established in July 1872. Its original members were the Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Norwegian, and Wisconsin synods. These synods agreed to work together, including sharing clergy, sharing educational facilities, and doing evangelism and mission work.

2. Initial steps in the controversy

- a. The sparring over the nature of God's election began between the Missouri and Iowa synods around 1870. Although information about the dispute was available to the various synods that formed the Synodical Conference, it raised no concerns.
- b. In 1877, as part of his annual doctrinal presentations to the Western District of the Missouri Synod, C.F.W. Walther gave a paper that stressed the independence of God's election from man's actions. He pointed out that while the 17th century theologian John Gerhard had used the term *intuitu fidei*, he also stated that those elected to eternal life were elected based on God's mercy alone. The Synodical Conference accepted the essay in 1878.
- c. F. A. Schmidt, who had previously sided with Walther, in 1879 attacked Walther's paper as Calvinistic because it made God's election arbitrary. He argued *intuitu fidei* had to mean in view of the faith of the one predestined. In 1880 Schmidt founded a new theological journal to promote his views called *Altes und Neues*, which he sent to every pastor and teacher in the Synodical Conference. Schmidt's actions led to a strong reaction.

- d. In 1881 President Loy wrote in the theological journal of the Ohio Synod that Walther had overstated his case on election making election into absolutism, which had the odor of Calvinism. The Missouri Synod instructed its delegates to the Synodical Conference not to sit with anyone who called the Missouri Synod Calvinistic. The Ohio Synod, afraid that its delegates would not be seated, withdrew from the Synodical Conference.
- e. Led by A. Hoenecke, the Wisconsin Synod and the other upper Midwestern German-speaking synods of the Synodical Conference supported Walther.
- f. The Norwegian Synod was greatly troubled by the dispute and Schmidt's continual haranguing about it, 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). With its house in disarray, the Norwegian Synod withdrew from the Synodical Conference to get things back in order.

C. Round two – the Norwegian union

1. The Norwegian problem

- a. The Norwegians in America were divided among three synods, which had historical roots in the teachings of three great Norwegian pastors. Although they spoke the same language, there was doctrinal division among the synods. The situation became more confused by the Schmidt-led revolt within the biggest of the synods.
- b. The situation was complicated by the fact that members of the three synods were largely interrelated. They attended family and cultural activities together, but they could not worship together. There was a lot of social pressure to resolve the causes of the divisions.

2. The drive for merger

- a. For years the Norwegian Synod held firm to its doctrinal position on election and other matters in dispute. The organizational and theological leadership remained committed to correct doctrine.
- b. A series of position turnovers in the Norwegian Synod, however, led to Pastor H.G. Stub becoming synodical president. He was committed to uniting all Norwegian Lutherans into one synod. Unity had replaced doctrinal soundness as his operative principle.
- c. The vehicle for accomplishing such a unity was a joint hymnbook. The three synods each had their own hymnals, but the hymnals contained basically the same hymns. For small groups to maintain and update separate hymnals seemed an unnecessary expense in both time and money.

3. The Opgjor

- a. Doctrinal discussions were held among the Norwegian Synod, the Hauge Synod, and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in conjunction with the preparation of the hymnal (*The Lutheran Hymnary* of 1913). Naturally, the proponents of merging the synods stepped up to develop the new hymnal and engage in the doctrinal discussions surrounding it.

- b. The result of the doctrinal discussions was the Opgjor, a joint statement of faith, which was produced as a basis for organic union of the synods.

4. The effects of the Opgjor

- a. The Opgjor was cleverly worded in sections that covered areas of doctrinal disagreement among the synods to create a false sense of unity. This was particularly true of the section on election, which contained the principle of *intuitu fidei* without using the words. It effectively agreed to tolerate both positions on election.
- b. The drive for synodical merger among Norwegians was enhanced by Norway having gained its independence from its Scandinavian neighbors after centuries of foreign rule. In this climate, most Norwegian Synod pastors were willing to overlook the election issue and to vote for merger in 1918.
- c. Thirteen pastors refused to accept the false compromise of the Opgjor and formed a new synod, which would eventually adopt the name, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (1918) and which became a member of the Synodical Conference.

D. Round 3 – The struggle over Walther’s dream

1. Lutheran mergers

- a. The merger among the Norwegians in 1918 significantly weakened the doctrine of election in the Lutheran community.
- b. The merger in 1900 of the Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota synods into what would become known as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) had no effect on the issue because all these church bodies had agreed with Walther from the start.
- c. The merger of the General Synod, the General Council, and the United Synod of the South to form the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) in 1918 likewise had no effect on the issue because none of the three parent bodies had an enforceable doctrine on election.
- d. In the same way, the merger of the Ohio Synod with the Iowa and Buffalo synods to form the American Lutheran Church (ALC) in 1930 did not change the battlefield over the election issue, because each of these synods taught that election had a human component. Nevertheless, the Iowa Synod had lax doctrinal positions on other issues, such as the Millennium, which made the ALC less orthodox than the Ohio Synod.

2. Trouble in the Synodical Conference

- a. A small, but dedicated faction in the Missouri Synod believed that the break with the Ohio Synod over election had been a mistake and had largely been caused by the arrogance of the Missouri Synod. Its members therefore maintained an unofficial fellowship with the Ohio Synod and tried to promote sanctioned joint activities.
- b. The merger of the Ohio Synod into the ALC in 1930 complicated the efforts of this group because the ALC was a bigger and much more visible body than the Ohio Synod. Moreover, the ALC formed the American Lutheran Conference with like-minded Lutheran

synods. One of these synods was the merged Norwegian Synod, and this set off alarm bells in the ELS, which was a member of the Synodical Conference.

- c. The Missouri Synod group met for years with ALC representatives in an attempt to get the ALC into the Synodical Conference. A document called the Common Confession was drafted as a basis for accomplishing this. The document tried to paper over the doctrinal differences as had been done in the Norwegian merger, but the document had to be approved by the Missouri Synod in convention, as well as by the other members of the Synodical Conference.
 - d. The Wisconsin Synod and ELS immediately rejected the Common Confession because it clouded the doctrine of election. Moreover, the willingness of the Missouri Synod to continue talks with a synod that clearly held an unscriptural position particularly riled the ELS which had been born over the struggle of the doctrine of election.
 - e. The Missouri Synod never adopted the Common Confession, but it flirted with it for a decade. When the ALC merged with other Lutheran bodies in 1960 to form The American Lutheran Church (TALC), the Common Confession became a dead issue, and a new document needed to be drafted if the relations between the Missouri Synod and the TALC were to be formalized.
 - f. The perceived growing insensitivity in the Missouri Synod on the issue of election caused the Wisconsin Synod and the ELS to scrutinize Missouri's practices in regard to chaplaincy and the Boy Scouts more closely and concluded that Missouri had changed its doctrine on fellowship. The ELS broke fellowship with Missouri in 1955, nominally over the doctrine of prayer fellowship, and the Wisconsin Synod followed suit in 1961. In 1963 the Synodical Conference was formally dissolved.
3. Subsequent efforts by the Missouri Synod (now called the LCMS) to establish fellowship with TALC succeeded for a decade, but it fell apart when TALC failed to keep its commitments. Turmoil within the LCMS led to a faction of it leaving and joining the newly amalgamated liberal Lutheran synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Walther's dream of a doctrinally strong confessional Lutheran body embracing much of American Lutheranism was dead. A major cause of the death was the doctrine of election.

7. Results of Our Election

A. Our Election Assurance – God completely planned our salvation when He elected us.

1. Why some people 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 declaration 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 people” and the “evil people” 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 own 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 our 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 his/her total depravity on the part of the believer, giving all glory to God. The presence of such humility precludes arrogance. In this way we follow in Jesus' footsteps because He, too, completely humbled Himself to save us.
 3. Security in the Word (a conscience captive to the Word)
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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. Paul wrote, *“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them”* 2 Corinthians 5:19.
 - c. 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. Paul wrote, *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* Romans 8:1.
 - d. 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.

- e. 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.

4. Loving warnings need to be sounded.

- a. Neglect – When all is well, one must 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. Paul wrote, *“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”* 1 Corinthians 10:12.
- b. 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 5:8-9.
- c. 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.

B. 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 32:46-47.
- 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. The writer to the Hebrews noted, *“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. Jesus said, *“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 withstand the temptations and trials that the devil and the world throw at us. Paul wrote, *“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 our 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. Paul wrote, *“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”* 2 Timothy 1:12.

3. Not for promoting carnal security

- a. 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. Jesus said, *“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector....The Pharisee 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....’”* Luke 18:10-14.
- b. 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. Paul wrote, *“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 and practices

1. 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 3:15.

2. Conversion – Because everyone is by nature spiritually dead, even those that have been elected for salvation, they cannot bring themselves to faith but must be brought to faith by the Holy Spirit. Our discussion of conversion will begin in the next lesson. Paul wrote, *“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins”* Ephesians 2:1.
3. Justification and Sanctification – If God did not choose us because He is God, but chose us because of our own actions, then we would need to work to improve the chances that He would have chosen us. Sanctification would replace justification as the central doctrine of the church. Paul wrote, *“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough”* Galatians 5:9.
4. Mission work
 - a. Universal message – We can and must proclaim the message of God’s free salvation to all because it is meant for all. Paul wrote, *“As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men”* Romans 5:18.
 - b. 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 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.
 - c. 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. The LORD said, *“Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me....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.

8. Substance of Conversion

A. The plan of salvation

1. The criteria for salvation are established by God – The LORD’s plan of salvation is His alone. Since He is the ultimate judge, only He can determine what will satisfy His justice. The only thing acceptable involves the work of Christ. Peter said, *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”* Acts 4:12.
2. God’s love, mercy and grace
 - a. Love & mercy – The LORD did not have to do anything for mankind based on his standard of justice. All mankind was guilty, and He could have punished everyone justly. But the LORD also loved mankind for reasons that are inherent in God and which we cannot understand, as we learned in the discussing the Decree of Redemption. Jesus said, *“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.

- b. Grace alone – The LORD’s plan requires that the deliverance from sin is effected through His grace alone. He will not accept the mixing of any foul human works into His own plan. Paul wrote, *“And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace” Romans 11:6.*
3. The revelation of God’s grace – The LORD Himself announced the existence of His plan immediately after mankind fell into sin. He gave the promise, but without details, so that people would have His assurance that the matter would be addressed to His satisfaction. The LORD said, *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” Genesis 3:15.*

B. The Savior

1. The incarnation – The Savior needed to be brought onto the scene to perform His work. The LORD did this through the working of the Holy Spirit upon the Virgin Mary so that she became pregnant without a human father. *“The angel [Gabriel] answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God’” Luke 1:35.*
2. The Savior had to be a true human.
 - a. Under the law (active obedience) – To take the place of humans before the LORD, the Savior had to be like them under the Law. This was because the LORD had placed mankind under the Law, and it is by the Law that they will be judged. Paul wrote, *“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” Galatians 4:4-5.*
 - b. Undergo death (passive obedience) – Because the penalty for sin is death, the Savior had to be able to undergo death and triumph over death. Only by enduring mankind’s punishment and overcoming the power of death and the devil, could He truly free mankind from them. The writer to the Hebrews wrote, *“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” Hebrews 2:14-15.*
3. The Savior had to be true God.
 - a. Weakness of man – Any savior who was only human could, at best, only save himself. Even a perfect man has no way to help others escape their sins. Only God could render a sufficient sacrifice to justify everyone. The sons of Korah wrote, *“No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him--the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough--that he should live on forever and not see decay” Psalm 49:7-9.*
 - b. Effective for all times – The Savior could not be limited in His work by time or circumstance. His work had to save the people of all times, regardless of what they had

done. Only God, who fills all time, could do this. He is always interceding for his children. The writer to the Hebrews wrote, *“Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens....He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever”* Hebrews 7:26-28.

4. The plan implemented

- a. The sinless life (active obedience) – Christ came and kept the Law perfectly. He was tempted, but He did not fall. As a result, He earned a perfect righteousness which He transfers to all who believe in Him. *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin”* Hebrews 4:15.
- b. The vicarious atonement (passive obedience) – He also died not only physically, but in such a manner that He endured all the punishment of God’s wrath for the whole human race. His punishment therefore takes the place of the punishment that every person deserves. He was our substitute, our sacrificial lamb before the LORD. *“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’”* John 1:29; also see Isaiah 53:4-12.
- c. Redeemed and ransomed – Because Christ endured the punishment for the guilt of all our sins, that guilt is no longer on our record before the LORD. When judgment is made, it is made on the clean slate of Christ which He substituted for our record of sins and rebellion. Paul wrote, *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree’”* Galatians 3:13.
- d. Universal justification – The righteousness which Christ won for us is not only an accomplished fact (objective justification), but it applies to everyone whether they believe or not (universal justification). The gates of heaven are open to everyone. There are no exceptions. Paul wrote, *“For 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.

C. What saving faith is not

1. Universal – Not everyone will be saved because not everyone believes in the justification earned by the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Faith is therefore not an inherent property of man. Jesus said, *“Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son”* John 3:18.
2. Vague feeling – Faith is not just a feeling about the existence of God and His will. Many religions worshipping gods of human creation exist, but no matter how strongly people feel about these gods, they cannot keep them out of hell. Paul wrote, *“For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse”* Romans 1:20.

3. Detached knowledge – Many people know something about the LORD, the Biblical God. Some of them even have a very accurate knowledge about Biblical teachings. Yet if this knowledge does not change the attitude of the heart, it is of no benefit at all. Faith requires knowledge, but it goes beyond knowledge. The LORD said, *“Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed”* Isaiah 6:9-10.

D. The essence of saving faith

1. Accurate information – Saving faith cannot be based on ignorance. If you don’t know some-thing, you cannot believe in it. If one doesn’t have correct knowledge, one’s faith will prove unreliable to accomplish the purpose for which it is held. Paul wrote, *“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.
2. Assent – For knowledge to become faith, it must be applied to oneself. One will not enjoy the benefit of seeing a circus that is in town if one does not act on the knowledge that the circus is present. The benefit comes from personalizing the knowledge into action in one’s heart and life. Jesus said, *“So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth”* Revelation 3:16.
3. Trust – Saving faith requires more than a willingness to accept what Jesus has provided for us. There must be a change in the heart that causes us to completely rely on His promise so that we abandon ourselves for Him and His kingdom. The writer to the Hebrews wrote, *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”* Hebrews 11:1.

E. Scriptural terms

1. “Knowledge” – The Bible sometimes uses “knowledge” in a sense that extends beyond the mind to the heart. This is to know “with every fiber of your body” that something is true. Such knowledge is indeed faith. Jesus said, *“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”* John 17:3.
2. “Obedience” – The Bible sometimes uses “obedience” in a sense that the heart has been so changed that it naturally desires to do the will of God. Such obedience is what God desires from all Christians. When He does not find such a faith, He punishes for lack of obedience. Paul wrote, *“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus”* 2 Thessalonians 1:8.

F. How faith saves

1. Purely by grace – Justification for the world was earned by Jesus Christ because God is gracious. His grace saves us. Faith accepts what has been done. It does nothing to effect salva-tion itself. Paul wrote, *“For 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.

2. Not as a good work – Our faith does not contribute to our justification and therefore to our salvation. If it did, then our salvation would depend partly on our own efforts, and we would have a claim on heaven based on our own efforts. Paul wrote, *“Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him’”* Romans 4:4-8.

G. Why faith saves

1. It points to Jesus – A faith is no better than the object in which it trusts. If the object of faith can deliver on the belief of the adherent, the faith is true, regardless of the strength of that faith. If the object cannot deliver, the strength of the faith counts for nothing. Faith that saves eternally trusts solely in Jesus. Paul and Silas replied, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household”* Acts 16:31.
2. It applies God’s reconciliation to us - When we believe in the vicarious atonement by Jesus Christ for our sins, God applies the objective justification earned by Christ to us, thereby making us not guilty before God because we are clothed with Christ’s righteousness. Faith therefore coincides with subjective justification. Paul wrote, *“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them”* 2 Corinthians 5:18-19.

9. The Bondage of the Will

A. The will is bound by the natural law.

1. *Opinio legis* – Man’s natural response to the law written in his heart is to create a religion in which he addresses the law through refinements, sacrifices and indulgences. Because this “natural religion” is man’s way and not the LORD’s way, it is worthless before God. *“A certain ruler asked him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good--except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’” ‘All these I have kept since I was a boy,’ he said”* Luke 18:18-21.
2. Better life than others – Fearing that they cannot keep God’s Law perfectly and being unsure whether they know it completely, people attempt to appear good by comparison to others, hoping to convince God that they are among the group who are deserving of salvation. Jesus said *“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”* Luke 18:11-12.

3. Sacrificing what is precious – Fearing that ordinary rule-keeping and *quid pro quo* bargaining will not be enough, people become willing to sacrifice their most precious things, even their own lives and the lives of their children, to appease the anger of God and earn a place among the blessed. “*They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech, though I never commanded, nor did it enter my mind, that they should do such a detestable thing and so make Judah sin*” Jeremiah 32:35.
4. Wrong mindset – Being corrupted by sin, buffeted by conscience, and limited by human reason, man cannot grasp the hopelessness of his situation. He cannot turn to a God whom he cannot know and does not understand. Paul wrote, “*The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned*” 1 Corinthians 2:14.

B. The spiritual condition

1. Spiritual blindness

- a. Of the heathen – Those who do not know the LORD will follow their own ideas or those of some guru whom they think can help them to appease God. They will fall for one human-devised religion or another because they cannot imagine anything else. Paul wrote, “*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*” 2 Corinthians 4:4.
- b. Of the religious – Sadly, blindness to the message of the Scriptures is also found among those who know the Scriptures. They read the Bible, but they see in it their own preconceived ideas of how the LORD should effect salvation. “*Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, ‘What? Are we blind too?’ Jesus said, ‘If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains’*” John 9:40-41.

2. In darkness

- a. Darkness recognized – The spiritual darkness of the human race was recognized by the prophets long before Christ. They knew the appearance of the LORD’s light was needed to make His salvation available to mankind. “*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned*” Isaiah 9:2.
- b. Darkness overcome – People could not find their own way in the darkness, so the LORD had to bring His light into that darkness to dispel it. Christ came as the light of the world because we could not find our way to him through the darkness of sin. Paul wrote, “*For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves*” Colossians 1:13. / “*But 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 Peter 2:9.

3. Spiritually dead

- a. No spiritual life – The person who does not believe in the salvation through Jesus Christ has no spiritual pulse or spiritual brainwave. Instead, there is spiritual *rigor mortis*. There is not the slightest ability present that can assist in receiving Christ because sin has destroyed all the senses. Paul wrote, “*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins*” Ephesians 2:1.
- b. Dry bones – In fact, it is much worse. Before the Holy Spirit comes to man, he is nothing religiously but dry bones scattered about. Those bones cannot arise and decide to live spiritually. “*The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ I said, ‘O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.’ Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to these bones....’ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army*” Ezekiel 37:1-10.
- c. Helplessness – If you are in a foreign country with a different culture and where no one speaks your language, you will be ignorant of the important things that are occurring around you. The language and culture of salvation are foreign to the unbeliever, who is effectively dead to what is happening around him. Paul wrote, “*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?*” Romans 10:13-14.

4. Hostile to God

- a. In the devil’s camp – People are by nature in the devil’s camp. They can only see what he lets them see. He has so corrupted their spiritual senses that they are actively opposed to the teaching of the Bible. “*The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.*” Romans 8:7-8.
- b. No neutrality – There are no people who are on their way across the divide between the devil’s camp and the LORD’s camp. Those not actively serving the LORD are actively serving the purposes of Satan. Jesus said, “*He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters*” Luke 11:23.

C. Does man have a free will?

- 1. Civil righteousness – People’s reason tells most of them that an orderly society is to their advantage, so they will accept certain restraints on their conduct to preserve such a society. They will freely do “good deeds” because they hope to gain from their actions, at least, until they see a reason to circumvent the rules. Civil righteousness is valuable to earthly life, but it does not save because it does not remove sin. Solomon said, “*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people*” Proverbs 14:34.

2. Civil liberty – People will restrain their actions in some areas to gain freedom of action in other areas. While these actions may appear to have been freely chosen as the right course, they are, in reality, the result of following a cost/benefit philosophy. Behavior changes quickly when that ratio changes. The Scriptures record, *“The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel....After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt”* Judges 2:7,10-12.
3. Spiritual bondage – Despite the apparent freedom of people to choose for themselves their way of life and their path to God’s favor, this is nothing but an illusion. Quite the contrary, a person can no more choose to be a Christian than a pear tree can choose to be a dog. Jesus answered, *“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit”* John 3:5-6.

D. Luther on the bondage of the will (response to Erasmus’ *Diatribes on Free Will*)

1. Dr. Martin Luther attacked the false teaching of free will with “five thunderbolts” in his discussion of five verses from Romans. Paul wrote, *“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the Prophets; the righteousness of God, I say, by faith in Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all those who believe in him. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God has set forth as a propitiation by faith in his blood”* Rom 3.21-25.
2. **First thunderbolt** – Luther separated the righteousness of God from the righteousness of the law, because the righteousness of faith comes by grace, without the law. “When Paul wrote, ‘without the law,’ he can mean nothing else than that Christian righteousness is perfectly independent of the works of the law – such that the works of the law have no worth or power to obtain it. In short, invent whatever you may as a performance which Freewill is equal to, and Paul will persist in saying, ‘the righteousness of God has nothing to do with this.’”
3. **Second thunderbolt** – Luther insisted “the righteousness of God is manifested, and is in force, to all and upon all who believe in Christ; and that there is no difference.”
4. **Third thunderbolt** – Luther further noted, “It also is no light thunderbolt, where Paul says, ‘All have sinned and come short of the glory of God: nor is there any difference.’”

5. **Fourth thunderbolt** – Luther continued, “So again, it is no light thunderbolt, Paul is saying that they are devoid of the glory of God. The glory of God may be understood with a difference here: *actively* and *passively*. Paul contrives this by his use of the Hebrew idioms, in which he is fluent. *Actively*, the glory of God is that with which God glories in us. *Passively*, it is that with which we glory in him. I think it should be understood passively here. The faith of Christ, in the Latin, expresses the faith which *Christ* has; but in the Hebrew, the faith of Christ is understood to mean the faith which *we* have towards Christ.”

6. **Fifth thunderbolt** – Luther concluded, “But what will the defenders of Freewill say at last to that which follows; ‘being justified *freely* by His grace?’ What is this ‘freely?’ What is this ‘by His grace?’ How do endeavor and merit square with a gratuitous and freely-given righteousness? Perhaps they will say here that they ascribe the least thing possible to Freewill — by no means a merit of condignity [i.e., worthiness]. But these are empty words; for the very aim of Freewill is to make room for merit. This has been Diatribe's perpetual complaint and expostulation. 'If there is no freedom in the will, what place is there for merit? If there is no place for merit, what place is there for reward? To what will it be imputed, if a man is justified without merit?' Paul replies here that there is absolutely no such thing as merit, but that as many as are justified, are all justified freely.”

10. The Means of Conversion

A. Changing our nature by conversion

1. By nature, everyone was headed down the road of life in the wrong direction, the direction of hell. In conversion the LORD changed our direction so that we would travel the road in the direction of heaven. “*For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls*” 1 Peter 2:25.

2. By nature, we were wandering in total darkness, with no ability to know how to please the LORD. In conversion He shone the light of His Son and His work into our lives and let us see the glories of the kingdom of God. Jesus told Paul, “*I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me*” Acts 26:17-18.

3. By nature, we were enemies of God and servants of Satan. In conversion the wicked are turned from their evil ways and rather desire to serve the LORD. The preacher merely proclaims the message faithfully; the LORD changes hearts. “*But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have*

saved yourself” Ezekiel 3:19.

B. The conversion process

1. Repentance

- a. The calling to repentance and faith can only be accomplished through the work of God. He is the enabling and effecting agent without whose work there can be no conversion. Jesus said, *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”* John 6:44.
- b. The Bible uses the word “repentance” in the narrow sense to indicate the sorrow for having sinned against the LORD, i.e., contrition. The sorrow does not save; in fact, it is an act of despair for having offended the Almighty God. *“The time has come,” he [Jesus] said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”* Mark 1:15.
- c. The Bible uses the word “repentance” in a broader sense to include not only contrition but also faith in Christ. In this usage, repentance is the whole process of rejecting one’s sinful life and believing in the promise of the forgiveness of sin. Jesus said, *“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent”* Luke 15:7.

2. Illumination – Conversion shines the light of God’s grace upon the sinner so that he can see His sin but also see His Savior. The way to heaven becomes illuminated so that the believer can see where to step to avoid sliding into the abyss of hell. Paul wrote, *“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God....For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ”* 2 Corinthians 4:4-6.
3. Regeneration – Before conversion, a person does not exist in the kingdom of grace just as before conception he does not exist in the kingdom of power. Rebirth, the second birth, brings the person into the kingdom of grace as a newborn who can take spiritual nourishment. *“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God”* 1 Peter 1:23.
4. Quickening – Before conversion, an individual is spiritually dead and unable to do anything to save himself. Conversion makes the sinner alive spiritually so that he/she can serve the LORD. Paul wrote, *“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins”* Colossians 2:13.
5. Changing the human will – Before conversion, people’s wills are self-centered and captive to Satan. They seek their desires by toiling in his service. Conversion replaces self-focus with Christ-focus within the human will. The person realizes the real purpose of life is to be joined to the LORD. *“I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart”* Jeremiah 24:7.

C. Conversion of children

1. Sinful from the beginning – If someone has a genetic defect, he/she has had it since conception. It was passed from the parents to the child. In the same way original sin is passed from the parents to the child. Children are therefore sinful from the moment they exist. David wrote, *“Surely, I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me”* Psalm 51:5.
2. Able to know from the beginning – The ability to believe and to understand what is necessary to be saved begins at birth, perhaps even before birth. Faith is not a matter of reason but a condition of the heart and soul. We understand neither how faith exists in a child nor in an adult. Paul wrote, *“How from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”* 2 Timothy 3:15.
3. Able to fall away from the beginning – Anyone who believes can fall away from faith. This is also true of children, which is why just baptizing them and ignoring their spiritual growth until they are older is as dangerous to their souls as not giving them physical food is to their bodies. Those who do not train their children in the Word of the LORD are guilty of spiritual genocide. Jesus said, *“And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck”* Mark 9:42.

D. The Means of Grace

1. The purpose of the Law
 - a. Without the Law that is written in our hearts and that is preached by the Christian church, people would not realize that they were not doing what the LORD wanted. There would be no standard for what sin is. Paul wrote, *“We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin”* Romans 3:19-20.
 - b. The Law tells not only of sin but also that sin has guilt attached to it that will be punished by God. The fear of this punishment forces people to deal with the reality of an angry God. Paul wrote, *“All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law”* Galatians 3:10-11.
2. The purpose of the Gospel
 - a. The “good news” of the Gospel is that the punishment of sin has been lifted from mankind because the guilt of sin has been transferred to Christ. God’s wrath is no longer directed at us. *“The next day John [the Baptizer] saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’”* John 1:29.
 - b. Because the LORD is no longer angry with us, we no longer need to fear Him, so the Gospel brings comfort. We are assured that the LORD will take care of our every trouble. *“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins”* Isaiah 40:1-2.

- c. As forgiven children of God, we are heirs of His heavenly kingdom. There we will share His kingly glory. Paul wrote, *“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.

3. Baptism

- a. The Bible teaches a water Baptism, in which water is applied with the Word of God to effect or strengthen faith. No other baptism is indicated for general use in the Scriptures. Luke recorded, *“And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him”* Acts 8:38.
- b. Without the Word of God, applying water only removes dirt from the skin. With the Word of God, it cleans the soul of all sin and works faith. *“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’”* Acts 2:38.

4. Lord’s Supper

- a. Bread and body – To nourish our souls the LORD has given us His very body that died for us on the cross. He conceals this in bread which is consecrated with His word. *“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body’”* Matthew 26:26.
- b. Wine and blood – He also nourishes our souls with His own blood which was shed for our salvation. This He conceals in the consecrated wine. *“Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’”* Matthew 26:27-28.
- c. Within the sacrament is the power of the LORD both to strengthen faith in the believer but also to hold the unbeliever guilty of affronting God by coming to His table unprepared to receive God’s gift. Paul wrote, *“Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself”* 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.

E. The means of grace applied

1. Sufficiency of the means of grace

- a. The Scriptures give us everything that we need to know so that the Holy Spirit can work and maintain saving faith in our hearts. Paul wrote, *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”* 2 Timothy 3:16-17.
- b. The saving message is effective because of the power of the Holy Spirit, not because of the cleverness of the messenger or any magic associated with the words. Paul wrote, *“My*

message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power; so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" 1 Corinthians 2:4-5.

2. Efficacy of the means of grace

- a. The message of the Gospel has the power to save because the Holy Spirit is associated with the message. Without His presence, the mere words would not convert anyone. Paul wrote, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile"* Romans 1:16.
- b. The LORD's purpose in having His message preached is not always to save souls. It is sometimes a message preached to intensify the judgment upon a group of people. *"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.

3. Work of Holy Spirit can be resisted.

- a. God acting alone – When the LORD acts through His word, nothing can resist His will. He commands and all must obey. The LORD said, *"From ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?"* Isaiah 43:13.
- b. God acting through means – When the LORD acts through agents, such as His pastors, people can ignore and despise what He desires, but they will be judged for their disobedience. Stephen said, *"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!"* Acts 7:51.

4. Why some are saved and not others

- a. Man's sinful nature is universal. All are dead in their sins, and none can be saved without God's intervention. *"As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.'"* Romans 3:10-12.
- b. The LORD's plan of salvation and His desire for all to take advantage of it are also universal. Christ died for all, not just for a chosen few. Paul wrote, *"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 2:4.
- c. Many are lost because they did not hear the message, and many are lost because they rejected the Word when they heard it. Either way, their sins will be held against them on judgment day. *"Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous"* Isaiah 10:22. / Jesus said, *"For many are invited, but few are chosen"* Matthew 22:14.

11. Effects of Conversion

A. Our relationship with God

1. Peace with God

- a. When Adam and Eve sinned, the human race declared war on the LORD. It was a foolish war which mankind could only lose. When people are converted, they receive God's amnesty. Paul wrote, *"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility"* Ephesians 2:14.
- b. The end of the war with God means that there can be tranquility in our lives. The eternal trouble we were facing has disappeared, and our eternal future is guaranteed. Paul wrote, *"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* Philippians 4:7.

2. Inclusion in God's family

- a. Conversion is equivalent to our adoption into the LORD's family. We are no longer slaves of the evil master Satan but are legally children of the loving Father in heaven. Paul wrote, *"So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir"* Galatians 4:7.
- b. As God's enemies, we did nothing to earn this adoption and, in fact, violently opposed it. Despite this, the LORD has taken us as His own. *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"* 1 John 3:1.

3. Access to God

- a. As children in God's house, we are able to come before the LORD, the master of the house, with our requests. Slaves of Satan cannot do that, but they are thrown out of His presence before they can utter a word. Paul wrote, *"In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence"* Ephesians 3:12.
- b. Not only can we ask God for what we need and want, but we can expect that He will reply by giving us what is truly best for our soul's salvation. Jesus said, *"In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name"* John 16:23.

B. Our freedom

1. From sin

- a. Before our conversion we were slaves to all the forces of evil, which dominated us. We are now free to serve the LORD rather than our sinful desires. Paul wrote, *"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin"* Romans 6:6.

- b. This freedom from sin gives us spiritual life. Our conversion that gave us this freedom was a gift of God. Had we done anything, it would not be a gift. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* Romans 6:23.

2. From death

- a. The dead have lost all ability to will and act. Conversion has made us alive spiritually so that we can live with our LORD forever. Jesus said, *“Because I live, you also will live”* John 14:19.
- b. Death has been forced to give us up because it was defeated by someone stronger than death. We are Christ’s booty claimed from death when He conquered it. Paul wrote, *“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* 1 Corinthians 15:55-57.

3. From the devil

- a. When we were slaves of the devils, we had no power to save ourselves. Satan could accuse us before the LORD and know He would send us to hell. Satan can no longer accuse us because Christ has taken away our guilt before God. *“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved 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 8:37-39.
 - b. We no longer need to fear that the devil will somehow reclaim us and destroy us. We can rejoice even when he troubles us, knowing that soon we’ll be with the LORD in heaven. *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* James 4:7.
4. From the Law – The Law was Satan’s weapon against us. He uses it to drive us to try to attain perfection and then ridicule us when we fail. Because Christ has fulfilled the Law, we receive Christ’s righteousness at our conversion. The Law can no longer be used to accuse us. *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death”* Romans 8:1.

C. Our life

1. New life

- a. Our new self was created in us at our conversion to replace the evil self that was enslaved by the devil. Our new self is in harmony with our creator. Paul wrote, *“You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator”* Colossians 3:9b-10.
- b. Our new self desires to do the will of the LORD, that is, to bear fruit that is pleasing to God. This replaced our evil self which sought its own aims and therefore opposed the will of the LORD. Jesus said, *“The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in*

his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks” Luke 6:45.

- c. The good fruit borne by the new self is only possible because of the continual influx of the power of the LORD by the workings of the Holy Spirit through word and sacrament. Jesus said, *“No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” John 15:4.*

2. Growing sanctification

- a. The new self in us is continually being challenged by the old self who refuses to give up the struggle to control us. Supported by the devil and his allies, the old self battles the new self on every issue. *“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” Romans 8:22-23.*
- b. Unlike justification, sanctification is an ongoing process. We must always strive to conform our lives to the LORD’s will, knowing that we will fail again and again and not reach perfection in living until we reach heaven. Paul wrote, *“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” Philippians 3:12.*

D. Persistence in the faith

1. Repentance

- a. Because we daily sin often, we need to daily repent of our sins and seek the comfort of knowing our sins have already been forgiven. *{If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”¹ John 1:8-9.*
- b. Someone who is “continuously converted” is someone who is in the state of grace. The conversion effected by the Holy Spirit continues to be valid within the person. *“Then he [Jesus] said to them all: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” Luke 9:23.*

2. Christians can fall from faith

- a. While Christians live in this world, the demons continually try to drag them back into the camp of Satan. They lay various snares to catch people and take their lives captive. Paul wrote, *“Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” Romans 8:12-14.*
- b. Even well-trained Christians can fall away if a temptation comes along that allures them so strongly that they are unprepared to resist it. Thus, such men as Abraham and David were drawn away from the LORD when Satan attacked their weaknesses. Paul wrote, *“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!” 1 Corinthians 10:12.*

- c. The Christian life is a life of discipline. When people stop their training in the word of God or grow tired of the routine of church, they will soon find themselves out of the competition for the heavenly prize. *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training”* 1 Corinthians 9:24-25.
- d. One of Satan’s most effective tools is to convince people that they can and/or must do works of righteousness for their salvation (i.e., synergism). The more pride a person has, the easier it is to spring this trap. Paul wrote, *“You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace”* Galatians 5:4.

3. Repeated conversion

- a. When believers sin, they always need to repent. When believers adhere to their sins, they lose their faith and need to be reconverted to faith again, either from inner remembrance of the previously learned Word of God or from hearing again the call to repentance. Jesus said, *“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’”* Luke 15:17-19.
- b. Not all sins, even public sins, lead to a loss of saving faith. If they did, Christians could never be certain if they would be saved because they might die before repenting of a sin. *“Peter replied, ‘Man, I don't know what you're talking about!’ Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly”* Luke 22:60-62.

4. Restoring the fallen – our Christian responsibility

- a. Some of the Christians at Galatia had fallen for the teachings of the Judaizers. Because this meant that they trusted to some extent in their own works, they were no longer in the kingdom of God. They had fallen from faith through weakness. Paul wrote, *“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel”* Galatians 6:1.
- b. When David started his romance with Bathsheba, he knew he was sinning, but he kept up the activity because he had stopped caring about whether he was pleasing God. He was in rebellion against God. *“Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.’” ...Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD.’ Nathan replied, ‘The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die’”* 2 Samuel 12:7,13.

E. Dangerous sins

1. Sin of hardening

- a. When sinners refuse to listen to the Law and claim it does not apply to them, they are hardening their hearts against God. They can also harden their hearts against the Gospel if they refuse to believe that Christ died to pay for all their sins. Hardening inhibits the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote, *“As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, “In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation”* 2 Corinthians 6:1-2.
- b. After people begin hardening their hearts and do so for long enough, God may complete the job by making it impossible for them to respond to the means of grace. Moses recorded, *“But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses”* Exodus 9:12.

2. Sin against the Holy Spirit

- a. When a person comes to know the work of the Holy Spirit and vigorously sets his heart against it (i.e., blasphemes it), then the Holy Spirit can no longer work on that heart. Because the person has cut off the only way that saving faith can be created, this sin is unforgivable. Jesus said, *“And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come”* Matthew 12:31-32.
- b. The sin against the Holy Spirit can only be committed by active opposition to the work of the Holy Spirit on the part of someone who knows His work. It can never be committed by a Christian or an ignorant unbeliever. *“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out”* Isaiah 42:3.

F. Certainty of faith – How can I be sure that I will remain a believer?

1. It is only through the power of the LORD that anyone comes to faith or remains in faith. God's power is overwhelming so that nothing can overcome it and snatch us from His hand. Paul wrote, *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”* Romans 8:35.
2. If the LORD allows trials to come upon us, He will also create a way for us to deal with the problems. He will not leave us on our own to face the onslaught of Satan. Paul wrote, *“God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it”* 1 Corinthians 10:13.

12. European Assaults on Conversion

A. *Opinio legis*

1. Natural law – When the LORD created man, He wrote into man's heart His unchanging Law. When man sinned, the Law in the heart began to be corrupted by the devil and the things of this

world. This corrupted law, the natural law, still guides people's actions because the conscience and the devil use it to accuse people of their transgressions of the natural law.

2. Natural law defense – The human mind responds to these accusations with *opinio legis*. In effect, the mind tries to develop an argument from the natural law that it is not sufficiently guilty of transgressing that law to deserve any punishment, certainly not severe punishment. It argues that it is willing to work with God to remove any obstacles that exist to its salvation and is perfectly capable of contributing what it must do to satisfy God. Paul wrote, *“When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them”* Romans 2:14–15.

B. Pelagianism

1. Teachings

- a. Adam was mortal, doomed to die even if he had not sinned. Scriptural rebuttal: The LORD said, *“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”* Genesis 2:16–17.
- b. Adam's sin only affected him; it did not corrupt the human race. Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, *“Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”* Romans 5:12.
- c. At birth all people are in the same state as Adam was at creation. Scriptural rebuttal: David wrote, *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me”* Psalm 51:5.
- d. People can keep God's Law perfectly. Scriptural rebuttal: John wrote, *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* 1 John 1:8.
- e. The Law is as effective as the Gospel in getting people into heaven. Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, *“For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe”* Galatians 3:21–22.
- f. Unbaptized infants who die will be saved. Scriptural rebuttal: Jesus said, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* John 3:5.
- g. No need for conversion. Scriptural rebuttal: Jesus said, *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned”* Mark 16:16.

2. Pelagianism today

- a. Masonic lodges: Masons, Moose, Elks, Eastern Star, Job's Daughters. These groups are quasi-religious organizations that promote service as a way of life.

- b. Secular (Radical) Humanism. These people believe that human nature can be changed to create an earthly utopia. They are often oriented around Marxist ideas.
- c. Boy Scouts. The scouts are a works-oriented youth organization. "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country."
- d. New Age Movement. These people look for new means of spirituality that can guide and support them in dealing with modern society.

C. Semi-Pelagianism

- 1. Impaired but not dead – Faced with the condemnation of the church, but unwilling to abandon the thesis that Adam's fall did not hopelessly corrupt mankind's nature, the followers of Pelagius after his death decided to make a compromise to gain acceptance. They claimed that Adam's sin had impaired every person's ability so that he could never completely please God, but yet by his natural powers and his intellect, he could make a start at a God-pleasing life which would lead to God embracing his efforts and converting him to salvation through Christ. Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, "*You were dead in the trespasses and sins*" Ephesians 2:1.
- 2. Meeting God halfway – For those who believe in Semi-Pelagianism, everyone can be saved because everyone can make an effort to reach out to God. Those efforts may be tainted by sin, but if they are carried out to the best of man's ability, God is obligated to respect them and reach out to them through Christ either in this life or at the time of judgment. The process is man-driven. Scriptural rebuttal: Jesus said, "*Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing*" John 15:5.
- 3. Condemned by the church – The Synod of Orange in 529 condemned Semi-Pelagianism as being incompatible with the Christian faith.

D. Synergism

- 1. The teaching – In a synergistic relationship two entities work together for the benefit of both of them. In its Christian application, synergism means that God and a person work together to convert and/or justify the person. God must make the first move because the corruption of sin is so great that man cannot reach out to God. Once God has taken the first step, however, man can respond and help to complete the process. The process is God-driven. Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, "*By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast*" Ephesians 2:8–9.
- 2. Eastern Orthodoxy – The Eastern Orthodox churches have always tolerated or encouraged the synergistic view of salvation. There are threads of it in the early writings of the Greek fathers of the church. It is encouraged by the obsession with icons in the Orthodox church, as veneration of these is to help fulfill a person's part of the process of justifying his/her soul so God will take it to heaven. Scriptural rebuttal: The LORD said, "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God*" Exodus 20:4–5.
- 3. Roman church

- a. Initial struggles – The Roman church struggled with the doctrine of original sin for centuries. The supporters of Augustine believed that man was totally depraved, the Semi-Pelagianists argued that man was minimally impaired and could be led to prepare his heart for Jesus, and the synergists argued a middle position that man was heavily impaired but still capable of responding to grace if offered by God.
- b. Council of Trent – The Lutheran Reformation forced the Roman church to unify behind one of the doctrinal positions. It chose synergism because that position gave the church the greatest ability to control its members. The pope could define what was needed to satisfy the human portion of the salvation requirement and change the needed deeds to meet his goals.
- c. As time has passed, the Roman church has also accepted the Semi-Pelagian position in an effort to appear tolerant to other religions. The church still maintains that effort from the Roman Catholic Church is necessary to effect salvation, but that action no longer requires an active faith in Jesus to offer at least some hope of salvation.
- d. Conversion versus justification – While the Roman church has long favored synergism in its teaching of justification, it has also brought synergism, at least to a limited extent, into its teaching of conversion. For a long time, this was not an issue in Europe because everyone joined the church when baptized as an infant. The Roman church adapts to the cultural mores by morphing its doctrines.

4. Distinction between Semi-Pelagianism and Synergism

- a. Both are partnerships between man and God for justification and/or conversion.
- b. Semi-Pelagianism is man-driven, man making the first move.
- c. Synergism is God-driven, God making the first move through giving “prevenient grace,” which will be discussed in the next session.

E. Partitioning the universe

- 1. Things of God (God’s space) – The nature of the LORD God Almighty is beyond our ability to comprehend. Those things touching on the attributes of the LORD we cannot understand, and we must take them solely by faith based on revelation. They do not need to make sense to the human mind, and we can only suffer harm by trying to learn more about them than the Scriptures teach. Examples of the things of God are the workings of the Trinity, creation, predestination, conversion, and the incarnation.
- 2. Things of the world (man’s space) – The things of this world are those things which are involved in our daily living while here on earth. These things can be understood by the human mind, and logical decisions can be made about them. Examples are employment, marriage, laws of nature, and government.
- 3. Role of the church

- a. Protestant view – The Lutheran and Reformed churches view the ministers of the church as being ambassadors of God. They are to proclaim the message of God – both the Law and the Gospel. They have no special power of making laws or representing people before God. Jesus said, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”* Matthew 28:19–20.
- b. Catholic view – The Roman church views its role as being one of dealmaker between God and man. The bishops, and supremely the pope, believe that they can set articles of faith on behalf of God and that they can negotiate on behalf of individuals to mitigate God’s wrath. Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, *“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all”* 1 Timothy 2:5–6.

F. Calvinism

- 1. Total depravity – Calvin, like Luther and Augustine, believed in original sin and the total depravity of all people. All mankind therefore was lost without acceptance of God’s plan of salvation. *“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment”* Isaiah 64:6.
- 2. Irresistible grace – Because the LORD God is almighty, Calvin argued that if He wanted to save someone, that person would be converted and preserved in the faith regardless of the person’s actions. Because only the Holy Spirit can bring people to faith and He is irresistible, therefore God did not want to save anyone who was not elected. By doing this, Calvin inserted human logic into God’s space. Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, *“For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?”* 1 Corinthians 7:16.
- 3. Preservation of the saints – Finally, Calvin taught that because no one can snatch the elect out of God’s hand, once a predestinated person believed, he or she could never lose their faith, even if they lost their focus on Christ. Moreover, those people who were not predestined to salvation could never believe and be children of God, no matter how sincerely they may have believed during parts of their lives. Because many baptized children were subsequently lost to the faith, baptism could not bring them into true faith or they could not be lost. Once again, Calvin inserted human logic into the things of God. Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons”* 1 Timothy 4:1.

G. Melancthon and synergism

- 1. Predestined to faith – Luther, Calvin and Augustine thought that men who were predestined by God “to faith” were predestined to believe because God had chosen them for some reason internal to God.
- 2. Predestined in view of faith – Melancthon came to believe that Luther’s position effectively said that God was showing partiality toward some people. He therefore argued that there had to be some difference among men which caused some to accept the message of salvation and others to reject it. Clearly God saw this and predestined only those who would not resist to the

point of unbelief. Scriptural rebuttal: *“For there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus... Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law”* Romans 3:22–28.

13. False Teachings in America

A. Arminianism

1. Arminius – Joseph Arminius was a Dutch pastor who objected to God being so arbitrary as to choose from eternity to damn some and save others. He therefore moved the cause of salvation from God to man. Scriptural rebuttal: Jesus said, *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit”* John 15:16.
2. Arminianism – In its various forms Arminianism teaches that the decision to be converted and to persevere in the faith is man’s. God looked forward in time and saw who would persist in the faith and predestined only those to be saved. While the Holy Spirit is a powerful force in bringing people to salvation, He will succeed only if people let him in.

B. Pietism

1. Public morality – Herman Francke was appalled at the level of public immorality that existed in supposedly Christian communities. Like the Roman church before it, the Lutheran church had become more interested in “churchly” activities than in teaching the whole counsel of God’s word. Francke therefore thought that a new emphasis on Christian living was essential.
2. Form before substance – Pietists wanted people to feel their commitment to the LORD more strongly, and they soon began emphasizing that one wasn’t really converted until one had an experience where one could sense God coming into one’s life. To get this feeling required preparation, often following routines not unlike those followed in some monastic orders. Only after a person had punished his sinful flesh and felt the power of God within him could he truly regard himself as being within the kingdom of God. Scriptural rebuttal: Jesus said, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’”* Matthew 7:21–23.

C. Conversion experiences

1. Puritanism – Although they were Calvinists, the Puritans placed an emphasis on a convincing event in their lives that showed they were really people whom God had called into His church. People who did not fit the mold were treated with suspicion, excluded, and even persecuted as witches.

2. The Great Awakening – The great awakening of 1740-1742 was caused by several powerful preachers who raised the emotional level of their congregations. Some members claimed that they had stepped up to a new level of Christian faith. This new level soon became the standard by which true belief was judged. Every minister who did not adopt this form of ministry was regarded as “unconverted.” Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, *“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths”* 2 Timothy 4:2–4.

D. The Arminian onslaught

1. Methodism

- a. Predestination based on foreknowledge – John Wesley was the founder of the Methodist movement. Having broken with Calvinism on predestination, he concluded that the reason some are saved and some are lost lies in man. Therefore, God had to predestine based on seeing beforehand who would believe. It was up to each person to believe and therefore determine his own predestination to salvation.
- b. Salvation without means – Unable to accept the damnation of those who were ignorant of Christ, Wesley declared that God had given everyone a “prevenient grace” that permitted the person through his own efforts to put himself into a relationship with God that God would count as sufficient to admit him to heaven. In short, faith in Christ was not necessary for salvation (a Zwingli heresy). Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, *“For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?”* Romans 10:11–14.

2. Revivalism (Second Awakening)

- a. Brainwashing – Revivalist meetings were designed to generate great emotional excitement in those present. Those who did not believe at the beginning of the sessions were pressured in many ways to give up their old ways and to rise to the joy of full commitment to Jesus. People were driven by various stimuli to altered states of consciousness.
- b. Human conversions – Those who practiced this approach to ministry felt that the method rather than the Holy Spirit was the cause of the conversions. Those who effected many conversions therefore had the best method and were the best servants of God. Doctrine meant little, and visible changes caused by conversion were the measuring stick for success. Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, *“No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit”* 1 Corinthians 12:3.

C. The Americanization of conversion

1. Denial of total depravity

- a. Roman view – The Roman Catholic church has maintained its view that man has not been totally corrupted, and that baptism removes original sin, leaving only a concupiscence that man can overcome by good works and the help of the Roman church. It has expanded its claim of who it can help to include all Christians, as well as Jews and Moslems.
 - b. Baptist view – The Baptists and Pentecostals also believe that original sin is only a weakness that needs not be dealt with until a person reaches the age at which they can decide consciously to sin. Moreover, because humans can strive against this concupiscence, it is possible to achieve perfection in this life. Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out”* Romans 7:18.
2. Decision theology – The belief that people are saved by making a decision for Christ is the natural consequence of rejecting that the LORD’s methods of predestining and converting the elect are something in God’s space that cannot and need not be understood by mankind. If humans influence God, then they must have a role in their coming to faith. If they have to have a role, then they cannot come to faith until they are capable of playing that role. Young children must therefore be sinless. People must therefore be given the opportunity to play their role as soon as they are old enough, and repeatedly thereafter, so that they can make the decision that God will have foreseen and therefore have predestined them. Scriptural rebuttal: Paul wrote, *“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned”* 1 Corinthians 2:14.
 3. Universalism – Because of the growing belief that there is a certain core of human rights that apply to all people in the world, one of those rights in the eyes of many people is the right to eternal salvation, in whatever way salvation is defined by a particular group. Any group that denies that salvation is universal is therefore regarded as being against the common human heritage and consequently radical. Some religious groups have actively embraced this teaching, while many hold it as an active possibility. Scriptural rebuttal: Jesus said, *“For many are called, but few are chosen”* Matthew 22:14.

Conclusion

A. The certainty of conversion

1. Hopelessness of self-reliance – If a person is totally helpless, he will not be able to do anything to help himself. Sin has made us totally helpless, in fact, spiritually dead. We will not find the least bit of strength within us to meet God half-way or any of the way. Moses recorded, *“The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time”* Genesis 6:5.
2. Completeness of redemption – Because our salvation cannot rely to the smallest extent on ourselves, Christ has done everything for us. It is a done deal by an Almighty God. Who can prevent Him from doing His will? *“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.

3. Conversion as the work of Holy Spirit – Because conversion is completely the work of the Holy Spirit, when He does it, it is done. There is nothing remaining for us to get wrong. *“I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh”* Ezekiel 11:19.

B. Doubts about conversion

1. Searching for a Savior – People desiring a “conversion experience” are looking for something that is not necessary and that God has not promised. It is an example of putting God to the test, expecting Him to give us what we want. Such searching directs us away from our Savior. Jesus said, *“So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it”* Matthew 24:26.
2. A culture of independence – Two pillars of Americanism are self-reliance and the belief that we have a right to have it our way. Both of these attitudes are contrary to the teachings of the Scriptures which call on us to rely on the LORD with our whole heart and accept His ways. *“Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them--the LORD, who remains faithful forever”* Psalm 146:3-6.