

Foreword

This issue of the *Quarterly* will be a combined issue including Volume 42 #2 and #3. It will include the spring and summer issues.

Have you wondered how to teach the doctrine of predestination to an adult confirmand? Not many instruction manuals include a special section on election. Maybe there's the fear a new Christian will become confused and have doubts. Does this person need more training in the basics before being confronted with solid meat? Could part of the reluctance (if there is one) result from the need for a model for instruction — a plan on how to present this great and wonderful mystery — that God chose people to believe in Christ and have everlasting life even before the world began?

These are the issues with which Professor John Moldstad deals in his dissertation on *The Inspired Paradigm for Presenting the Doctrine of Election*, written in partial fulfillment of the requirements for his STM degree. It is an informative study of the doctrine of election which is filled with comfort for the Christian.

The imprecatory psalms and sections of Scripture like them are some of the most troublesome to the non-Christian and even to many Christians. Imprecatory psalms call down the vengeance and judgment of God upon one's enemies. Rev. Mark DeGarmeaux in his essay, *The Imprecatory Psalms and Christ's Command to Love One's Enemies*, speaks to the relevance of these psalms in a Christian's life. The essay was originally written for the Iowa Circuit Pastoral Conference in 1988, but it has special significance today in light of the events of September 11. Rev. DeGarmeaux is the chaplain at Bethany Lutheran College.

Pastors have a special responsibility to speak out against public evil. By virtue of their profession they are public speakers. By virtue of their call, like it or not, they are spokesmen for their congregations, for their church body, for the Christian faith, for God. This is the point of the essay entitled *Speaking Out Against Public Evil Properly*, written by Rev. Karl Anderson. Rev. Anderson is the

Contents

The Inspired Paradigm for Presenting the Doctrine
.107

of Election

John A. Moldstad, Jr.

The Imprecatory Psalms and Christ’s Command to
184

Love One’s Enemies

Mark DeGarmeaux

Speaking Out Against Public Evil Properly
. 199

Karl J. Anderson

Book Review:

THE INSPIRED PARADIGM FOR PRESENTING THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

by John A. Moldstad, Jr.

Outline

- I. Theological Presuppositions Necessary for a Proper Examination of the Doctrine of Election
 - A. The consequences of original sin
 - B. Universal atonement
 - C. Regeneration and the preservation of faith
 - D. The Means of Grace

- II. The Immediate and Wider Contexts of Romans 8 & 9

- III. Analysis of Romans 8:29-39
 - A. Verses 29-30 (The *locus classicus* for predestination)
 - B. Verses 31, 32 (The highest security assurance)
 - C. Verses 33-36 (The inseparable connection)
 - D. Verses 37-39 (More than conquerors)

- IV. The Discussion of Israel's Election in Romans 9
 - A. Verses 1-5 (Israel's rejection)
 - B. Verses 6-9 (Not the fault of God's Word)
 - C. Verses 10-13 (The example of Jacob and Esau)
 - D. Excursus on Romans 9:13
 1. Calvinism ruled out
 2. What is meant by "hated"?

3. Consequential will of God
 - E. Verses 14-16 (The Paramountcy of God's mercy)
 - F. Verses 17, 18 (The example of Pharaoh)
 - G. Verses 19-21 (The Creator's prerogative)
 - H. Verses 22, 23 (Two kinds of vessels)
 - I. Verses 24-29 (Gentiles and Jews—both in the elect)
 - J. Verses 30-33 (The righteousness of works contrasted with that of faith)
 - K. Summation: Election is attributed always and only to the grace of God as shown in Christ Jesus
 1. No room for *aliquid in homine*
 2. Rules out any *intuitu fidei* view
 3. Realization of one's election in the Means of Grace
 4. Salvation certainty: *gratia universalis* and *sola gratia*
- V. The Position of the Lutheran Church in Light of Romans 8 and 9
- A. A look at article XI of the Formula of Concord
 - B. Cyriakus Spangenberg's series of sermons
 - C. Later errors among some of the Lutherans
 - D. Ever present dangers
 1. Rome's uncertainty
 2. Calvinism and Arminianism/synergism
 3. Misunderstanding of Luther's *Bondage of the Will*
- VI. Conclusion

Introduction

The guest professor hurriedly entered the classroom. He already was five minutes late for his lecture. After his customary "Good morning," he immediately launched into his well-prepared

speech on molecular and thermodynamic processes related to metabolism and muscle contraction. Suddenly it dawned on him that the faces in this university classroom were expressing great surprise and bewilderment. Pausing for a moment, he acknowledged a raised hand. “Uh ... Professor, is it possible your class is waiting for you in the next room? This is Biology 101, and the group next door is Biophysics 313.”

It helps to know your audience. If that is true in the realm of secular or scientific knowledge, how much more is it the case in the realm of spiritual knowledge! What pastor would plan to conduct his first session with the 7th grade confirmation class explaining the three *genera* of the communication of attributes in the personal union of our Lord Jesus Christ? There is a time and place for everything. This is especially the case in presenting the scriptural doctrine of election or predestination.¹

We may use the following as a working definition of the doctrine of election: The teaching of election is **“the truth that God from eternity has in his mercy chosen people to eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, and that this faith is worked in them by means of God’s Word and sacraments.”**²

When the Apostle Paul wrote, “We ... speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing” (1 Corinthians 2:6), he was indicating a sharp distinction between an audience of believers and an audience of scoffers. But he was doing more. He was drawing attention to the important nature of the topic. He was speaking of “God’s secret wisdom,” the Gospel of salvation by faith in Christ, which he calls “a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began” (1 Corinthians 2:7).

Just as the Gospel itself cannot be known by anyone without the Spirit, so also the teaching that God elected people to come to faith and be saved eternally cannot be known — that is, accepted — by anyone without the Spirit. “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” (2:14). In teaching the doctrine of predestination, the pastor or teacher will want to make every effort to lay the proper groundwork, so that it is presented in its scriptural light as a teaching of comfort and great assurance for all who have

been brought to faith in the Lord Jesus.

Purpose of this study

The aim of this thesis will be to show from Paul's letter to the Romans how the doctrine of election is a most comforting and assuring doctrine, since it continually drives the believer to see God's mercy in Christ as the sole source and reason for his salvation. The Apostle Paul's methodology in discussing predestination serves as the paradigm for the way scriptural instruction should be conducted on this subject.

Paradigms or models are popular today. One example is the paradigm of supply and demand in the business world where upstart companies can be watched for maximum performance over a period of years as they struggle to find a need and fill it. People like to observe patterns or proven methodology from which they can learn what to expect in the future. The paradigm we observe in the following study is, however, in a category by itself. Like paradigms in the business world, a pattern of instruction can be seen. But unlike other paradigms, this one is inspired. It is a pattern of instruction put forth in the unchanging, infallible, inerrant Word of God. This unique paradigm especially is found in Paul's epistle to the Romans, chapters 8 and 9.

Procedure

In our exegetical review of these two important chapters in Romans:

(1) We will take a look at the theological presuppositions necessary for a proper examination of the doctrine of election. (2) We will want to note carefully the wider and immediate contexts of chapters 8 and 9 before doing a careful analysis of the verses. (3) We will summarize what we have learned from Paul's instructional paradigm, focusing also on the way Paul's words were understood by our Lutheran confessors.

I. Theological Presuppositions

In order to see the doctrine of election for the comfort it contains, certain presuppositions must be established. The Bible does not present predestination in a vacuum. Before Paul speaks of predestination in Romans 8 and 9, he takes for granted four doctrinal assumptions on the part of his Roman readers:

A. The consequences of original sin (Romans 1 – 3: 20)

Adam and Eve’s transgression in the Garden so infectiously poisoned the entire human race (Psalm 51:5, Ephesians 2:1, Romans 5:18a) that nothing short of eternal damnation now dangles like the sword of Damocles over the head of every man, woman, and child born from sinful parents. The effects of original sin on the lives of humans are evident — to a degree — by observing vices characteristic of the heathen but are not so evident in terms of the spiritual devastation common to every sinner, whether Jew or Gentile. Of the heathen Paul writes: “Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things [the evils listed in Romans 1: 29-31] deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve [συνευδοκοῦσιν] of those who practice them” (Romans 1:32). But lest Jews, with whom God first made his covenant, falsely imagine that the effects of sin have eluded them due to a better blood link, et. al., the apostle continues: “All who sin apart from the law [the Gentile heathen] will also perish apart from the law and all who sin under the law [God’s covenant people, the Jews] will be judged by the law” (Romans 2:12). Again, he says: “What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin” (Romans 3:9).

Then, as a master instructor intent on laying the groundwork for eliminating any thought of work-righteousness among his readers — past or present — Paul comes with a list of quotations from the Psalms. His purpose is to prove the guilt of the sinner is not just the result of sinful **actions** against God’s divine precepts but also the result of a **condition** permeating the very soul of the sinner. “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).

Can anyone escape the verdict of guilty in the eyes of God? No. Why? The law of God is so perfect and exacting that it demands **hearts** of holiness, not just careful hands and feet and mouths. God gives his law both by writing it in people's hearts (Romans 2:15) as well as by writing it on tablets at Sinai (Romans 2:17-18). As a result, "we become conscious of sin" (Romans 3:20). In all respects, then, sinners of every stripe "have sinned (aorist: ἥμαρτον) and fall short (note the present tense: ὑστεροῦνται) of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

So thoroughly hopeless is every sinner's spiritual corruption, stemming from the fall of our first parents in Eden, that our Lutheran confessors described it this way:

Original sin is not a slight corruption of human nature, but ... so deep a corruption that nothing sound or uncorrupted has survived in man's body or soul, in his inward or outward powers. It is as the church sings, "Through Adam's fall man's nature and essence³ are all corrupt."

This damage is so unspeakable that it may not be recognized by a rational process, but only from God's Word.⁴

The consequences of original sin are more than merely the evils easily noticed on heathen soil. They are more than just the guilt pangs arising from the pricked conscience of any who transgress God's command to love him before all else and to love one's neighbor as oneself. The effects of original sin go beyond the grave in this life. Yes, "death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12) and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Yet the deadly pall cast over each sinner by nature is even that of a lasting variety: eternal damnation in hell. "The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (Romans 5:18).

Without this presupposition of a deserved and certain condemnation facing every sinner as a result of original sin, there can be no proper understanding of the scriptural doctrine of election; it could never be viewed for the beautiful comfort that it contains. If confusion exists in the area of original sin, the teaching of predestination either will be turned into a tool to tweak built-in screws of work-righteousness or turned into a tool to pry away God's

eternal attribute of mercy. In either case one misses the underlying premise of God's election: God's undeserved mercy toward us sinners freely given to us in Christ, the world's Savior.

B. Universal atonement (Romans 3:24 – 5:21)

In the apostle's inspired paradigm for presenting the doctrine of election, he sets forth no greater presupposition than that Christ's holy life and innocent death at Calvary brought about the world's reconciliation with the heavenly Father. All have been redeemed or bought back to God by the blood of the holy Son of God. After placing all mankind under the condemnation of sin, Paul immediately continues with the same subject "all" and states: "...[All] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).

Ponder for a moment how often the apostle reiterates this point before launching into his explication of the doctrine of election. "For if the many (οἱ πολλοί simply indicates that "all people" mentioned in Romans 5:12 is a very large number) died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many (again referring to all people)" (Romans 5:15). "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men (εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους). For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many (οἱ πολλοί) were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many (οἱ πολλοί) will be made righteous." (Romans 5:18, 19).

It doesn't surprise us that many of the Calvinists have trouble with the "all men" in Romans 5. Calvin's exposition of Romans 5:18 includes this remark: "He makes this favor common to all, because it is propounded to all, and not because it is in reality extended to all..."⁵ John Stott, a familiar Anglican author, also states the Reformed view when he contends: "So in Romans 5 the 'all men' who are affected by the work of Christ cannot refer to absolutely everybody... [T]he scope of Christ's redeeming work, although not universal, will be extremely extensive."⁶

We Lutherans respond by pointing out that Paul clearly states that Christ has “justified the ungodly” (τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἄσεβῆ). God, on account of Christ, actually has **declared forgiven and holy** every sinner in the court of his justice. So completely does God love the whole world! In other words, even apart from the faith absolutely necessary for a person to be saved, Christ’s righteousness has been attributed forensically and objectively to all mankind, i.e., to every person. If a sinner perishes it is only because he refuses this free gift from God—not because Christ’s saving work failed to include him. The apostle John shows this to be not only Pauline theology but the theology of God’s entire Word when he writes: “He [Jesus Christ] 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).

Dr. Martin Luther wrote in his well-known commentary on Galatians: “...Christ has taken away not only the sins of some men but your sins and those of the whole world. The offering was for the sins of the whole world, even though the whole world does not believe.”⁷ This teaching of Scripture comforts the believer. Since Jesus paid for all sins and God declares everyone’s sins forgiven, the Christian can know that Jesus excluded no one from salvation, and that “God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). The Apology of the Augsburg Confession says of Christ, “He was given for us to make satisfaction for the sins of the world and has been appointed as the mediator and propitiator” (Ap IV, 40).

Universal redemption helps dispel any false assumptions concerning the doctrine of election. The test of a true Lutheran is that he accepts universal redemption and a particular election. Since God so loved the world that he also made atonement for the sins of the whole world, how can anyone distort the scriptural doctrine of predestination to postulate that “some are preordained...to eternal damnation”?⁸ Furthermore, the teaching of universal redemption underscores both that our election to eternal life in heaven is **in Christ** (Ephesians 1:4) and also entirely by God’s **grace** (John 15:16; 2 Timothy 1:9).

Therefore no true teacher of Scripture will ever presume to present the doctrine of election without first building on the

comforting assurance of universal redemption and its correlative, objective justification. What is gospel must always be preserved as pure gospel and nothing less!

C. Regeneration and the preservation of faith

Is the faith which apprehends the gospel a two-way proposition or is it a monergistic activity? The vital answer to this question also is part of the necessary groundwork for a proper presentation of the doctrine of election.

In his paradigm the apostle Paul — especially in Romans 3 and 4 — nails down how the righteousness of Christ becomes one’s personal possession solely **by faith** and thus all **by grace**. “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” (Romans 3:22). “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith ⁹ (πίστει, dative of instrument ¹⁰) apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:28). Sandwiched in between the examples of Abraham and David, the apostle clearly delineates that what a person receives by faith is never to be equated with something earned — not even partially earned: “Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:4,5). And in Romans 4:16 we read: “Therefore the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace...”

We must also hold that the whole domain of creating and sustaining faith is monergistic: God’s activity in us. Coupled with a proper view of original sin, **divine monergism** is the only way new life (regeneration) can come to deadened hearts. It also is the only way in which faith can be true grace. If faith were an activity in man partly caused by man’s own powers, even to some remote degree, then we would have to exclaim: “Grace would no longer be grace!” (Romans 11:6). Faith in the heart of a Christian is worked completely by God the Holy Spirit, without any human cooperation (1 Corinthians 12:3). The same holds true for the preservation of faith in the believer (Philippians 1:6; 2:13). Therefore, from start to finish our faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins is God’s gift to us, 100%.

How could a misunderstanding of regeneration and faith

affect one's view of election? Since the doctrine of predestination is realized by us sinners here in time only by faith in Christ's grace, it is imperative that faith be understood only as grace and not as a combined effort on the part of man and of God. Otherwise one cannot avoid having an erroneous *intuitu fidei* approach to the teaching of election. [See section IV. K. 2.]

D. Means of Grace

The final theological understanding basic to a proper view of election is a knowledge of the channel through which the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith: the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacrament. Paul also lays this foundation for his Roman hearers prior to his presenting predestination.

Baptism, for example, receives emphasis as the power of God at work in us: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus (εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν; same preposition used in Galatians 3:27) were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:3, 4). We recall that Luther used this very verse (6:4) as proof for what baptism signifies and means.¹¹ In his Large Catechism the Reformer speaks of baptism's sacramental power: "Thus you see plainly that baptism is not a work which we do but is a treasure which God gives us and which faith grasps, just as the Lord Christ upon the cross is not a work but a treasure comprehended and offered to us in the Word and received by faith."¹²

Before leaving this point, we would be remiss if we did not also draw attention to Romans 1:16, 17 where the apostle describes the gospel as the power source for obtaining the righteousness of Christ: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God (δύναμις γὰρ Θεοῦ) for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" Paul's confidence in the Word's power is also reflected in chapter 10: "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 1:17).

Election to eternal life in heaven includes faith in Christ as the Savior. Faith in the Savior necessarily includes the means of grace, through which alone the Holy Spirit operates in working regeneration and the preservation of faith. Therefore a right concept of the means of grace is also imperative to a proper view of the doctrine of election.

II. Context of Romans 8 and 9

Before beginning an exegesis of verses from Romans 8 and 9, let us briefly remind ourselves of the context of Paul's treatment of the doctrine of election in these two chapters.

The Wider Context

The apostle Paul wrote this epistle to a church which he had not founded and had not yet visited. Apparently the church at Rome had existed already for some time (1:8; 15:23; 16:19) before he penned the letter. A good assumption is that Paul writes the Roman Christians from the city of Corinth in 57 or 58 A.D. Several references to the Gentiles in this epistle (1:5, 6; 1:13; 16:3, etc.), as well as Paul's self-descriptive tag, "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles" (15:16), leads us to conclude that this mixed Jewish/Gentile congregation probably had a majority of non-Jewish members.

The purpose of Romans seems to be this: Paul wanted his hearers to have a thorough understanding of the gospel, as well as a thorough commitment to its cause. Romans is Paul's most doctrinal epistle. Was he also writing the letter to instill a missionary spirit among his readers? Since it was Paul's desire to preach the gospel where Christ was not yet known (Romans 15:20), some speculate he was preparing the Roman Christians for his arrival in order to ask for their help in his missionary trip to Spain (Romans 15:24).

Did the Roman believers of both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds get along? It *seems* there was tension at times, or at least the potential for tension. Why else would Paul go to such length to stress that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile? Throughout the letter he insists that the blessings of divine grace are granted to all who believe regardless of their racial origin or background. In chapter 14 in particular he discusses how variations in

food and variations in preference of holy days should not be a source of division among them. “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Romans 14:19).

More than ever, the apostle wants his Roman readers to know and firmly believe how a sinner is justified in the presence of God. After establishing his theme – namely, that **the just shall live by faith** (Romans 1:17, quoting from Habakkuk 2:4) — Paul in chapters 1-4 shows how the righteousness needed for heaven can come only by God’s grace in Christ through faith and not by works of the law. Then, in the four chapters right before Paul begins his discussion of election, he explains how a person who is justified through faith will live in freedom: freedom from God’s wrath (chapter 5); freedom from sin (chapter 6); freedom from the law (chapter 7); and freedom from death (chapter 8).

The Immediate Context

The immediate context of Paul’s treatment of the doctrine of election is the assurance for the Christian not to be worried, for the final day of deliverance is glorious. If the Holy Spirit has brought believers into the special family relationship with Christ, even to the point that they are called co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17), why should there be any reason for them to doubt even when troubles and sufferings invade the present home? Isn’t the glory in the eternal home awaiting every believer so much greater by way of comparison (Romans 8:18)? Doesn’t that thought constantly carry the day for the believer?

The precise lead-in for Paul’s election discussion is Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Notice how the setting is one of pure comfort. No matter what grief comes along in the life of a believer, all of it — yes, πάντα! — works together (συνεργεῖ in present tense, not future) for the good of those “called according to his purpose” (τοῖς κατὰ πρόθεσιν κλητοῖς). Here the expression “called” refers to those who not only hear the gospel message (the invitation, as in Matthew 22:14) but whom God actually brings to faith.

This passage sets the stage for Paul’s comprehensive treatment of the doctrine of election. Far from merely engaging in a

philosophical exercise, the apostle Paul launches into his discussion of predestination as a way to buttress the certainty of God's love and grace. Luther captures the apostle's mood when he remarks: "This doctrine is not so incomprehensible as many think, but it is rather full of sweet comfort for the elect and for all who have the Holy Spirit."¹³

III. Analysis of Romans 8:29-39

A. Verses 29-30 (The locus classicus for predestination)

ὅτι οὐς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισεν συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνης τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς· οὐς δὲ προώρισεν, τούτους καὶ ἐκάλεσεν· καὶ οὐς ἐκάλεσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδικαίωσεν· οὐς δὲ ἐδικαίωσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδόξασεν.

NIV: For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

προέγνω – aor., act. ind., 3rd sg. of προγινώσκω, to foreknow, to know beforehand. This historical aorist is in actuality *ahistorical*, since God's foreknowing is **from eternity**, as we learn elsewhere (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9). We find the same verb form used in Romans 11:2 where Israel as a nation is the object.

Although it is true that God's foreknowledge is distinct from his election, for he knows all things and thus also those who will perish¹⁴ (those not found in his election decree, since election deals only with believers), in this particular verse the reference to God's foreknowledge is virtually tantamount to his election. In other words, here in Romans 8:29 only those who¹⁵ by his gracious plan would believe and come into his kingdom are included in this foreknowing event.

Why are we believers told this? God, in effect, is saying to us: "I already had my merciful eyes on you to take you for my own even before you were ever born!"

προώρισεν – historical aor., act. ind., 3rd sg. of προορίζω, to choose beforehand, to elect ahead of time; literally: to set a boundary around. Six times προορίζω appears in the New Testament, all of which make reference to a decree from God (Romans 8:29, 30 – election; 1 Corinthians 2:7 – God’s wisdom; Ephesians 1:5, 11 – election). Under his discussion of Ephesians 1:5, Irwin Habek remarks: “The root of προορίσας [the aor. ptc.] is ὄρος, boundary. The picture which it evokes is that of being held within limits so that we do not veer to the right or left but head straight for a goal. With the prefix προ it tells us that God’s plan concerning us was formed in advance, before we had set foot upon this earth.”¹⁶ Not only did God *know* with eternal foresight the salvation of the elect, he also in his grace *chose* from eternity people to be holy like his Son (συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνης τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ = conformed to the likeness of his Son) and have everlasting life.

εἰς τὸ εἶναι – This purpose clause (w. ACI construction) indicates that in God’s plan of election he intended from eternity to have Jesus Christ, our Brother, come into this world and die for sinners, so that by faith in him we would have new spiritual birth — birth with lasting effects for eternity!

ἐκάλεσεν – historical aor., act. ind., 3rd sg. of καλέω, to call; here: to call to faith. As the next links in this chain of God’s actions indicate, God’s “call” here includes the Spirit’s miraculous work of bringing us to faith.¹⁷

ἐδικαίωσεν – historical aorist, act. ind., 3rd sg. of δικαίω, to declare righteous, to justify, to acquit. Since Paul earlier confirmed the fact that God justified the world (Romans 4:4; 5:18,19), and since here in 8:30 he is speaking of the elect whom he called to faith, we note he is using the term “justified” in a subjective (not objective) sense. In the course of time God calls his chosen ones to faith in Christ; that is, he has them know and firmly believe that, for Christ’s sake, they are declared personally righteous. As with all of the aorist indicatives in this series, attention must be given to the subject: **God himself** does the justifying.

ἐδόξασεν – aorist, act. ind., 3rd sg. of δοξάζω, to glorify. Better than the

gnomic classification¹⁸ is Wallace's "proleptic aorist."¹⁹ He rightly states: "The glorification of those who have been declared righteous is as good as done from Paul's perspective."

Heaven is the final goal for God's elect: the blissful, timeless abode in resurrected, glorified bodies with the merciful Elector. "[By] the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, [the Lord Jesus Christ] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21).

Summary: Verses 29 and 30 of Romans 8 serve as the *locus classicus* for the doctrine of predestination. God has chosen people to life everlasting. He chose them to come to faith in his Son. A person's election is realized here in time by believing in Christ as the one whose saving work gives us the gift of forgiveness of sins which alone justifies. From beginning to end — from election prior to faith until the time the believer experiences the glories of heaven — Christians are to know with comforting certainty that God alone is the agent of salvation. No wonder believers in Christ have nothing to fear!

B. Verses 31-32 (The highest security assurance)

Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν πρὸς ταῦτα; εἰ ὁ θεὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, τίς καθ' ἡμῶν; ὅς γε τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐφείσατο, ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πάντων παρέδωκεν αὐτόν, πῶς οὐχὶ καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα ἡμῖν χαρίσεται;

NIV: *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

οὖν – The inferential particle ("therefore") makes what follows the result of God's actions that the apostle has expounded in vv. 28-30 ("in reference to these things," πρὸς ταῦτα).

ἐροῦμεν – fut. ind., 1st pl. of λέγω; used in a rhetorical question.

This is a deliberative future only in the sense that it occurs in a rhetorical question. There is nothing in doubt about the answer. In fact, the series of questions which here follow is what could be called a “declaration of defiance.”²⁰ With the use of the first person plural the apostle personalizes the dogma just expounded. He would have us all ponder what great joy and confidence this brings to the heart of every believer.

τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ – The argument is from the greater to the lesser: If God did not spare *his own Son* in demonstrating his love for us, why should we think there would be any blessing he would withhold from us—both for time and eternity? Paul had posed a similar argument in chapter 5 of this epistle: “Since we have now been justified through his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!” (v. 9). There, as here, he contrasts the present state we are in (justified by Christ’s blood) with how it will be for us on the day of judgment — delivered from God’s just anger and given eternal happiness.

ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πάντων – We should not overlook the importance of this phrase. It clearly states the substitutionary nature of Christ’s saving work. [The reader is directed to an excellent discussion by D. Wallace (see next footnote) on the use of the prepositions ὑπὲρ and ἀντί in soteriologically significant texts in the Greek New Testament. He writes: “It is our conviction that ὑπὲρ is naturally suited to the meaning of substitution and is in fact used in several passages dealing with the nature of Christ’s atonement.”²¹

πῶς οὐχί – By introducing the rhetorical question in this fashion, the answer expected is in the affirmative.

χαρίσεται – fut. dep., 3rd sg. of χαρίζομαι, to give freely or graciously. This verb carries “the implication of good will on the part of the giver.”²² (Other examples of this verb can be found in Galatians 3: 18 and Philippians 2:9.)

Summary: With God so much on our side that he even has foreordained us to be the elect by faith in his Son, and not only that, but sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins; how shall we fail, through

faith in Christ, to be partakers of every blessing imaginable? Put it like this: If a child in a family began wondering about the love and protection he or she has from a parent, wouldn't the parent's sacrificing himself or herself on behalf of the child go a long way to dispel doubts or fears concerning that love? God, our heavenly Father, has given us—his dear children by faith—the highest security assurance ever so that no foe can prevail against us! Remember Dr. Luther's familiar refrain:

...And take they our life,
 Goods, fame, child and wife,
 Let these all be gone,
 They yet have nothing won;
 The Kingdom ours remaineth” (ELH:250).

C. Verses 33-36 (The inseparable connection)

τίς ἐγκαλέσει κατὰ ἐκλεκτῶν θεοῦ; θεὸς ὁ δικαίων· τίς ὁ κατακρινῶν; Χριστὸς [Ἰησοῦς] ὁ ἀποθανῶν, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐγερθεὶς, ὅς καὶ ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅς καὶ ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν. τίς ἡμᾶς χωρίσει ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Χριστοῦ; θλίψεις ἢ στενοχωρία ἢ διωγμὸς ἢ λιμὸς ἢ γυμνότης ἢ κίνδυνος ἢ μάχαιρα; καθὼς γέγραπται ὅτι Ἐνεκεν σοῦ θανατούμεθα ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν ἐλογίσθημεν ὡς πρόβατα σφαγῆς.

NIV: *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

τίς ἐγκαλέσει κατὰ ἐκλεκτῶν θεοῦ; – Literally: “Who shall bring a charge against the elect ones of God?” This is the most basic rhetorical question in Paul's list. For all of the other rhetorical questions boil down to this one: Can even our worst enemy, the devil (the accuser), make his darts of charges against us stick to our slate as it is held up

before the holy God? The obvious answer is: “No way!” God calls the shots. In his grace of electing us and bringing us to faith in Christ, we can be sure that — for Christ’s sake — he blots out our sins and remembers them no more (Isaiah 43:25). Our slate is spotless and clean, wiped pure by the blood of Christ!

ἀποθανών (aor.)... ἐγερθείς (aor.)... ἐστίν (pres.)... ἐντυγχάνει (pres.)
 – Who cannot be moved by the tenses? From the historical aorists describing Jesus’ death and resurrection we proceed to the current scene of our Savior today. In his state of exaltation he *is* at the right hand of God and this means he constantly *intercedes* for us.

In what way, we might ask, does Jesus’ intercession differ from that of the Holy Spirit’s (Romans 8:26)? For our answer we point to 1 John 2:1, 2. Not only does Jesus (as does the Holy Spirit) intercede in respect to prayer (Hebrews 4:15, 16); he also stands as our advocate (John uses παράκλητον) before the Father’s throne as we, who in weakness continue to sin, draw strength again and again from his powerful death (Hebrews 10:10) and resurrection.

We happily agree with C. Hodge (despite his Reformed view of Jesus’ ascension) when he says of Christ’s intercession at the right hand of the Father here in Romans 8: “Christ continues since his resurrection and exaltation to secure for his people the benefits of his death; everything comes from God through him, and for his sake.”

23

χωρίσει – future act. ind., 3rd sg. of χωρίζω, to separate. Referring to the etymological root of this verb (from χώρα, space), A. Robertson asks: “Can anyone put a distance between Christ’s love and us?”
 24 Typically the –ίζω verbs stress the energy expended for a given action. No matter how hard someone (τίς, the interrogative “who”) or something (τί, “what,” is not stated by Paul but assumed; see next phrase) works at attempting to separate the elect from Christ (variant: God), this can never happen. “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28).

ἡμεῖς – Notice how the apostle includes his readers and himself in the

election plan. He does this while not yet having visited the Roman congregation in person. With the Thessalonian congregation — a group of Christians that he had seen — this is also apparent. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 he writes: “...God chose you” (εἴλατο ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός).

Can we learn from this? Certainly the apostle was well aware of difficulties in the congregations to which he wrote. He knew that not all of the members were of the same level in their spiritual understanding (Romans 14:1ff.; 1 Thessalonians 5:13, 14). Yet Paul says that they were chosen by God and therefore nothing could separate them from Christ’s love. How could he say this? How can any pastor today say this about the flock he has been called to serve? The people he was addressing accepted the preaching of the gospel. They professed faith in their Savior. The apostle, therefore, regards them as elect and deals with them accordingly. True undershepherds today will want to do the same.

τοῦ Χριστοῦ – subjective genitive. Paul is not speaking here of *our* love for Christ, which can vacillate — sinners that we are. Only *Christ’s* love for his elect (no less than his love for the entire world!) is where the stability lies.

Summary: The implied answer to the rhetorical questions is an obvious “Nothing!” Nothing at all can separate his chosen ones from the Lord Jesus. So, what happens when the afflictions in verse 35 *do* fall on the believers? A. Panning’s remark is appropriate: “Paul doesn’t give the Romans, or us, any assurance that things like trouble, hardship, persecution, or famine won’t happen. Rather, he operates with the assumption that they will happen. He cites Scripture to support his point. With this quotation he’s saying, our situation is exactly like the one the psalmist wrote about in Psalm 44:22: We’re like sheep being led to the slaughter. Nor should that surprise us. Jesus told his disciples: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and *take up his cross* and follow me’ (Matthew 16:24)”²⁵

The consoling irony behind the psalmist’s (Psalm 44:22)

description—used axiomatically here by Paul — is this: The very fact that Christians are persecuted shows the believers they are of Christ (Hebrews 12:8, 1 Peter 3:12). “For your sake” (“Ἔνεκεν σοῦ”) is emphatic. As a natural result of their connection to God, God’s people bear the marks of persecution — even unto death, if necessary.

D. Verses 37-39 (More than conquerors)

Ἄλλ’ ἐν τούτοις πᾶσιν ὑπερνικῶμεν διὰ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντος ἡμᾶς. Πέπεισμαι γὰρ ὅτι οὔτε θάνατος οὔτε ζωὴ οὔτε ἄγγελοι οὔτε ἀρχαὶ οὔτε ἐνεστώτα οὔτε μέλλοντα οὔτε δυνάμεις οὔτε ὕψωμα οὔτε βάθος οὔτε τις κτίσις ἑτέρα δυνήσεται ἡμᾶς χωρίσαι ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.

NIV: *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.*

ὑπερνικῶμεν – pres. act. ind. of ὑπερνικάω, to conquer exceedingly, to be completely victorious. No future tense is employed. Even right at this moment, every believer in Christ, who by virtue of the God-given faith is to know he/she is one of the elect, is in a victory mode! How can it be otherwise? The connection to Christ is the guarantee! So favorable will be the outcome that the apostle depicts the believer’s life as a race with the eternal crown of victory (Revelation 2:10, 2 Timothy 4:8, 1 Peter 5:4) *hyper-assured!* As someone aptly put it, this is “a holy arrogance of victory in the might of Christ.”²⁶

τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντος – aor. act. ptc. of ἀγαπάω, to love (with an active, selfless love). The aorist is historical. It refers to God’s love in Christ clearly manifested at the time of the incarnation and at the cross which guarantees that we are victors.

Who is the subject of the substantival participle here in verse 37? God? Christ? Depending on the variant back in verse 35, the

immediate antecedent appears to be Χριστοῦ; or possibly the subject of the Psalm quotation (v. 36). Dogmatically there is no difference. God's salvific love for us is always "*favor Dei propter Christum*" (God's love for us on account of Christ).

πέπεισμαι – perf. pass. ind., 1st sg. of πείθω, to persuade; pass.: to be convinced. With the perfect tense (idiomatic with this verb²⁷) the apostle exclaims how the state of his confidence in God's love continues, for it is based on past experience. "The source of confidence is the career of Christ summarized in verse 34: our hope began at Christ's victory at Calvary and is as invincible as Christ's reign in heaven."²⁸ Paul's use of the first person intends to transmit to all of us (ἡμᾶς, v. 39) the staying power of the gospel.

οὔτε ἄγγελοι οὔτε ἄρχαὶ – The NIV renders: "neither angels nor demons," adding with a footnote "or: *nor heavenly rulers.*" It's obvious these angels and rulers are not of the benign type. For, as F. Bruce says: "[T]hose who are well-disposed would not attempt to separate believers from the love of Christ."²⁹ Similar to Paul's hypothetical remark in Galatians 1:8, even if it were possible — which it is not! — for an angel of God to try to lead believers astray, God's elect can trust the faithfulness of him "who began a good work in [them and] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

δυνάμεις – powers, forces. Undoubtedly we have here another reference to angelic designations (1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21; 1 Peter 3:22).³⁰

ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν – Our election by grace is always and only "in Christ." It exists only in who he is and what he has done. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians echoes this very truth: "For he chose us **in him** before the creation of the world... In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons **through Jesus Christ...**" (Ephesians 1:4, 5). Hear also our Lutheran Confessions: "Thus the entire Holy Trinity, God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, directs all men to Christ, as to the Book of Life, in whom they should seek the eternal election of the Father. For this has been decided by the Father from eternity,

that through Christ, as He [Christ] Himself says, John 14,6: *No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.* And, again, John 10, 9: *I am the Door; by Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved.*”³¹ So much is our election and our security of that election tied up in Christ, that God chose his Son to be the redeeming sacrifice before the world’s creation — **before time began** (1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8).

In light of the bold promises of the apostle, a natural question arises: Is Paul denying that people can believe for a span of time and yet fall away before they die (Ezekiel 18:24-26)? Answer: No. These words are speaking of the elect. These comforting words apply to the believer according to the new man,³² for each Christian is to know with certainty that he/she is of the elect. There is no reason ever to think otherwise. Election is always in/through Christ. Faith in Christ saves. When one is trusting in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting, he/she is — by the very definition of faith (Hebrews 11:1) — to be **confident** that nothing can sever the harmonious relationship with God as it has been accomplished through Christ. The warnings about falling from faith, which are indeed real (contrary to Calvin’s “once saved always saved”), are addressed to the Christian as a warning not to fail to use the means of grace — the gospel in word and sacrament — which is the way God preserves him in faith. Since Christians are at the same time saints and sinners until death, they must hear both warning (the Law, as in Ezekiel 18) and comfort and confidence (the Gospel, as here in Romans 8).

G. Stoeckhardt offers this excellent³³ explanation of Romans 8:

[T]his is a certainty that belongs to all the elect children of God. All who read these words should say with the apostle: ‘I am persuaded,’ etc. In these words speaks the comfort which St. Paul gives to suffering Christians. Had he wanted to limit this certainty to his own person, he would take away from them all comfort. In accordance with love he regards all Christians, to whom he is writing, as true children of God, as elect. And for that reason he does not have the least doubt that God will

consummate their faith.³⁴

Summary: Verses 37-39 form a powerful antidote for any believer who is tempted to doubt salvation because of the awareness of his/her sin. One can't help wondering if Martin Luther was thinking of this section of Romans when he made his defiant retort, "But I am baptized! And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body."³⁵

By holding to Christ's vicarious satisfaction for all sins, as this gift is presented in Word and Sacrament, the believer can know with 100% assurance: I am — by God's grace — one of the elect. Therefore, what can ever divide me from him and his great love? Absolutely nothing! How tremendously good God is to want this fact sealed in our hearts.

IV. The Discussion of Israel's Election in Romans 9

The Transition

For the connection of thought between chapters 8 and 9, one must look again at Romans 8:29, 30: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." Here Paul unequivocally mentions that God has a chosen people.

Considering his Roman audience's mixture of Jews and Gentiles, the question easily would surface: If God has a chosen people, just as in the time of the old covenant (a chosen nation — Israel), then what is God's relationship to Israel **now**? Has Israel's predominant rejection of Christ as the Messiah proven that God's promises on election cannot be trusted or — even worse — be faulted? And how does God's plan of using the Jews' rejection to bring the gospel to the Gentiles fit into the doctrine of predestination?

Chapter 9 shows Paul delicately balancing Israel's fall in light of the purpose of God's election. What shines through is his emphasis on how God's mercy **still** suffices and is extended to Jew

and Gentile alike. Here particularly we find the inspired paradigm for presenting the doctrine of election. Paul's methodology centers on God's mercy and grace at all times.

A. Verses 1-5 (Israel's rejection)

Ἀλήθειαν λέγω ἐν Χριστῷ, οὐ ψεύδομαι, συμμαρτυρούσης μοι τῆς συνειδήσεώς μου ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ, ὅτι λύπη μοί ἐστιν μεγάλη καὶ ἀδιάλειπτος ὀδύνη τῇ καρδίᾳ μου. ηὐχόμην γὰρ ἀνάθεμα εἶναι αὐτὸς ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα, οἵτινές εἰσιν Ἰσραηλῖται, ὧν ἡ υἰοθεσία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ αἱ διαθήκαι καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία καὶ ἡ λατρεία καὶ αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι, ὧν οἱ πατέρες καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὧν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

NIV: I speak the truth in Christ — I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit — I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

οὐ ψεύδομαι – “I am not lying.” Paul wants to make sure that his readers understand his sincerity on the issue he is about to discuss. Since Paul had left Judaism, might any from Jewish background question his love for the Jews (Acts 21:21ff.)? With an oath-like formula, the apostle wants to set the record straight. The genitive absolute (συμμαρτυρούσης . . .), as attendant circumstance, also adds punch to the veracity of what he is about to say.

ὅτι – not causal but declarative: “that.” Following the ὅτι is the declaration of what continually is on Paul's mind as he brings his prayers before the heavenly Father.

μεγάλη καὶ ἀδιάλειπτος – adjectives: “great and constant,” modifying ὀδύνη. Paul isn't employing hyperbole here. In fact, verse 3 expresses

just how deeply in his heart (τῇ καρδίᾳ, locative dative) he feels about the wide-spread rejection of Christ on the part of his fellow Israelites.

γάρ – explanatory. The reason for his unusually deep sorrow is now made apparent.

ἠὺχόμην – imperf. dep. ind., 1st sg. of εὖχομαι, to pray, wish. Wallace classifies this as a “voluntative” or “tendential” imperfect (an unattainable wish): “I could almost wish...”³⁶ We cannot help but think back to the way in which Moses expressed similar desires in his relation to the pre-Messianic nation of Israel (Exodus 32:32). Talk about empathy! The apostle is so set on their repentance, that he goes to the extreme of being willing to trade places (if that were possible) with his own people headed down the inevitable path to eternal doom. Luther says, “It seems incredible that a man would desire to be damned, in order that the damned might be saved.”³⁷ So much does the “missionary to the Gentiles” ache for the conversion of his own national relatives from the loins of Abraham (κατὰ σάρκα)!

ὦν ἡ υἰοθεσία – J. Edwards provides a powerful summation of these words:

Who else could claim **adoption as sons** (Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9; Hosea 11:1)? What other people had beheld **the divine glory**, the very presence of God in theophanies (Exodus 3:2ff.; 24:10), in the desert (Exodus 13:21-22), in the temple (1 Kings 8:29; Ps. 11:4), and in the ark of the covenant (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2)? With what other nation had God entered into **covenants**, first with Abraham (Gen. 15:17f.), later with Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:5) and on the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy 29:1) and in the promised land (Joshua 8:30f.), and finally with David (2 Samuel 7:21ff.)? What people could boast of **receiving . . . the law**, the Torah, Israel’s crown and eternal instruction? Was not **temple worship** ordained and pleasing to God (2 Chronicles 7:11ff.; Ps. 11:1)? Did not God make **promises** to the **patriarchs**, to Abraham (Genesis 12:7), Isaac (Genesis 26:3ff.), Jacob (Genesis 28:13ff.), and David (2 Samuel 7:12)? Not surprisingly, Israel’s crowning hope was the advent of the final deliverer of the ages. Truly, “salvation is

from the Jews” (John 4:22). And why does Paul rehearse this glorious heritage? To magnify the mystery that Israel, who had been arrayed so divinely, had in the end rejected its crown! ³⁸

θεός – While the NIV gives the traditional (KJV) rendering in the main text (“Christ, who is God over all...”), a footnote shows the way in which other English versions (RSV, Phillips, NEB, LB) take the punctuation: “... Christ, who is over all. God be forever praised! ... Christ. God who is over all be praised!” The UBS editors reveal some antichristological colors by sharing their reason for opting not to go with the NIV/KJV preference for the punctuation: “[I]n the opinion of the majority of the Committee, none of these considerations [namely, the forementioned reasons supporting the KJV rendering] seemed to be decisive, particularly since nowhere else in his genuine epistles does Paul ever designate ὁ Χριστός as θεός. In fact, on the basis of the general tenor of his theology it was considered tantamount to impossible that Paul would have expressed Christ’s greatness by calling him God blessed for ever.” ³⁹ How blasphemous to say this of Paul! We hastily reply: Does not the apostle unambiguously indicate in numerous places that Jesus is indeed fully God ⁴⁰ (Colossians 2: 9; 1:19; Titus 1:3,4; Romans 8:9, where the Spirit of God is equated with the Spirit of Christ, etc.)?

We could also note that Erasmus in his third edition of his New Testament manuscript in 1522 disputed the orthodox punctuation of Romans 9:5. But, as P. Schaff says, he was viewed as having a “leaning to Arianism,” for he had once made the comment: “The Father is very frequently called God, the Son sometimes, the Holy Spirit never.” ⁴¹

Summary: By letting his readers in on his innermost thoughts and detailing his frustrations, the apostle isn’t trying to evoke some kind of sympathy for himself. Instead, without saying it, he impresses on his Jewish and Gentile readers the urgency to join him in fervent prayer for the return of Israel. He wants his Jewish kinsmen who do not yet believe in Christ to stop and ponder the goodness of God toward the Jewish nation. He hopes to arouse an interest. He wants

them to see the serious consequences of rejecting the Messiah, the Christ. Furthermore, doesn't God's goodness in Israel's history prove that God himself could never be blamed for Israel's obstinacy?

Oh, if only all Christians would have this kind of deep yearning for the lost! Indeed, we can imagine similar Pauline thoughts in the hearts of hundreds of graying Christians today who agonize over their own grown children's indifference to the Word of God. Shortly before death a wealthy Christian gentleman in his early sixties confided to this writer while serving as his pastor: "Pastor, I know you will have an opportunity to talk with my family at the time of my funeral. Please let them know how much I want them to return to the Lord. That would mean more to me than all the material blessings they have received in their lives."

B. Verses 6-9 (Not the fault of God's word)

Οὐχ οἶον δὲ ὅτι ἐκπέπτωκεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ. οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραήλ, οὗτοι Ἰσραήλ· οὐδ' ὅτι εἰσὶν σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ, πάντες τέκνα, ἀλλ', ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα. τοῦτ' ἔστιν, οὐ τὰ τέκνα τῆς σαρκὸς ταῦτα τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας λογίζεται εἰς σπέρμα· ἐπαγγελίας γὰρ ὁ λόγος οὗτος, Κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον ἐλεύσομαι καὶ ἔσται τῇ Σάρρα υἱός.

NIV: *It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."*

Οὐχ οἶον – Literally, "not as such" or "by no means." The idiom οὐχ οἶον δὲ ὅτι, best rendered "but it is not as though," derives from a mixture of οὐχ οἶον and οὐχ ὅτι ("not as if").⁴²

ἐκπέπτωκεν – perf. act. ind., 3rd sg. of ἐκπίπτω, to fall off; to fail; to become ineffective. “As a technical naval term it means to be driven off course, to drift, to be cast ashore, because of inability to follow the course on which one has set out.”⁴³ The perfect tense suggests that the Word failed to accomplish its purpose with the **continuing** result that Israel rejects Christ. The apostle corrects this way of thinking. Does Israel’s rejection mean that God’s plan for his ship (the church) has gone off course? No, God’s plan — His Word of promise — has not failed (Isaiah 55:11). When man rejects, all “credit” for the rejection goes to sinful man, never to God and his Word.

οὐ γὰρ πάντες – The γὰρ is explanatory. What constitutes a Jew? race? religion (Judaism)? birth in the geographical region of Palestine? In the eyes of God, says Paul, the true people of Israel (meaning, “striving with God,” Genesis 32:28) are those who have the **faith** of Abraham and not just his blood descendants. Jesus had said: “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56).

Earlier in his epistle the apostle gave a more thorough explanation of what he says here. “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly (ἐν τῷ φανερωῷ), nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly (ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ); and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God” (Romans 2:28, 29).

We see that faith in Christ as the Savior was/is always presupposed in the designation “true Israel.” In fact, the term “Israel” is used in the New Testament to describe not only believing Jews but the entire holy Christian church — both Jew and Gentile Christians (Galatians 6:16; 1 Corinthians 10:18). We note how the *sedes* for the universal priesthood of all believers depicts the church much like the Israel of old: “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).

“Israel First” millennialists mistakenly believe that there will

be a mass conversion of all Jewish people at the end of time. But here Paul speaks of **all believers in Christ** — Jew or Gentile — who constitute the whole church that actually will go into heaven, the elect. One need only look ahead to Romans 11:25, 26⁴⁴ to observe how Paul employs the expression “all Israel.” There we find him speaking of Israel’s “hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”

ἐπαγγελίας (v. 9) – fem. n., appositional gen.; “the promise.” Although anarthrous in v. 9, this noun is definite as seen from the previous verse; it is in the emphatic position and the quality is stressed: the *promise*, namely, the one given Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18 — was a one-sided covenant in which God would do everything with no conditions for Abraham to fulfill. God promised he would give them a son through whose line the Messiah one day would come. To show the full import of this gospel promise, one need only read Paul’s allegorical use of the factual Genesis account as found in Galatians 4:21-31.

Summary: People could easily wonder if God’s word lacked power, since the people of Israel by and large had turned their backs to the gospel of Christ. But Paul stresses how the *real* children of Abraham are those not from the vantage point of human ancestry but from the vantage point of believing the promise. Faith in the promise of God to send a Savior was always the heart and center of the definition of a true Israelite. Pondering what Jesus said of Nathanael (“Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false,” John 1:47), Lenski rightly concludes: “[W]e cannot reduce this word of Jesus to mean merely that Jesus sees the character of the man Nathanael; we must elevate it to mean the character and quality of his being an Israelite, a man who is absolutely sincere about Israel’s hope and salvation, so sincere that he does not allow the mention of Nazareth to turn him away from Jesus.”⁴⁵

With Paul’s reference to the births of Isaac and Ishmael to prove how God’s choice (predestination) does not depend on man, his progression to the illustration of Rebekah (vv. 10ff.) becomes readily apparent. Unlike the case of Isaac and Ishmael which involved

separate mothers, this one involves twins coming from the same womb. Yet, the point is the same: God is always fully in control in making his choice, without any contribution on the part of man.

C. Verses 10 – 13 (The example of Jacob and Esau)

Οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ Ῥεβέκκα ἐξ ἑνὸς κοίτην ἔχουσα, Ἰσαὰκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν· μήπω γὰρ γεννηθέντων μηδὲ πραξάντων τι ἀγαθὸν ἢ φαῦλον, ἵνα ἡ κατ' ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις τοῦ θεοῦ μένη, οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος, ἐρρέθη αὐτῇ ὅτι Ὁ μείζων δουλεύσει τῷ ἐλάσσονι· καθὼς γέγραπται, Τὸν Ἰακώβ ἠγάπησα, τὸν δὲ Ἡσαὺ ἐμίσησα.

NIV: *Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad — in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls — she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

οὐ μόνον δέ – “and not only”; the NIV has: “not only that.” The subject of this clause is either the promise just cited in the previous verse, or — more likely — the person of Sarah (v. 9). In other words, by this extra example, we are to note how “God’s sovereignty is being illustrated even more in the case of Rebekah.”⁴⁶

ἐξ ἑνὸς κοίτην ἔχουσα – literally: “having sexual intercourse from one man;” idiom: “being pregnant” from one; ἑνὸς and Ἰσαὰκ belong together.

γεννηθέντων . . . πραξάντων – genitive absolutes (1st – aor. pass.; 2nd – aor. act.); the clause is a preliminary temporal circumstantial. In this instance, both sons were born of a free woman (Rebekah) and neither involved the help of a concubine or bondwoman (e.g., Hagar). Yet, before their birth and before their being involved in any activity, God chose to have the older serve the younger (v. 12). Luther states: “It did not help Esau that he descended from so good a father and from

so good a mother and that he was conceived and born according to the flesh in wedlock so undefiled; indeed, it did not benefit him at all that he was the first-born. How much less will it benefit the unbelieving Jews who are born so long afterwards, that they are the sons of the patriarchs according to the flesh, if they continue in unbelief, that is, if they are not elected by God.”⁴⁷

ἵνα – purpose. The purpose/plan of God here is that Jacob and not Esau would be the one through whom the Messiah would come.⁴⁸ [We view κατ’ ἐκλογὴν to refer not to the doctrine of election *to salvation*⁴⁹ (although it is used to illustrate such), but as the election *pertaining to the saying* which Rebekah had received, i.e., the older would serve the younger.⁵⁰] God had chosen Jacob’s lineage (the people of Israel) to be a blessing to all nations via the advent of the Savior, the long awaited Seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15).

καλοῦντος – pres. act. ptc. of καλέω, to call; used as substantive with the definite article. God, **the one who calls** (notice the present tense; gnomic), is the only cause for Jacob’s being picked. This is in contradistinction to what the world would imagine, namely that it is by works (i.e., he was the better of the two sons) — to some degree at least.

ἐμίσησα – aor. act. ind., 1st sg. of μισέω, to hate. Lenski seems to vacillate between classifying the aorist as constative or historical. We opt for the latter, since it refers to “the two individual acts when God took Jacob and did not take Esau.”⁵¹ In the original citation (Malachi 1:2, 3) reference is made to the two nations — Israel and Edom — which came from the respective twins. But here the apostle uses the verse from Malachi to speak of the twins personally. Yet, notice that election to heaven is not in the illustration itself. It is in the immediately following context that Paul discusses the doctrine of predestination.

We do not know whether Esau died as an unbeliever. Does Esau’s reconciliation with Jacob and also his mention at the burial of his faithful father imply that his life had undergone a spiritual change?⁵²

Summary: With an even stronger example from the history of ancient Israel, the apostle shows that the sovereign God is totally in control and is not influenced by any merit or goodness in man regarding the extension of his mercy. What did either one of the twins do to earn God's favor? Just as Jacob and Esau did nothing to effect the fact that God chose to give the birthright blessing to Jacob (it was a choice made before they were born or did anything good or bad), so all of us were chosen from eternity (Ephesians 1:4) by the One who calls apart from any human works (Romans 9:12). Similar to the way none of us can lay any claim to merit when it comes to birth as American citizens, so also in the matter of election no human element can enter the discussion. Only the mercy of God prevails.

D. Excursus on Romans 9:13

“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

1. Calvinism ruled out

The citation from the prophet Malachi (1:2,3) is used by J. Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as an illustration of the way — according to the Geneva reformer's faulty teaching — God from eternity chose some to eternal life and chose others to eternal death.⁵³ So strongly did Calvin hold to his doctrine of “double predestination” that he even castigates any believer who would call this into question. He says: “The predestination by which God adopts some to the hope of life, and adjudges others to eternal death, no man who would be thought pious ventures simply to deny.”⁵⁴

But is Paul saying here in Romans 9:13 that Esau is an example of the short end of the stick in such an alleged divine “double election”? Certainly not! Already in this epistle, as we noted earlier (cf. discussion on p. 6 under the heading “Universal atonement”), God not only through his apostle lets us know that he loves all (and **all** means **all, including the ungodly**), but, even more importantly,

he had his Son – the Christ – die in the place of **all**: “Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men” (Romans 5:18). “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).

So, if the apostle is **not** hinting at any “double predestination” by his quotation from Malachi, why does he use it? He uses the quote simply to confirm the statement that “the older will serve the younger” (9:12b). It was God’s sovereign choice to go with Jacob as the one through whom the Messianic promises would be fulfilled. Basically Paul asks rhetorically: “So, since this is the case, who can question God on how he chooses to dispense his mercy for man’s temporal life, or — more importantly — for eternity?”

2. What is meant by “hated”?

Hodge and others maintain that the *evmi,shsa* should be understood: “I did not love as much” as the other, by way of comparison. He says: “[I]t is evident that in this case the word *hate* means *to love less, to regard and treat with less favour.*”⁵⁵ But does this do justice to the actual meaning of the Greek term? A. Panning observes: “The problem with this interpretation is that when one arbitrarily softens the meaning of *hate* to something less, the degree of its opposite partner, *love*, is also called into question... A better explanation is to let both terms have their full meaning and see in them the twofold quality exhibited by a loving and merciful God who is also just and holy.”⁵⁶

A good suggestion for obviating the difficulty is to note carefully how the Malachi quote (Malachi 1:2, 3) is being used by Paul. With the Malachi reference he reminds the Romans that the **historical developments** showed that the older did indeed serve the younger. The context of the Malachi citation proves to Israel historically how God loved her in contrast to what happened to Edom (cf. Malachi 1:3b) and what would continue to happen to Edom (Malachi 1:4, 5). The quote in Malachi is not about **why** God chose one and not the other, but the **result** of that choosing. Coming after the statement

in Romans 9 about the result (older serving the younger), it simply confirms that this certainly was the result. The *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* appears to support this understanding:

Here, at the beginning, [Malachi] illustrates the love of God by contrasting the lot of the nation Israel, the descendants of Jacob, with the fate of the nation Edom, the descendants of Esau, who had occupied the neighboring high hill country to the south of the Dead Sea. The judgment of God lay heavy on that bitter and vindictive enemy of Israel (cf. Ob; Psalm 137:7; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 35; Amos 1:11-12). The high fortress-land lay waste; and, above all, Edom had no future. No bright Messianic hope lightened her dark sky. The fate of Edom points up the fact that the Lord who loves Israel has the power to implement his love: *Great is the Lord, beyond the borders of Israel! (5).*⁵⁷

3. Consequential will of God

The Bible plainly tells us that the will of God is that all people be saved by coming to a knowledge of Christ Jesus as the one and only Savior (1 Timothy 2:2). At times theologians have labeled this the “antecedent will” of God.⁵⁸ Scripture also exhibits a “consequential will” of God, in so far as God’s anger inveighed against sin and unbelief must correspond to his attributes of holiness and justice. The Lord through his prophet Hosea railed against Israel’s rebellion: “Because of all their wickedness in Gilgal, I hated (שנא) them there. Because of their sinful deeds, I will drive them out of my house. I will no longer love them; all their leaders are rebellious” (Hosea 9:15).

Distinguishing between the antecedent and consequential will of God does not imply that his love for each and every individual in the world is **not** eternal; it is steadfast (Isaiah 54:10). But when sinners reject God’s steadfast love, as it has been revealed in the universally redemptive work of Christ, there is a divine consequence. “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but **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).

As for the Lord hating Esau . . . , this in no way disturbs our Christian faith, but rather confirms it, that He is God, accountable to no man, and that especially in his infinite mercy He will not be

mocked. . . By His sovereign will to hate and to harden whom he will, the solemn warning is given to us and to all men that we harden not our own hearts by receiving His grace in vain, lest He Himself harden us and make an end of us making us vessels of wrath fitted for destruction...⁵⁹

E. Verses 14-16 (The paramouncy of God's mercy)

Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; μὴ ἀδικία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ; μὴ γένοιτο· τῷ Μωϋσεῖ γὰρ λέγει, Ἐλεήσω ὃν ἄν ἐλεῶ, καὶ οἰκτιρήσω ὃν ἄν οἰκτίρω. Ἄρα οὖν οὐ τοῦ θέλοντος οὐδὲ τοῦ τρέχοντος, ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἐλεῶντος θεοῦ.

NIV: *What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he 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.*

ἐροῦμεν – deliberative future (Wallace⁶⁰). Purposefully the apostle asks the question about God's justice, knowing that man's **logic** assumes a doubtful response. But he does so only to follow quickly with his patented μὴ γένοιτο (That could never be!).

οἰκτιρήσω – fut. 1st sg. act. ind. of οἰκτίρω, to pity, to have compassion on. In this quotation from Exodus 33:19, the verb's meaning parallels that of ἐλεέω. But the synonym is even a little stronger. In classical usage the sense of οἰκτίρω reflects both the mere feeling of pity as well as the merciful action.⁶¹

Notice what is conspicuously absent in the passage from Exodus. No mention is made of the opposite. Only God's mercy is spoken of. The thought that God does not have mercy on any individual person or group of humanity is not entertained.

ἄρα οὖν – inferential particle plus the transition: "consequently then." Drawing the deduction from the stark reference in Exodus, one can only conclude that God's mercy alone with no added ingredient is what rules and pervades the gamut of divine intervention in human affairs.

θέλουτος – pres. act. ptc. used substantivally with the article: “the one who wills.” Paul negates the fact that any human will-power or even a hint of decision theology plays into the equation of God sending his favor when and how he does.

τρέχουτος – pres. act. ptc. also used substantivally: “the one who runs.” Added to the matter of will-power, also the active and strenuous participation of man is ruled out.

Summary: Why is it an absurdity — no, blasphemy! — to think of blaming God for any person’s situation in life? As depicted by the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), God’s “pay” always is predicated on his sheer **mercy**. God’s grace and mercy is for all; it is non-discriminatory.

Carrying this over to the discussion on election, we can only say this: We cannot probe the *Cur allii prae aliis* (Why some and not others?). But we can be certain that everyone who believes and is saved owes all to God’s **grace alone**; those lost in unbelief “owe” their loss to sin itself and their own refusal to believe.

F. Verses 17, 18 (The example of Pharaoh)

λέγει γὰρ ἡ γραφή τῷ Φαραῶ ὅτι εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐξήγειρά σε ὅπως ἐνδείξωμαι ἐν σοὶ τὴν δύνάμιν μου, καὶ ὅπως διαγγελῆ τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῆ. ἄρα οὖν ὃν θέλει ἐλεεῖ, ὃν δὲ θέλει σκληρύνει.

NIV: *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.*

λέγει – “(it) says.” We find it interesting that Paul personifies the scriptural citation (Exodus 9:16) as if it were God himself. In Exodus 9:16 God speaks directly to Pharaoh.

Εἰς – prep. denoting purpose. The ὅπως clause provides the further explanation.

ἐξήγειρα – aor. 3rd. sg. act. ind. of ἐξεγείρω, to raise up. We take the aorist here as historical. In the history of his people God saw to it that this specific Egyptian leader came on the scene to accomplish God’s own purposes.

ἐνδείξωμαι – aor. 1st sg. mid. subjunc. (in purpose cl.) of ἐνδείκνυμι; to show, demonstrate. As God shows his power, Scripture pointedly says this was done *in* Pharaoh (ἐν σοὶ) not *against* Pharaoh. Lenski remarks, “The divine purpose of raising Pharaoh to Egypt’s throne was that God ‘might show forth his power in him.’ . . . This is not mere omnipotence or omnipotence set over against mercy but omnipotence serving mercy”⁶² [namely, for the sake of his people, Israel].

διαγγέλῃ – aor. 3rd sg., pass. subjunc. (in purpose cl.) of διαγγέλλω, to proclaim far and wide. The compound verb (διά as an intensifier, or — shall we say — “extensifier!”), together with the unlimited sphere (“in all the earth”), emphasizes God’s universal purpose of having the Gospel spread as a result of his dealing with Pharaoh. When God hardens, he always does so with a saving purpose in mind.

ἄρα οὖν – logical conclusion drawn.

σκληρύνει – pres. (gnomic) 3rd sg., act. ind. of σκληρύνω, to harden. In a two-part essay originally published in 1912 and in 1913 in the *Theologische Quartalschrift* (vol. 9, No. 4 and vol. 10, No. 1), and now available in the English,⁶³ J. P. Koehler addresses thoroughly “The Teaching of Scripture Regarding Hardening.” Apropos of this verse he writes:

Men harden themselves, and then the time comes that God so governs them that they no longer get over this condition of hardening; he hardens them. That becomes especially clear with Pharaoh when his conduct rises against God’s definite command which had been delivered to him through Moses and Aaron. The judgment that men are confirmed in their hardening by God, kept in it, and given over to it is always preceded by the fact that they

have hardened themselves. ⁶⁴

Out of the 20 times in Exodus where the hardening of Pharaoh is described, ten report that Pharaoh hardened himself. It was the completion of the fifth plague where **God's** hardening of Pharaoh occurs (Exodus 9:12). "God's hardening of him was a judicial act, abandoning him to his own stubbornness, much as God's wrath against the ungodly is expressed by 'giving them over' to their own depravity (1:24, 26, 28)." ⁶⁵

Summary: The reader of Romans may wonder how the incident of Pharaoh serves to highlight the **mercy** of God. The answer to this is found in the way God planned and shaped the results of the obstinacy of Pharaoh. God used the evil of Pharaoh for the good of his people. He used Pharaoh's hardening to accomplish his inscrutable purpose and will of having his name broadcast far and wide. The psalmist reminds us of God's providential hand directing the affairs of his people: "*For he remembered his holy promise given to his servant Abraham. He brought out his people with rejoicing, his chosen ones with shouts of joy; he gave them the lands of the nations, and they fell heir to what others had toiled for — that they might keep his precepts and observe his laws*" (Psalm 105:42-45).

Yes, we find the promise of Romans 8:28 hovering over the scene in Egypt long ago: "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*"

G. Verses 19-21 (The Creator's prerogative)

Ἐρεῖς μοι οὖν, τί [οὖν] ἔτι μέμφεται; τῷ γὰρ βουλήματι αὐτοῦ τίς ἀνθέστηκεν; ὦ ἄνθρωπε, μενοῦνγε σὺ τίς εἶ ὁ ἀνταποκρινόμενος τῷ θεῷ; μὴ ἔρεῖ τὸ πλάσμα τῷ πλάσαντι, τί με ἔποίησας οὕτως; ἢ οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν ὁ κεραμεὺς τοῦ πηλοῦ ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ φυράματος ποιῆσαι ὃ μὲν εἰς τιμὴν σκευός, ὃ δὲ εἰς ἀτιμίαν;

NIV: *One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did*

you make me like this?’’ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

ἑρεῖς – The second person singular is used to set up a scenario by a supposed unenlightened reader, a reader appealing only to reason. The NIV properly reflects this. Paul sets up the argument for pedagogical purposes.

οὖν – not so much inferential but transitional: “then”

γὰρ – explanatory. The apostle explains his opening polemical question.

μέμφεται – pres. 3rd sg. dep. ind. of μέμφομαι, to blame, find fault with. The subject is God. Although there is no stated object, it is understood either as “Pharaoh” or “one like Pharaoh” or “us.” If God is in control, if he is sovereign in exercising his mercy, then why should any of his creatures be blamed when something doesn’t go right? Paul knows this is the key question that the rational mind of sinful man wants to pursue.

ἀνθέστηκεν – perf. 3rd sg. act. ind. of ἀντίστημι, to stand against, to resist. With the perfect tense here, we prefer to render: “maintains a stand against.” The assumption is that no one ever has and no one ever will be able to resist God’s will and “get away with it.”

ὦ ἄνθρωπε – “O man. . .?” In typical Pauline fashion the rebuke is given (2:1, 3).

μὴ ἐρεῖ – A negative answer to the question is expected. How foolish it is for the created object to be so bold as to challenge the maker!

οὐκ ἔχει – Now an affirmative reply is expected. Obviously, the potter has a right to do with his lump of clay precisely what he wants to do with it. How much more isn’t this the case with God and his creation? Again, the theme of God’s sovereign will is underscored.

εἰς – prep. denoting purpose. The second εἰς prepositional phrase (“for dishonor”) is what raises the concern. Calvinists misuse the

illustration when they attempt to find in it the implication of a predestination to damnation. The picture of the potter with his clay pottery should not and cannot be forced to go beyond what is intended. Even the Reformed dogmatician and exegete, Charles Hodge, properly says of this verse: “It is not the right of God to create sinful beings in order to punish them, but his right to deal with sinful beings according to his good pleasure, that is here, and elsewhere, asserted.”⁶⁶

Summary: Like the prophet Isaiah, Paul shows the absurdity of a dialogue between a pot and its maker when the pot forgets its proper place. Isaiah had written: “You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘He did not make me’? Can the pot say of the potter, ‘He knows nothing’?” (Isaiah 29:16) Keeping the focus on God’s saving mercy, F. F. Bruce offers this helpful summation: “God is not answerable to man for what he does. Yet He can be relied upon to act in consistency with his character, which has been disclosed supremely in Christ. With such a God to trust, why should any of His people question His ways?”⁶⁷

H. Verses 22, 23 (Two kinds of vessels)

εἰ δὲ Θέλων ὁ θεὸς ἐνδείξασθαι τὴν ὀργὴν καὶ γνωρίσαι τὸ δυνατόν αὐτοῦ ἤνεγκεν ἐν πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ σκεύη ὀργῆς κατηρτισμένα εἰς ἀπώλειαν, καὶ ἵνα γνωρίσῃ τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ σκεύη ἐλέους, ἃ προητοίμασεν εἰς δόξαν . . .

NIV: *What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath — prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory . . .*

εἰ δὲ – interrogative use⁶⁸ of εἰ: “but if.” The NIV’s way of handling the transitional question is good: “What if?”⁶⁹ Paul isn’t trying to sidestep deep questions concerning election. However, he wants his readers to ponder what God’s sovereignty really means.

Θέλων – pres. act. ptc. (circumstantial) of θέλω, to wish, to desire.

We treat it concessively: “although willing...”⁷⁰ The NIV has “choosing.” The problem with “choosing” is that one might assume that a scenario for double predestination is postulated. But again, what we have in the first part of this verse is the consequential will of God: his bringing punishment on “vessels” which have repudiated his love.

κατηρτισμένα – perf. mid. (or pass.) ptc. of καταρτίζω, to restore, mend; in middle: to prepare (in the sense of “make, create, form” — not in the sense of “decide or determine beforehand”). In the perfect tense the word can mean “ripe.”⁷¹

A careful exegesis must lead one to take issue with the NIV on its handling of this verb.⁷² For one thing, the NIV in going with “prepared” does not differentiate between what this verb means by “prepare” and what προητοίμασεν in verse 23 means. An important distinction is being made. [See the note on προητοίμασεν below.]

Secondly, the form can be either middle or passive, so context will have to decide. Translations with a Reformed bias (e.g., NIV) tend to take the participle as a passive, treating God as the agent in preparing or fitting such vessels for destruction. If, however, as is grammatically proper and in view of the context (two different verbs are used), one goes with the middle, the rendering would be: “prepared themselves for...” or “were in a state of ripeness.”⁷³ This acknowledges (as also learned from the *analogy of faith* hermeneutical principle⁷⁴) that these “vessels” (created human beings) were “fitted for destruction” (KJV) through their own doing. The GWN version reflects this well: “...those who had prepared themselves for destruction?”

Wallace argues that the middle voice⁷⁵ “seems to fly in the face of grammar (the normal use of the voice and tense), lexeme, and context.”⁷⁶ Yet, even if the translator opts for the passive voice (against this writer’s preference), Paul’s contextual juxtaposing of the two different verbs indicates that the responsibility lies entirely with the unbelievers in bringing on their own destruction.

καί – (v 23) ascensive: “especially” (God’s ultimate goal).

ἵνα – purpose.

γνωρίση – aor. subjunc. (with ἵνα) of γνωρίζω, to make known. The aorist in a purpose clause points out what the doer of the main verb wants to happen.

δόξης – appositional genitive. *God's glory* (with def. art. and αὐτοῦ) is what is to be made known.

προητοίμασεν – aor. 3rd sg. act. ind. of προετοιμάζω, to prepare beforehand, to make ready ahead of time. As with προώρισεν in 8:29, so here the aorist is “historical” — the reference being, however, to God’s timeless decree of election prior to creation (Ephesians 1:4). God in eternity prepared “vessels of mercy” — souls, who in time would be brought to faith in his great mercy as shown in Christ and then transported to glory.

We differ with H. Meyer who contends that the **pro** in προητοίμασεν does not refer to the time before birth, “nor to the *aeterna electio*.”⁷⁷ The dissimilar vocables (κατηρτισμένα and προητοίμασεν) seem to dictate that, in the one case (the latter), predestination is meant, while in the other (the former), the consequential punishment is the referent. We also point to ἐκάλεσεν in the next verse and note that the use of the same word in the previous chapter (8:30) leads one to conclude that the context for verse 23 is clearly one of election. *Summary:* Far from presenting any predestination of reprobation, these verses zero in on God’s predominant mercy. The apostle wants to know: Is it wrong if God withholds judgment on those deserving it in order to (ἵνα purpose) make known the wealth of his glory upon the elect? Stoeckhardt reminds us: “The context stated that God wanted to make use of the time of patience and longsuffering, granted the vessels of wrath, to glorify himself in the vessels of mercy through grace and mercy, to gather a people from the Jews and Gentiles, who here see and experience his goodness and mercy and there should see his glory.”⁷⁸ One commentator appropriately asks: “In light of these twin facts, God’s forbearance conjoined with God’s inexplicable mercy, how can there be any talk of injustice?”⁷⁹

I. Verses 24-29 (*Gentiles and Jews—both in the elect*)

οὓς καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς οὐ μόνον ἐξ Ἰουδαίων ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐξ ἐθνῶν; ὡς καὶ ἐν τῷ Ὡσηὲ λέγει, Καλέσω τὸν οὐ λαόν μου λαόν μου καὶ τὴν οὐκ ἠγαπημένην ἠγαπημένην· καὶ ἔσται ἐν τῷ τόπῳ οὗ ἐρρέθη αὐτοῖς, Οὐ λαός μου ὑμεῖς, ἐκεῖ κληθήσονται υἱοὶ θεοῦ ζῶντος. Ἡσαΐας δὲ κράζει ὑπὲρ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἔαν ἦ ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ ὡς ἡ ἄμμος τῆς θαλάσσης, τὸ ὑπόλειμμα σωθήσεται· λόγον γὰρ συντελών καὶ συντέμνων ποιήσει κύριος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. καὶ καθὼς προείρηκεν Ἡσαΐας, εἰ μὴ κύριος Σαβαώθ ἐγκατέλιπεν ἡμῖν σπέρμα, ὡς Σόδομα ἂν ἐγενήθημεν καὶ ὡς Γόμορρα ἂν ὠμοιώθημεν.

NIV: *...[even us,] whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,” and, “It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality.” It is just as Isaiah said previously: “Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.”*

οὓς – trailing relative: “those whom” — even us (ἡμᾶς serves as the apposition). This verse is a key one, since it introduces an important inclusion: Paul and his Roman readers (ἡμᾶς). Paul describes *their own* (and *our own* today!) coming to faith (ἐκάλεσεν) as a result of God’s gracious election. Paul’s use of καλέω in Romans especially and throughout his writings refers always to the **effective** call of the gospel.⁸⁰

Ὡσηὲ – Hosea 2:23 (also cited in 1 Peter 2:10) in its original context referred to the remnant of the Israelites that God would preserve, following the Assyrian takeover and the deportation of the ten lost tribes in 722 B.C. Is Paul (along with Peter) justified in applying the citation to the **Gentiles** coming to faith? C. Keil explains how the

fundamental thought of this prophesy more than simply *allows* for the fact that the two apostles see in the words of Hosea 2 the prediction that Gentiles would be brought into God’s spiritual kingdom: “Through its apostasy from God, Israel had become like the Gentiles, and had fallen from the covenant of grace with the Lord. Consequently, the re-adoption of the Israelites as children of God was a practical proof that God had also adopted the Gentile world as His children.”⁸¹

A Targum (an Aramaic paraphrase) on this Hosea passage erroneously makes the prophet a promoter of work-righteousness: “I (God) will love the unloved because of their works.”⁸² How utterly opposed this is to Paul’s emphasis on God’s mercy and grace as the only catalyst for God’s election of either Jews or Gentiles.

Ἡσαΐας δὲ – The adversative δέ indicates a shift. It lets us know that, while the Hosea reference was being used to indicate the election of Gentiles, the Isaiah reference now indicates the elect — the spiritual remnant of the Jews.

τὸ ὑπόλειμμα – “the (specific) remnant.” What kind of remnant? Paul speaks of a spiritual remnant among the Jews. From among the Jewish people there will be those whom God will bring to faith, keep in the faith, and eventually receive into everlasting life in heaven. We are reminded by the definite article that in the economy of God’s predestination no random selection applies, but a specific election to faith and eternal life. (Romans 9:6-8 and Romans 11:26 find their explanation in Paul’s use of this term.)

σωθήσεται – fut. 3rd sg. pass. ind. of σώζω, to save. Included here is the culmination: obtaining heaven. The use of this future in the apodosis of the strong condition (FMV) is the common, predictive one; yet **certainty** is implied in view of the context (God’s election).

γὰρ – explanatory.

συντελῶν . . . συντέμνων – ptcs. of attendant circumstance. Phillips Modern English captures the thrust of the syntax: “For the Lord will execute his word upon the earth, **finishing** it and **cutting** it short.”

Εἰ μὴ . . . ἂν – contrary to fact condition. In the protasis we find great comfort, for this is the Gospel which goes contrary to the fact of sin and its results. God’s mercy intervened. On **that** our hopes depend!

In Isaiah 1:9 some may argue that the physical rescue of Jews is meant. However, basic to the promise of God to bring back physically a group of survivors was always the greater idea, namely, that from this remnant the Messiah would come and that a portion of them would believe in him for their eternal good. And — we quickly add — through this relatively small group salvation would be extended to the Gentiles. Think of what occurred at Pentecost and beyond!

ἐγενήθημεν – aor. 1st pl. act. ind. of ἐγκαταλείπω, to forsake, to abandon, to leave behind. “The torrent of wrath swept over the Jews but always abandoned [sic] some, and from these God’s mercy won the seed, the remnant, the leftover, and made this seed vessels of mercy.”⁸³ The aorist here is historical; the fact that this happened is being stressed.

Summary: With his keenly placed pronoun ἡμᾶς, the apostle places himself and his Christian readers among the elect. Paul, a Jew, and his Roman readers — both Jew and Gentile — already give evidence that God’s decree of election from eternity embraces people irrespective of race. The Old Testament prophets in recording God’s promise of a remnant for Israel had foretold (by extension) salvation arriving also on Gentile soil.

J. Verses 30-33 (The righteousness of works contrasted with that of faith)

Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ὅτι ἔθνη τὰ μὴ διώκοντα δικαιοσύνην κατέλαβεν δικαιοσύνην, δικαιοσύνην δὲ τὴν ἐκ πίστεως· Ἰσραὴλ δὲ διώκων νόμον δικαιοσύνης εἰς νόμον οὐκ ἔφθασεν. διὰ τί; ὅτι οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐξ ἔργων· προσέκοιψαν τῷ λίθῳ τοῦ προσκόμματος, καθὼς γέγραπται, Ἴδου τίθημι ἐν Σιών λίθον προσκόμματος καὶ πέτραν σκανδάλου, καὶ ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ’ αὐτῷ οὐ καταισχυθήσεται.

NIV: *What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone.” As it is written: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”*

ὅτι – declarative; introducing ind. discourse. What follows the ὅτι is in answer to Paul’s question urging the logical deduction. In essence the theme of the entire epistle is reiterated (Romans 1:16, 17).

ἔθνη – anarthrous. By saying “the Gentiles,” the NIV leaves the impression that **all** Gentiles came to faith. In this case the absence of the article should be noted. See the ἐξ ἔθνῶν in 9:24.

δικαιοσύνην – The occurrences of δικαιοσύνη (justice, righteousness, acquittal) in verse 30 do not need distinguishing; in each case the reference is to the judicial declaration by God that a person’s legal status is cleared. But there is a progression in thought as to how this cleared legal status becomes one’s own: this is a righteousness “which is by/through faith” (ἐκ πίστεως), not by/through works (ἐξ ἔργων). νόμον δικαιοσύνης – When Israel is said to have pursued “a law of righteousness,” Paul explains that they sought God’s acquittal based on what they did rather than on God’s acquittal that comes by faith in Christ. The genitive is descriptive: “law righteousness.”⁸⁴ The prepositional phrase εἰς νόμον (not translated in the NIV) reinforces the legal concept by informing us that Israel did not “attain to the law,” that is, they did not achieve the perfection the law required in order to obtain God’s declaration of a clear legal status. Our Lutheran confessors refer to Romans 9:31 in Article XI of the Formula of Concord, prefacing the citation with this phrase: “...or seek other ways to righteousness and salvation outside of Christ.”⁸⁵

ἔφθασεν – aor. 3rd sg, act. ind. of φθάνω, to come upon, to achieve, to attain. The aorist is historical: Israel’s falling short is a fact of history.

λίθον προσκόμματος καὶ πέτραν σκανδάλου – descriptive genitives: “stumbling stone and stumbling/offending rock.” Unfortunately the NIV leaves room for the possibility of seeing in Christ (the Stone, the Rock) the **cause** of people’s (especially the Israelites’) stumbling. The *God’s Word* version (God’s Word to the Nations Bible Society, 1995) gives the best rendering of the quotation from Isaiah 28:16 (see also 1 Peter 2:6-8 and Romans 10:11): “I am placing a rock in Zion that people trip over, a large rock that people find offensive. Whoever believes in him will not be ashamed.”

Summary: The contrast in these verses brings the gospel into sharp focus. Israel, on the one hand, had dedicated itself to a righteousness earned by human effort, but this legal goal obviously was unattainable by sinners in the presence of a holy God. Many Gentiles, on the other hand, did not pursue a legal righteousness. They did not even know the way of salvation until the gospel came to them. Yet Gentiles who heard the message and believed did indeed obtain a righteousness — the righteousness which is by faith in Christ. In God’s election plan many Gentiles came to faith in the very Rock on which the entire Israelite worship system centered. Sadly and tragically, many in Israel took offense at this Rock.

K. Summation: Election is Attributed Always and Only to the Grace of God as Shown in Christ Jesus

What have we learned from the way in which Paul has presented the doctrine of election to his Roman readers? What can we take away from this inspired paradigm by way of application to our own presentation of predestination today? In answer to this question, here are the key points from Romans 8 and 9 in summary form:

1. No room for aliquid in homine in Paul’s paradigm

In this epistle where the doctrine of justification by faith is set forth in opposition to a justification by works, we are not surprised to find Paul completely ruling out any merit or work on the part of man as having a bearing in providing an answer to the unanswerable *Cur allii prae aliis?* Let’s reiterate something very crucial. Paul presents the teaching of election only to those who already have been

well instructed in this basic Christian truth: The righteousness that sinners need for eternal life in heaven comes only via the objective work of Christ in making atonement for all sins; this righteousness is one of grace through faith, not by works of the law. Notice how the **exclusive particles** ⁸⁶ are scattered throughout his letter. Paul employs not only them in his discussion on justification, but also in his treatment of election. For example, in Romans 9:12 he says it is “not by works” (οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων); in 9:16 he writes “of God’s mercy” (τοῦ ἐλεῶντος θεοῦ), and in 9:30 he speaks of the righteousness the elect Gentiles cling to as one “by faith” (ἐκ πίστεως).

Man’s predestination is due only to God’s mercy and never to something in man. Remember how the apostle stresses the subject — God — in Romans 8:30-33. To illustrate, we put the references to God in bold: “And those **he** predestined, **he** also called; those **he** called, **he** also justified; those **he** justified, **he** also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If **God** is for us, who can be against us? **He** who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will **he** not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom **God** has chosen? It is **God** who justifies.”

2. Rules out any *intuitu fidei* view

Later we will address more in depth the *intuitu fidei* (in view of faith) error. But we briefly define it here as: the false doctrine that assumes God with his infinite fore-knowledge saw a spark of faith in man, or that man would have an enduring quality of faith, and that this played into his decision to elect certain individuals for heaven. Paul sweeps away such insidious thinking. He attaches no extra phrase of explanation to “those whom he foreknew” in Romans 8:29. He simply says that the ones God foreknew, God also predestined. Furthermore, Paul’s major thrust in Romans 9:6-16 is the sovereignty of God’s mercy in the matter of election. If any kind of *intuitu fidei* were part of Paul’s paradigm, he would not say of election: “It does not, therefore, depend on man’s effort, but on God’s mercy” (9:16). By this statement the apostle rules out any *intuitu fidei* view, and it is this very fact which makes the doctrine of election so comforting. Every bit of our salvation — from the eternal election decree until our entry into heaven — is 100% grace! “Because of the Lord’s great love

we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22, 23).

3. Realization of one’s election in the Means of Grace

Although Paul does not directly address the truth (here in Romans 8 & 9) that one can be sure of his/her own election through the use of the means of grace, this truth is taught indirectly a number of times. In Romans 8:30 the calling to faith is mentioned. This kind of call can come only from contact with the Word, the tool the Holy Spirit uses to engender faith and to sustain that faith. Looking ahead to Romans 10, we find the apostle emphasizing how important it is for anyone to hear the Word of God in order to have faith. “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? . . . Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (10:14, 17). Then too in his powerful conclusion to Romans 8, Paul states that our election security is all tied up in Christ. In other words, through connection with the Savior comes the guarantee of security. He says that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is **in Christ Jesus our Lord**” (8:39). And how do we have Christ? How do I personally have Christ and his forgiveness of sins? Listen to the way Dr. Luther puts it: “If now I seek the forgiveness of sin, I do not run to the cross, for I will not find it given there. . . But I will find in the sacrament or gospel the word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which was won at the cross.”⁸⁷

The litany of blessings God showered upon Israel (Romans 9:4,5), which the apostle painstakingly urges his fallen countrymen to embrace again, furnishes additional testimony to the fact that election is realized for any person or group of people via the one means God provides. “The receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises,” were the very means by which God made his Messiah, the Christ, known. Oh, if only Israel would turn again to the real meaning behind “the covenants”! In picture form God had his Old Testament people see the Messiah, the one whose sacrifice would make the true atonement for the sins of all people. For this reason, Paul states in another epistle: “Thus the Law has been our guardian until Christ came, so that we might be justified [declared

righteous] by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (Galatians 3:24, 25).

Before leaving this point, we should remind ourselves of two passages where the apostle directs Christians to the means of grace when seeking certainty for their election. The first is Ephesians 1: 13, where he reminds his hearers **how** they came to faith: “You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” The second is 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15, where he tells believers to continue standing firm in their use of the gospel — the same gospel by which they were called to faith: “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. So, then, brothers stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.”

4. Salvation certainty: *gratia universalis* and *sola gratia*

The very reason God has given us the doctrine of election in holy Scripture is that we might be absolutely certain of our eternal salvation. Since all depends on his mercy alone (Romans 9:16); since all depends on Christ from which nothing can separate us (Romans 8:33-39); and since we have been made to see that “righteousness is by faith” (Romans 9:30) and not by works; we have confidence that we — by God’s grace — are numbered among the elect.

An excellent devotion on this subject, written by John Gerhard in 1606, speaks to this very point. The devotion is found in his *Meditationes Sacrae* under the title “Predestination.” We quote a portion of it below:

O devout soul, as often as thou wouldst meditate upon thy predestination, look up to Christ hanging on the cross, dying there for the sins of the whole world, and rising again for ⁸⁸ our justification (Rom. iv. 25). Let thy meditation begin with the infant Redeemer as He lay in the manger, and so let it proceed in regular order to the end.

God hath chosen us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians

i. 4), but that choice was made in Christ; if therefore thou art in Christ by faith, doubt not that this election of grace pertains to thee also; if thou art clinging to Christ with firm and assured confidence of heart, let no doubts distress thee as to thy being included in the number of the elect . . . Seek not to fathom all the reasons of the divine counsels of the Most High, lest thy thoughts lead thee far away from God. ‘God dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto (1 Timothy vi. 16); presume not then to approach Him rashly and without due humility.

And yet God hath revealed Himself most graciously to us in the light of the gospel; in this light thou mayest safely inquire concerning the mystery of thy election, and in this light thou wilt see the true light (Psalm xxxvi. 9).⁸⁹

V. The Position of the Lutheran Confessors in Light of Romans 8 and 9

We now turn to the Lutheran confessors, especially the writers of the *Formula of Concord*, and see how they made use of Romans 8 and 9. First, we will devote attention to the only article in the *Book of Concord* that deals with election. Then, we want to observe how an early Lutheran exegete, Cyriakus Spangenberg, treated these chapters. Finally, we need to remember how the scriptural doctrine of predestination, as set forth by our Lutheran forefathers, needs to be defended against a host of errors which have arisen in time — both outside of, and inside of Lutheranism.

A. A look at Article XI of the Formula of Concord

Dr. Luther’s *Bondage of the Will* (1525) and Melancthon’s first edition of his *Loci Communes* (1521) had dealt with the topic of predestination. But, as R. Preus observes: “It must be recognized, however, that neither Luther nor Melancthon is treating predestination in his respective discussion as a necessary and fundamental element of the gospel, but rather as a polemic against freedom of the will and in the context of divine providence. This may explain why the matter was not in the confessions prior to the *Formula of Concord*.”⁹⁰

The writers of the *Formula of Concord* felt a need to address this doctrine, even though no specific controversy about it had

developed among the Lutherans at that time. Acknowledgement of a “painful controversy in other places” [FC, XI, 1] (such as among the Calvinists and synergists), together with the need for clarification in terminology, prompted the confessors to explain the scriptural and true Lutheran view of predestination. When we remember that Melancthon as early as 1532 ⁹¹ had postulated some cause in man (*aliquid in homine*) for man’s conversion, it may come as a surprise that no full-blown controversy on election had erupted at that time.

It cannot be overlooked, though, that a “lesser” (or local) controversy at Strassburg involving the Crypto-Calvinist Jerome Zanchi, and John Marbach, a gnesio-Lutheran, contributed toward the pressing need for clarification. Zanchi taught the Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (once saved, always saved). Marbach rightly objected. The *Strassburg Formula of Concord* (1563), probably authored by Jacob Andreae, settled the issue. Yet, according to F. Bente, “[Marbach’s] controversy with Zanchi, though of a local character, may be regarded as the immediate cause for adding Article XI [of the FC in 1580].” ⁹²

But now we ask: In Article XI what use is made of Paul’s treatment of election in Romans 8 and 9? We will check the references (only those from Ro 8:29-9:33) as they appear sequentially in the article. [All references below are from the *Triglotta*.]

1. FC, XI, 10. An appeal is made to Romans 9:19 (“One of you will say to me: ‘Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?’”) when discussing how God’s election cannot be thwarted or hindered in any way. But guarding against false security (pride) is necessary, for true repentance is assumed among the elect.

2. FC, XI, 14. Along with Ephesians 1:4ff., the entire section of Romans 8:29ff. is cited as the definitive Pauline portion of Scripture on predestination.

3. FC, XI, 27. Paraphrasing Romans 8:29ff., the confessors summarize: “Whom God predestined, elected, and foreordained, He also called.” Keying off the word “called,” a vital

comment is made on the necessity of the means of grace: “Now, God does not call without means, but through the Word.”

4. FC, XI, 33. Most helpful to the discussion of our thesis is the reference by the confessors to Dr. Luther’s “Preface to the Epistle to the Romans.” Observe carefully how Luther highly commends the topical arrangement of the apostle Paul in his epistle: “Follow the Epistle to the Romans in its order, concern yourself first with Christ and his gospel, that you may recognize your sins and His grace; next, that you contend with sin, as Paul teaches from the first to the eighth chapter; then, when in the eighth chapter you will come into [will have been exercised by] temptation under the cross and afflictions, this will teach you in the ninth, tenth and eleventh chapters how consolatory predestination is, etc.”

5. FC, XI, 40. Romans 9:31 (“...but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it”) is quoted as proof that numbered among the elect are **not** any who despise the Word of God or seek other ways of obtaining righteousness than the true righteousness that comes by faith and is ordained by God in Christ the Savior.

6. FC, XI, 43. Stressing that election is by grace alone, Romans 9:11 (“Yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad in order that God’s purpose in election might stand...”) is cited. The point is: Before birth — yes, even before time — the choosing by grace took place, obviously before any deeds were performed on the part of humans.

7. FC, XI, 46. Under the purpose of the doctrine of election (namely: consolation and certainty for the believer in Christ), we find Romans 8:28 and 39 (“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. . . 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.”).

8. FC, XI, 49. Closely related to the previous paragraph,

the confessors expressed the purpose of the doctrine of election as one which brings certainty of God's love to the child of God while he/she is undergoing trials and afflictions. Here a number of verses from Romans 8 are referenced (vv. 28, 29, 35, 38, and 39).

9. FC, XI, 50. The teaching of predestination also testifies to the fact that the church of God will continue in existence until the end of time, as shown in Romans 9:24, 25 ("...even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: 'I will call them "my people" who are not my people; and I will call her "my loved one" who is not my loved one.'")

10. FC, XI, 60. The expression "vessels of mercy" (Romans 9:23) is used.

11. FC, XI, 63. There is a crucial caveat when contemplating the mystery of predestination. If sinful man wants to pry where he shouldn't and attempts to go beyond what is simply revealed in Scripture, then the words of Paul must be recalled: Romans 9:20 ("But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?").

12. FC, XI, 79. Romans 9:22 ("...who had prepared themselves for destruction," GWN) is addressed in the context of **not** God but sinful and rebellious man as the cause of his own perdition. The unbeliever has "made himself a vessel of dishonor" (*se ipsum vas contumeliae fecit*).

13. FC, XI, 84. Attention is given to Pharaoh's hardness of heart in Romans 9:17 ("For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.'"). This occurred "not because God had begrudged him salvation, or because it had been his good pleasure that he should be damned and lost." On the contrary, Pharaoh himself was to blame, and the apostle Paul raised it "for no other reason than to prove by it the justice of God which he exercises toward the impenitent and despisers of his Word" (par. 86).

In the paragraph just cited (86), the reader of the *Triglotta* should be aware of an unclear English rendering of the German and Latin. Speaking of Paul's use of Pharaoh in Romans 9, the English says: "...by no means, however, has he [Paul] understood it to mean that God begrudged salvation to him or any person, **but** had so ordained him to eternal damnation in his secret counsel..." What has been translated "but" in the English is in both German and Latin the word "or." The German has **oder** which, prior to **sondern**, controls the entire rest of the sentence. The Latin has **aut...aut quod** (either...or that). The Tappert version is clearer.⁹³

14. FC, XI, 88. Once more, Romans 9:11 ("Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad — in order that God's purpose in election might stand...") is referenced. Here the Formula's subject is that there exists no third cause of God's election. [We say "third," since the mercy of God and the merits of Christ are stated as the cause. In reality these two causes are one: God's mercy in Christ.] The sovereignty of God's mercy, as we have stated earlier, is plainly set forth in this passage from Scripture.

Just as Paul so beautifully expounds the doctrine of election as one of great comfort and assurance, primarily as seen in Romans 8, the Lutheran confessors do the same in Article XI. We see this particularly in two paragraphs. In paragraph 70 good practical, pastoral advice is given in answer to the question, What if someone is troubled by his/her election?

Therefore, whoever would be saved should not trouble or harass himself with thoughts concerning the secret counsel of God, as to whether he also is elected and ordained to eternal life... But they should hear Christ...who is the Book of Life...He testifies to all men without distinction that it is God's will that all men should come to him who labor and are heavy laden with sin, in order that he may give them rest and save them, Matthew 11: 28.⁹⁴

The second one is paragraph 91. Here our Lutheran Confessions

warn against any presentation of the doctrine of election that intends to raise questions or doubts in the minds of Christians. The election doctrine — as Paul forcefully shows in his paradigm (Romans 8) — is given in holy Scripture only for one purpose: comfort.

Accordingly, if any one presents the doctrine concerning the gracious election of God in such a manner that troubled Christians cannot derive comfort from it, but are thereby incited to despair, or that the impenitent are confirmed in their wantonness, it is undoubtedly sure and true that such a doctrine is taught, not according to the Word and will of God, but according to [the blind judgment of human] reason and the instigation of the devil.⁹⁵

B. Cyriakus Spangenberg's series of sermons

Spangenberg's dates are 1528-1604. He began his studies under Dr. Luther at Wittenberg in 1542 and went on to serve as pastor at Eisleben and then at Mansfield.

Cyriakus was a strong defender of Matthias Flacius in describing original sin as consisting even of the physical substance of man since the time of the fall. Exiled for his position in 1574, Spangenberg fled to Sangerhausen, where in 1577 he met with Jacob Andreae to discuss the preparation of the Formula of Concord. He rejected the efforts of the so-called "Concordianists" because of their rejection of the position taken by Flacius.

Cyriakus was known for his exegetical skills. In fact, one biographical sketch characterizes him this way: "[He] was one of Luther's most devoted students but also among the most able and insightful. His involvement in the dispute over Original Sin limited his impact upon the ecclesiastical and theological developments of his day, but his influence through commentaries and other works helped shape Lutheran preaching and teaching in his time."⁹⁶

According to Dr. Robert Kolb, currently a professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, Cyriakus Spangenberg

was “among those who had most clearly understood Luther’s concept of the bondage of the will and its corollary doctrine of election in the generation after [Luther’s] death. . . He openly embraced Luther’s *De Servo Arbitrio* [Bondage of the Will] and delighted in it. Spangenberg had occasioned a small flurry of protest when he published his *Seven Sermons on Predestination* in 1565. And thus probably stands among those whom the Formula of Concord alluded to as ‘our people’ who had been involved in controversy over the doctrine of election.”⁹⁷

For our purposes here, we are interested in some of the remarks he makes in relation to Romans 8 and 9. The so-called “flurry” caused by Spangenberg’s sermons, according to Kolb, consisted in the fact that Spangenberg — clearly reflecting Luther — attributes man’s predestination only to God’s “purpose” (Romans 8:28) and not — as did Nikolas Hemmingsen and some other later Lutherans — to any “in view of faith” idea, allowing for something in man prejudicing God’s foreknowledge and election.⁹⁸

In a sermon delivered in 1567, using Romans 8:28-30 as his text, Spangenberg remarks:

So that this comfort [of] our call may be made still more certain, thus Paul places quite a beautiful word there for this purpose and says: We are called according to the purpose. He does not say this: by *our* purpose, which God then first called us to his kingdom when we have advanced ourselves and have understood ourselves to be pious and blessed, as some also among the fathers have indeed incorrectly understood this text. For, out of this would follow that our free wills also did something as preparation and worthiness and served for salvation and also God would not maintain the honor alone...

He says: who are called *according to the purpose*. And there is in fact also no other purpose than one, namely, God’s [purpose] which alone is set beforehand, is ordained and must remain, [which] can neither weaken nor waver nor give way as Judith sings: Lord God, you are the mighty God and no one can stand against you. All things must serve you for what you say must happen.⁹⁹

In the same sermon Cyriacus speaks of the foreknowledge of God addressed in Romans 8:29. We quote him at length here, since it

was precisely on this verse that a misunderstanding later arose, with the effects spanning even to the time of the election controversy in the Norwegian Synod here in America in the 1800s. [We will refer to the controversy under the next heading, “Later errors among some of the Lutherans.”]

He has foreseen us, that is, known beforehand and recognized us before we were born, even before the foundation of the world was laid. Already he cast an eye on us. . . He takes upon himself what he wants to collect. . . a beautiful large church and communion. And who the same ones should be, he has known and has seen (as he said). . . Everyone is guilty after the fall of Adam and therefore he [God] chooses them out of a wretched pile, a beautiful great and unspeakable number. Who should be partakers of eternal glory with him is one such grace which no man nor angel tongue can express. . .

He has not foreseen and elected us for this reason, that he knew how we believers would be pious and blessed, but for this reason: He has seen us beforehand that we, believers, may be pious and blessed and that he wanted to make us children of God. . . He has also ordained the same ones whom he thus foresees from eternity, that is, he has determined how he would lead them, what he would begin with them, what he would do with them and what he would accomplish with them. Such things he alone has determined in his hidden counsel, but also he has authored and written in his holy and divine Word that one can learn whereto God the Lord has ordained his election. ¹⁰⁰

And in connection with Romans 9:6, where Paul speaks of Israel’s apostasy as having inflicted no damage on the reliability of God’s words and promises, Spangenberg pastorally directs his hearers to the never-changing Gospel for comfort, especially when personal questions on election arise. We are indebted to Kolb for providing us with the following quotation from Spangenberg:

God is reliable; he is neither vacillating nor capricious. What he has planned happens irrevocably. He has predestined us to be his children, apart from any human merit, or worthiness, so nothing can prevent our salvation . . . God has planned to save many thousands times thousands human creatures and to lift them out of the crushing condemnation in which they were struck by nature to eternal glory. Before the world began, he made this

choice on the basis of pure mercy and sheer goodness.¹⁰¹

In summary, we want to say that Spangenberg is an example of an early Lutheran exegete who correctly understood the scriptural doctrine of predestination. When John Marbach and Jerome Zanchi got into a skirmish on election at Strassburg (1561-63), about the same time that Spangenberg was writing his commentary on Romans (a homiletical commentary on Romans 8-11), it was the “perseverance of the saints” that emerged as the *status controversiae*. Zanchi represented the Crypto-Calvinistic view of “once saved, always saved,” whereas Marbach contended for the true Lutheran view as had been set forth in the Smalcald Articles (Part III, Art. III).¹⁰² The possibility of falling away from faith is very real, said Luther, but the doctrine of predestination — when taught correctly — is always intended to assure believers of their standing as God’s elect. Spangenberg — like Marbach — correctly understood Luther’s position as simply setting forth what Scripture says.

In light of the possibility of falling, can the Christian then have election assurance? By holding on to the means of grace, where alone the merits of Christ are offered to each soul personally, the believer has unspeakable and immovable comfort. This is God’s means of preserving us in the faith. Again, we let Kolb give us Spangenberg where he uses the expression “the faithful lambs of Christ” to refer to the elect:

The faithful lambs of Christ can indeed lose their way and stumble, but they will not be lost, they cannot be totally corrupted. For their faithful shepherd Jesus Christ will never forsake them completely. They should take comfort and learn to recognize from their weakness how extremely necessary God’s help, blessing, and support is for them, how they can do nothing in and of themselves, how faithful, good, and loving God is in his regard for them, how wonderfully the Lord deals with his saints, how we always have more than enough reasons which move us to give God thanks and praise.¹⁰³

C. Later errors among some of the Lutherans

In his *Historical Introduction to the Symbolical Books of the*

Evangelical Lutheran Church, F. Bente observes: “Calvinists and Synergists have always contended that Luther’s original doctrine of predestination was essentially identical with that of John Calvin.”¹⁰⁴ One of the earliest Lutheran theologians to capitulate on the doctrine of predestination was Philip Melanchthon. His *Loci* of 1543 (even found in the 1535 edition) blatantly contains the abominable “three causes of conversion”: the Holy Spirit, the Word of God and **the consenting will of man**. In this same *Loci* Melanchthon shows how his synergism in the area of conversion resulted naturally in an error in his understanding of the doctrine of predestination. He wrote: “Since the promise is universal and since in God there are not conflicting wills, it is necessary that there is some cause within us for the difference as to why Saul is rejected and David received, that is, there must be a different action on the part of the two men.”¹⁰⁵ In a sense, it can be said that Melanchthon was a major contributor to a synergistic understanding of predestination among some in the Lutheran camp. This would include those in the next century who adopted an *intuitu fidei* approach to election inimical to the *sola gratia* principle, men such as Latermann, Dreier, and Hornejus.¹⁰⁶ It also would include those several centuries later who would opt for a synergistic understanding of election and conversion: the likes of F. A. Schmidt, F. W. Stellhorn and others.

For the record, it must be stated that theologians such as Johann Gerhard and possibly also Erik Pontoppidan,¹⁰⁷ while also employing the terminology of *intuitu fidei*, did not intend in any way to detract from God’s grace in Christ alone as the sole agent in predestination. Gerhard’s reason for using *intuitu fidei* (“the consideration — *intuitus* — of faith must also be included in the decree of election”¹⁰⁸) was the desire to combat Calvinism’s absolute predestinarian dogma that eviscerated faith in Christ for obtaining salvation. The trouble was, however, the Gerhardian understanding of *intuitu fidei* was not the same as that of a later generation (Schmidt, et. al.) who were bent on inserting a quality in man or a will in man as a contributing factor in God’s eternal election decree. As a result, hindsight shows that any use of the *intuitu fidei* expression was at best unfortunate and ill-advised, while at worst subtly and heretically odious.¹⁰⁹

The proper exegesis of Romans 8:29 played into the discussion. The erroneous use of this passage began with Aegidius

Hunnius (1550 - 1603), who also is attributed with originating the *intuitu fidei* clause. He and others like him who had departed from the Lutheran *sola gratia* sought to find in the verb προέγνω (foreknew) the **reason** why God chose some for eternity. Logic was placed above the bare Word! Instead of reading verse 29, “For those God foreknew he also predestined...,” they interpreted the verse to say: “For those whose constant faith he foresaw he also predestined.”¹¹⁰ Yes, God in his omniscience knows all who will believe and not believe, but never does Scripture imply this to be a reason for his choosing people to life everlasting. In other words, faith does not determine election. Clearly the Bible teaches that faith always flows from election (John 15:16); never is it the other way around. The faulty exegesis of Hunnius was a subtle but serious departure from grace alone. We wonder how Hunnius could have overlooked the emphatic **rejection** of the Formula: “That it is only the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ, but that there is within us a cause of God’s election, on account of which he has elected us to eternal life” (FC, Ep, XI, 20).

F. A. Schmidt’s use of “in view of faith” in the 1880s election controversy in America was designed to counter an alleged Calvinism in C. F. W. Walther’s theology. An irony is found not only in the absurd charge against this preeminent Missouri Synod theologian known for his proper Law-Gospel division, but also in the fact that Schmidt himself as a youth had been confirmed by Walther. Now, however, Schmidt was a leading theologian of the Norwegian Synod, and he felt a compunction to deal with what he perceived were Calvinistic thoughts implanted in an essay (theses) delivered by Walther in 1877. [But Schuetze adds: “It does not appear to have been mere coincidence that not long after Schmidt failed to receive the desired call (back again to St. Louis in 1878), early in 1879, he informed Walther of his objections to the report in the 1877 Proceedings, stating, ‘I can no longer go with you. . . . I dare no longer keep silence.’”¹¹¹]

Permit a slight digression for a moment. Make no mistake about it, even the “Schmidtians” had their theological scruples. They insisted that Walther and the Missourians, as well as the Wisconsin Synod and many who opposed Schmidt within his own Norwegian Synod (like H. A. Preus and U. V. Koren), were guilty

of overlooking the importance that faith plays in the economy of God's plan of salvation. The charge was bogus. Man's faith in Christ simply needed to be put into its proper perspective: *after* election. If it would precede, then faith itself would no longer be grace but some kind of merit in man. To demonstrate the resolve on the part of Schmidt in the rightness of his cause, I draw attention to a letter dated January 9, 1912 (but should be 1913). It is written by J. N. Kildahl, president of St. Olaf College. F. A. Schmidt is the addressee. After giving encouragement in the battle against Walther, Pres. Kildahl tells Schmidt:

As I have said before, your battle against the false doctrine of the Missourians has not been in vain. It has led to victory among the Norwegians in this country. . . . And finally you can have the satisfaction that your struggle has borne fruit, and that you have saved the Norwegian people in America from Calvinism. . . . It is oft thus, that he who has taken the lead in a great cause, and has of necessity had to make many enemies, has not from his contemporaries always gotten the thanks due him; but history has rendered a more righteous judgment.¹¹²

Vigilance in doctrine must never end. The upshot of the 1880s election controversy was that approximately one-third of the pastors and congregations left the Norwegian Synod with F. A. Schmidt, forming the Anti-Missourians — a body which soon merged with two other Norwegian groups to become in 1890 the United Norwegian Lutheran Church (an ELCA predecessor). Then, in the merger mania at the turn of the century, the Norwegian Synod found itself once again having to deal with the old *intuitu fidei* error of Schmidt. The error weaseled its way back into the lime light via a document known as *Opgjør* (Settlement). *Opgjør* was being used as a basis for merging the Norwegian Synod with the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of 1890 (and also the Hauge Synod), the very body which comprised as part of its membership the followers of F. A. Schmidt! Now, if the document truly had “settled” the doctrine of election by directing once again to the clear passages of Scripture, reaffirming that predestination is *sola gratia* in its entirety, the *Te Deum* could have been sung. But the document was flawed. It permitted the formerly much debated

intuitu fidei view to be taught without any reservation. Fortunately, 13 pastors refused to sign the document and go along with the merger and thus the roots of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod were planted in 1918. Why did they refuse? Grace was at stake. They saw the document as a compromise on what Scripture clearly says. These pastors were convinced that sound hermeneutical principles were not being employed. They desired to stay only with what the Apostle Paul had penned by verbal inspiration in Romans 8 & 9 and not to deviate one iota.

Following Luther, Andreae, Spangenberg, and the forefathers of the old Synodical Conference who stood on the side of Walther, may we today stick to what God’s servant, Paul, set forth on predestination in the eighth and ninth chapters of Romans. Remember that the same Paul once told a young pastor named Titus: “You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). Only by careful exegesis and the proper use of the analogy of faith ¹¹³ can one be certain of the true doctrine to expound and also to discern the errors which must be repudiated.

D. Ever present dangers

Heresy in the domain of predestination knows no exclusivity in terms of denominational perpetrators. Countless errors have sprung up in the Christian church because of faulty views on predestination. The delicate handling of the doctrine, demanding strict adherence to Scripture without leaning even slightly toward human speculation, is a must. For this reason one theologian has labeled the doctrine of election the “shibboleth” of the Christian church. ¹¹⁴ Another has suggested that the final exam a young pastor should take is that on predestination because “the issues are so easy to go wrong on.” ¹¹⁵

1. Rome’s uncertainty

Roman Catholicism has contended — contrary to Romans 8 — that one cannot be sure of his election. The Council of Trent declared: “No one...so long as he lives this mortal life, ought in regard to the sacred mystery of divine predestination, so far presume as to state with certainty that he is among the number of the predestined

... For except by special revelation, it cannot be known whom God has chosen to Himself.”¹¹⁶

We shouldn't be surprised at this doubt canonized by Rome. Any work-righteous oriented religion will of necessity invoke doubt and uncertainty. In response to Rome, Chemnitz contended: “If the reader will examine the statements of Scripture concerning election, he will see clearly that the doctrine of predestination was revealed in the Scripture not that it should render doubtful and uncertain the salvation of believers but that it should be a basis of certainty.”¹¹⁷ He then lists among the many passages Romans 8:34 and 35: “Who is he that condemns? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

The neo-orthodox Barth, although nominally Reformed, has been accused of universalism in his doctrine of election. Stanley Grenz calls it “christomonistic,” since Barth sees Jesus Christ as the only object of God's election and damnation. In this way, then, Barth “made absolutely clear that Jesus Christ is the only truly rejected person and that all humans are elect in him.”¹¹⁸

2. Calvinism & Arminianism/synergism

Yes, error comes in many different stripes. But concerning the doctrine of election it is safe to say that two dangers in particular confront us constantly. The one is the false doctrine of Calvinism, promoting “double predestination” (absolutism) and its corollary heresy of limited atonement. Calvinism does violence to the book of Romans and robs people of the very comfort which God intended to be conveyed through his apostle to the Gentiles. On the other hand, the synergism of Arminianism both in its obvious form (decision-theology) and subtle form (*intuitu fidei*) continually threatens the church. How can any contribution of man be permitted to creep into an honest and objective look at Paul's presentation of election? The apostle plainly summarizes the case of predestination: “It does not therefore depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy” (Romans 9:16).

3. Misunderstanding of Luther's *Bondage of the Will*

Reformed theologians have long contended that Luther was a supporter of Calvin's double predestination, primarily because of certain statements made in his famous writing of 1525. Some insist that Luther in his later years changed his position.¹¹⁹ The charge cannot be dismissed lightly, since *De Servo Arbitrio* — his response to the humanist Erasmus — is regarded as one of Luther's chief writings and is also endorsed by the Formula of Concord in Article XI (as well as I and II). One can see why Bente felt obliged to include a proper defense of Luther and his *De Servo Arbitrio* in a separate twenty-some page article (*Triglotta*, intro., pp. 209ff.)

Granted, certain statements in the *Bondage of the Will* can, if not carefully noted in context, give the casual reader the impression that Luther would agree with Calvin. For example, Luther remarks: "But granted foreknowledge and omnipotence, it follows naturally by an irrefutable logic that we have not been made by ourselves, nor do we live or perform any action by ourselves, but by his omnipotence. And seeing he knew in advance that we should be the sort of people we are, and now makes, moves, and governs us as such, what imaginable thing is there, I ask you, in us which is free to become in any way different from what he has foreknown or is now bringing about?"¹²⁰

But remarks such as this are not being used by Luther to imply in any way a predestination to damnation. Rather, such comments are made simply to prove that man can receive nothing except that it be given him from heaven. To speak as Erasmus did of some sort of "free will" is **unbiblical**. Furthermore, the distinction between the hidden will of God and the revealed will of God must be observed. Bente captured the essence of Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio* when he wrote that Luther was stressing the principle "that we must neither deny nor investigate nor be concerned about the hidden God, but study as he has revealed himself in the Gospel and firmly rely on his gracious promises in the means of grace."

While Calvin followed human logic to try to answer mysteries that the Bible simply leaves as paradoxes, Luther knew that sinful human logic could get one into trouble. He contended that man must stay only with what God has clearly revealed in his holy Word. To say less or to say more would be to exalt human reason and thus

attribute some saving ability to man himself instead of holding to God's grace and mercy alone for every ounce of man's rescue from sin and hell. So thoroughly had Romans 3:28 impressed itself upon Luther's doctrinal conscience: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith [alone ¹²¹] apart from observing the law."

An astute comparison of the approach of Luther and that of Calvin is offered by Paul Althaus:

In the final analysis, Luther does not establish a theoretical doctrine of double predestination as Calvin does. In spite of all appearances to the contrary, his theology is at this point completely pastoral. His idea of the hidden God finally intends only to purify the Christian's faith from all secret claims and all self-security by proclaiming the freedom of God's grace. In this he agrees with Paul in Romans 9-11. He has just as little independent interest in an eternal rejection as Paul does. ¹²²

VI. Conclusion

Far from encouraging speculation and doubt, the doctrine of election as set forth in Holy Writ is intended for the solid comfort and assurance of all who trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The paradigm of the apostle Paul's presentation of the doctrine of election as set forth in Romans 8 and 9 is one which every true pastor and teacher of God's Word will want to emulate as the Lord provides opportunities to nurture souls — young and old — in the deep truths pertaining to election or predestination.

Before Paul addresses his readers on election, he assumes their knowledge of sin (Romans 1-3); he assumes their knowledge of the merciful, atoning sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the entire world (Romans 3-5); he assumes the proper understanding of regeneration and the preservation of faith by the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Today, too, in teaching the doctrine of predestination such preliminary understandings must lead the way. Then, as Paul does so carefully in chapters 8 and 9, God's grace, God's sovereignty and God's immovable decrees and promises need to be brought home to the heart of every sinner who trusts in the unchanging love of Christ for his or her salvation.

Where do we look for certainty for our own election? Where are we, who are given the responsibility and privilege to teach, to direct others for certainty concerning their election? It is to Jesus Christ alone and the Word by which the Spirit keeps us in the saving faith. Nothing at all — says Paul — “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8: 39). The more we focus on Christ and what he has done for our complete salvation, the more confident we will be about every facet of our future. That Christ-centered focus is maintained in us by our use of the means of grace: the Word of the gospel, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

We are certain of our election when all depends not on man’s effort but on God’s mercy (Romans 9:16) — a mercy that exacted in our place the blood of God’s own Son to obtain our forgiveness of sins and everlasting life!

Lord Jesus, take me by the hand,
 And lead me — I am Thine!
 I stand among Thy chosen band
 Whose lamps so brightly shine.
 In peace and joy I now may rest,
 For this I know, my Savior blest,
 That I will live, by grace restored,
 Forever with my Lord.

ELH, #585, v. 2

Appendix 1

An excellent devotion we could suggest to our readers is one entitled “Am I written in the Book of Life?” The devotion appears in John Gerhard’s *Manual of Comfort* (1611), in which the author begins each of his meditations with a statement by the afflicted (Law) followed by a statement from the comforter (Gospel). The English translation below is given by John M. Drickamer according to the German edition by Carl J. Boettcher.

Am I Written in the Book of Life?

The afflicted person says: Only they persevere who are written in the book of life. How can I know that I am written in it?

The comforter says: The book of life is Christ. It is called “the book of the Lamb” (Revelation 13:8; 21:27). Being written into this book is nothing other than the election of the believers to everlasting life, which takes place in Christ. For it is said of the believers that they have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) and that their names were written in the book of life from the beginning of the world (Revelation 17:8).

As with election, so with being written in the book of life; one may not judge in advance but only afterwards. As many as have been ordained to life hear the Word of salvation, believe in Christ, show the fruit of the Spirit, and persevere in the faith. “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness [of God] in himself” (1 John 5:10). The Holy Spirit bears witness in the hearts of believers that they are God’s children (Romans 8:16) and are written in the book of life. Those whom God has chosen from eternity, whose names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20), he calls through the Word and justifies through faith in Christ (Romans 8:29-30). Such faith is shown in calling on God, being patient under the cross, and desiring sanctification.

A wholesome consideration of election and the book of life must begin with the wounds of the Crucified. Whoever believes in him and perseveres in faith has been justified and is written in the book of the living (Romans 10:9). Or have you not been accepted into God’s grace through baptism? Have you not been cleansed from sins by the blood of Christ? Have you not been renewed by the Holy Spirit? Those are clear signs that you have been written in the book of life. Believers “are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27).

God has written not some tablets of fate but rather a book of life. He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Seek your election and your writing in the book of life in Christ alone. Amen.

Appendix 2

In the middle of the election controversy in the Norwegian Synod a pastor by the name of Hagbert Amandus Hartmann (b. 1849), a firm supporter of F. A. Schmidt, held meetings with his parish in order to persuade his congregations to take their stand against the synod. From 1880-1886 Hartmann was the pastor at the East and West Paint Creek churches in the northeast corner of Iowa (near Decorah). He compiled a doctrinal confession (see below) which he called "A Confession for the Benefit of the Simple" (printed in the Iowa

District's *Synodalberetning*, pp. 52-53). Dr. Koren, then president of the Iowa District of the Norwegian Synod, suspended Hartmann as pastor in 1886. As a result of Pastor Hartmann's influence, the Paint Creek congregations were split. The majority went with him into the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood and then into the United Church in 1890. The East and West congregations, however, remain to this day as members of the ELS, the church body which is the confessional successor of the old Norwegian Synod.

You will notice that Hartmann's confession carries the old error of trying to explain with human reason the mystery as to why some are saved and others not. Hartmann attempted to solve this unfathomable mystery by teaching a conditioned gospel, one which makes man's acceptance of the gospel a deciding factor in the mind of God for his decision to save sinners. The confession also erroneously asserts that, while on this earth, we cannot have full assurance of our salvation.

A Confession for the Benefit of the Simple

***H. A. Hartmann
Paint Creek, Iowa***

1. In accordance with his will to have all men saved, God calls all men with equal earnestness, and this his call consists in this, that he by his Word stirs men's hearts and by the Gospel especially reveals to them his grace, invites them earnestly and at the same time gives them grace to accept it.

2. Because God in his call in this manner gives all men the power to accept the offered grace, he gives conclusive regard to how far we by the endued (granted) power will receive the grace or not. He who does not then resist the grace of the Holy Spirit, but lets himself be led into this sanctifying order, he is awakened from his spiritual death, is regenerated to a new life. But he who in this sanctifying order will not receive and use the grace of God, he remains in this natural sinfulness, separated from God.

3. God is so gracious and faithful that he will with the

same care and compassion uphold all believers in the true faith to the end if they do not stubbornly resist and fall away. Since, then, God's promise to uphold them contains a condition, then it is not an unconditioned, but rather a conditional promise. God's grace does not have power over a person longer than he gives it room or doesn't stubbornly resist it.

4. In accordance with his unchangeableness God has had the same rule and regard in eternity as he has in time. His election to the unfailing attainment of eternal salvation, therefore, consists in that he has ordained all them to eternal life, which he from eternity has seen will receive the offered grace, believe in Christ and remain steadfast in this faith to the end.

5. Since God's decision to salvation in this manner is conditioned, and not all conditions are fulfilled while we still live here in this time of testing, we can and shall only have a conditioned certainty of our salvation. Such a conditioned certainty agrees exactly with the way of salvation and keeps the heart watching and praying.

Endnotes

¹ In this monograph we use the expressions "election" and "predestination" interchangeably. Some Lutheran theologians have distinguished between the terms. David Hollaz, for example, claimed that "election" relates more to the *objects* which are to be elected, whereas "predestination" relates more to the end and order of means within election (H. Schmid's *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p. 286). Others have contended that

“predestination” is not preferable since often it carries a Calvinistic connotation (A. Suelflow’s *Servant of the Word*, p. 168).

² This definition is used in the essayist’s 1999 NPH publication, *Predestination Chosen in Christ*, p. 17.

³ Here the term is *not* being used in the Flacian sense (substance of man).

⁴ Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article I:8,9, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 467.

⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, translated by J. Owen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1947), p. 211.

⁶ John Stott, *Romans God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), p. 159.

⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, American Edition, Vol. 26 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-1986), p. 38.

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by H. Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989 one volume), Book III, chapter XXI, p. 206.

⁹ In his *Die Heilige Schrift* Luther added the word *allein* and insisted on retaining it in spite of much criticism from German scholars.

¹⁰ The first edition (1995) of *God’s Word by God’s Word to the Nations* Bible Society erroneously translated this verse: “We conclude that a person has God’s approval because of faith, not because of his own efforts.” This rendering leaves the reader with the impression that God has granted forgiveness **as a result of** the person’s having a bearing on the Benefactor’s generosity *a priori*, thus akin to *intuitu fidei*. But the dative πίστει is a dative of means/instrument and is therefore similar to the common phrases throughout the New Testament “by faith” (ἐκ πίστεως) and “through faith” (διὰ πίστεως). This writer is happy to note that the very latest edition of *GW* has reflected a change; however, the colloquial “approval” — a weak substitute for “justified” — still remains.

¹¹ Tappert, p. 349.

¹² Tappert, p. 441.

¹³ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, translated by J. T. Mueller (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1976), p. 128.

¹⁴ Tappert (FC XI, 6), p. 617.

¹⁵ Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 487. Warding off any *intuitu fidei* implications, Pieper asserts that “we join Luther, the Formula of Concord...in taking ‘foreknow’ (προγινώσκειν) as a synonym of ‘predestinate,’ even though conceptually the two terms are not identical.”

¹⁶ Irwin Habbeck, *Ephesians Amazing Grace* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985), p. 17.

¹⁷ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*

(Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), pp. 562, 563.

¹⁸ Lenski, p. 563.

¹⁹ D. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Zondervan, 1996), p. 564.

²⁰ C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC), vol. I (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1975), p. 435.

²¹ Wallace, p. 383. See also the extended discussion on pp. 383-389.

²² J. Louw & E. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. II, p. 569.

²³ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, unabridged (New York: A.C. Armstrong, 1900), p. 456.

²⁴ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1931), p. 379.

²⁵ Armin Panning, *Romans—The People’s Bible* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), p. 144.

²⁶ M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. II (McLean Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company), p. 711.

²⁷ Wallace, pp. 579, 580.

²⁸ James R. Edwards, *Romans – NIBC* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1992), p. 226.

²⁹ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Tyndale Series) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 181.

³⁰ Harold Bult, *Notes on the Epistle to the Romans I-VIII* (Fort Wayne,

Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1988), p. 127.

³¹ Formula of Concord, SD, XI:66, *Concordia Triglotta*, F. Bente, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 1085.

³² Pieper, Vol. III, pp. 246, 247.

³³ In spite of how Melancthon contends that this section (8:31-38) does not refer to predestination, we agree with Stoeckhardt (see fnnt. #34) and others in seeing the context as supportive of election. See P. Melancthon, *Commentary on Romans*, translated by Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), p. 184.

³⁴ George Stoeckhardt, *Predestination Election*, translated by Erwin Koehlinger (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press), p. 65.

³⁵ Tappert (LC), p. 442.

³⁶ Wallace, p. 552.

³⁷ *LW*: 25, p. 380.

³⁸ J. Edwards, pp. 230, 231.

³⁹ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 522.

⁴⁰ FC VIII:6 uses Romans 9:5 in support of Christ's deity.

⁴¹ P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. VII (Eerdmans, 1994 reprint), p. 413.

⁴² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, revised by Arndt and Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979 reprint), p. 562.

⁴³ Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. I (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978), p. 608.

⁴⁴ The expression "all Israel will be saved" in verse 26 is shown by the context in Romans 11 (especially verses 17-25) to refer to *both* Jewish and Gentile believers.

⁴⁵ Lenski, see John's Gospel, p. 168.

⁴⁶ Class notes from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1999 (A. Panning), Romans 9-16.

⁴⁷ Luther, Kregel edition on Romans, p. 138.

⁴⁸ Arthur Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1922), p. 239. Pink states that "the birthright was a spiritual heritage...It constituted a link in the line of descent by which the Messiah was to be born into the world."

⁴⁹ See also here Dr. Luther's remarks in *LW* 33:197.

⁵⁰ George Stoeckhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans*, translated by E. Koehlinger (St. Louis: Concordia Mimeograph, 1943), p. 123.

⁵¹ Lenski, p. 604.

⁵² Stoeckhardt, p. 124. (See also M. Franzmann's *Romans*, p. 173).

⁵³ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, pp. 209, 210.

⁵⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, p. 206.

⁵⁵ Hodge, p. 490.

⁵⁶ Panning, p. 154.

⁵⁷ W. Roehrs and M. Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), p. 658.

⁵⁸ Pieper, Vol. I, p. 454.

⁵⁹ M. A. Zimmermann, *Studies in Genesis* (Menasha, Wisconsin: Protestant Lutherans, 1970), p. 244.

⁶⁰ Wallace, p. 570.

⁶¹ Colin Brown, II, p. 598.

⁶² Lenski, p. 614.

⁶³ Curtis Jahn, ed., *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. II (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), pp. 189-228.

⁶⁴ Jahn, p. 212.

⁶⁵ Stott, p. 269.

⁶⁶ Hodge, p. 502.

⁶⁷ Bruce, p. 195.

⁶⁸ Baur/Arndt/Gingrich, p. 219.

⁶⁹ Class notes from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1999 (A. Panning), Romans 9-16.

⁷⁰ Lenski, p. 622.

⁷¹ Martin H. Franzmann, *Romans A Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p. 179.

⁷² *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Winter of 1982, p. 54.

⁷³ See footnote #70.

⁷⁴ The "analogy of faith" principle can be described as the sum total of the clear passages of Scripture which set forth a given doctrine or doctrines. Basically the axiom, "Let Scripture interpret Scripture,"

is another way of defining this principle.

⁷⁵ The middle voice is supported by the Lutheran Confessors in FC XI, 79.

⁷⁶ Wallace, p. 418.

⁷⁷ H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Funk & Wagnalis, 1884; Hendrickson reprint in 1983), p. 383.

⁷⁸ Stoeckhardt, p. 133.

⁷⁹ Franzmann, p. 180.

⁸⁰ Class notes from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1999 (A. Panning), Romans 9-16.

⁸¹ C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Minor Prophets*, vol. X (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977 reprint), p. 49.

⁸² The citation of this Targum reference is given by James Edwards (p. 242) in his commentary for the NIBC series.

⁸³ Lenski, pp. 632, 633. Lenski's use of "abandoned" here means "preserved."

⁸⁴ Class notes from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1999 (A. Panning), Romans 9-16.

⁸⁵ FC XI:39 (*Triglotta*, p. 1077).

⁸⁶ FC III (*Triglotta*, pp. 927-929).

⁸⁷ LW 40:214. Luther is distinguishing between *grace obtained* and *grace distributed*.

⁸⁸ The two $\delta\iota\acute{\alpha}$ prepositional phrases in Romans 4:25 should be rendered "because..." In the latter phrase this is especially important for showing that the **reason** Jesus was raised to life was **because** the justification of sinners had already been accomplished at the cross.

⁸⁹ John Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*, translated by C. Heisler (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1896), pp. 130, 131.

⁹⁰ R. Preus and W. Rosin, eds., *A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), p. 271.

⁹¹ F. Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (found in the *Triglotta*) (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 197. Bente records that Melancthon in his 1532 *Explanation of the Epistle to the Romans* held that, in addition to God's mercy as the cause of election, something in man was to be found, since believing man does not reject the grace offered. Later in his *Loci* (the 2nd and 3rd editions of 1535 and 1543) Melancthon spoke of the so-called "three causes of conversion": the Holy Spirit, the Word of God and the will of man.

⁹² Bente, p. 201.

⁹³ The Tappert version of FC XI:86 reads: “The holy apostle adduces Pharaoh’s example for the sole purpose of thereby setting forth the righteousness of God which God manifests toward the impenitent and despisers of his Word, and in no way does he want us to infer that God had not wanted to grant Pharaoh or any other person eternal life, or that in his secret counsel God had ordained him to eternal damnation so that he could not and might not be saved.”

⁹⁴ FC XI:70 (*Triglotta*, p. 1085).

⁹⁵ FC XI:91 (*Triglotta*, p. 1093).

⁹⁶ H. Hillerbrand, ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 100.

⁹⁷ *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, March 1994, p. 33. In October of 1993 R. Kolb presented the annual Reformation Lectures at Bethany

The Imprecatory Psalms and Christ's Command to Love One's Enemies

by Mark DeGarmeaux

The imprecatory psalms and sections of Scripture like them are some of the most troublesome to the non-Christian and even to many Christians. They are considered by many to be very hard to understand and even antiquated and outdated. They are presumed to be from an early stage in the "evolution of religion." Perhaps we too are troubled by them or are at least doubtful as to whether they are fitting and appropriate for our modern church and our civilized culture. But we also believe and confess that they are God's holy word. The imprecatory psalms also bear the prophetic stamp: "*Thus saith the LORD.*"

POINT ONE: The imprecatory psalms are God's Word and are to be interpreted according to the analogy of faith and the principles of Law and Gospel.

Imprecation, the calling down of judgment and vengeance upon one's enemies, is not a thought peculiar to the Psalms or the Old Testament. John the Baptist and our Lord Jesus also spoke very harshly to the scribes and Pharisees. St. Paul speaks "*anathema*" against false teachers in his beloved congregations: "If any one does not love the Lord, let him be accursed" (1Corinthians 16:21); "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). Scripture is unanimous in its condemnation of false teachers and enemies of God's kingdom.

But then we are confronted with Jesus' command: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:44f). Is this a contradiction? And even if it is not, what place do the imprecatory psalms have for today's Christian? In order to answer these questions we must look at these psalms in detail.

Which are the imprecatory psalms? John Walton's

Chronological Charts of the Old Testament lists 35, 58, 69, 83, 109, and 137. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* gives many more as but a partial list: (5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 16, 21, 23, 28, 31, 35, 36, 40, 41, 44, 52, 54, 55, 58, 59, 68, 69, 70, 71, 137, and others). Walton clearly lists the harshest of these psalms and looking at one from his list will best serve our purposes here. We have chosen one psalm as an example to learn the content and purpose of the imprecatory psalms in general.

PSALM 35 (author's study translation with some of the Hebrew)

- 1 לְדוֹד רִיבָה יְהוָה אֶת־יָרִיבֵי לַחַם אֶת־לִחְמֵי:
- 2 הַחֶזֶק מִגֹּן וְצַנְהָ וְקוֹמָה בְּעִזְרָתִי:
- 3 וְהָרַק חַיִּית וּסְגָר לְקִרְאֵת רִדְפֵי אָמַר לְנַפְשִׁי יִשְׁעֲתֶךָ אָנֹכִי:
- 4 יִבְשׁוּ וְיִכְלְמוּ מִבְּקָשֵׁי נַפְשִׁי יִסְגּוּ אַחֲרַי וְיִחַפְּרוּ חֲשָׁבֵי רַעְתִּי:
- 5 יִהְיוּ כְּמִץ לַפְּנִי־רוּחַ וּמִלֶּאֶד יְהוָה דּוֹחָה:
- 6 יִתִּירְרָכֶם חֶשֶׁד וַחֲלַקְלָקוֹת וּמִלֶּאֶד יְהוָה רִדְפֶם:
- 7 כִּי־חָנַם טַמְנוּ־לִי שַׁחַת רַשָׁתָם חָנַם חִפְרוּ לְנַפְשִׁי:
- 8 תְּבוֹאֶהוּ שׂוֹאֵה לֹא־יִדְעֵה וְרַשָׁתוֹ אֲשֶׁר־טָמַן תִּלְכְּדוּ בְּשׂוֹאֵה יִפְלֶ־בָּהּ:
- 9 וּנְפָשֵׁי תַנְיֵל בֵּיתוֹהָ תְּשִׁישׁ בִּישׁוּעָתוֹ:
- 10 כָּל עֲצָמוֹתַי תֹּאמְרָנָה יְהוָה מִי כָמוֹךָ מִצִּיל עָנִי מִחֶזֶק מִמֶּנּוּ וְעָנִי וְאֲבִיּוֹן מִגְּזֵלוֹ:
- 11 יְקוּמוּן עָדֵי חַמָּס אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִדְעָתִי וּשְׂאֵלוֹנֵי:
- 12 וְיִשְׁלְמוּנֵי רַעְהָ תַּחַת טוֹבָה שְׂכוֹל לְנַפְשִׁי:
- 13 וְאֲנִי בַּחֲלוֹתָם לְבוּשֵׁי שָׂק עֲנִיתִי בְּצוּם נַפְשִׁי וּתְפַלְתִּי עַל־חִיקוֹ תָּשׁוּב:
- 14 כְּרַע־כַּפָּאֵח לִי הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי כְּאַבְל־אֵם קָדָר שַׁחוֹתִי:
- 15 וּבְצַלְעֵי שְׂמַחוֹ וְנֹאסְפוֹ נֹאסְפוֹ עָלַי גִּכִּים וְלֹא יִדְעָתִי קָרְעוּ וְלֹא־דָמּוּ:
- 16 בַּחֲנַפֵּי לַעֲנִי מֵעוֹג חָרַק עָלַי שְׁנִימוֹ:
- 17 אֲדַנְּי כְּמָה תִּרְאֶה הַשִּׁיבָה נַפְשִׁי מִשְׂאִיהֶם מִכְּפִירִים יַחֲדָתִי:
- 18 אֹרֶךְ בְּקֶהֱל רֶב בְּעַם עֲצוּם אֶהְלַלְךָ:
- 19 אֱלֹהֵי־שְׂמַחוּ־לִי אִיבֵי שְׂקָר שְׂנְאֵי חָנָם יִקְרְצוּ־עֵינַי:
- 20 כִּי לֹא שָׁלוֹם יִדְבְּרוּ וְעַל רִגְעֵי־אַרְצֵךְ דִּבְרֵי מִרְמוֹת יַחֲשַׁבוּן:
- 21 וַיִּרְחִיבוּ עָלַי פִּיהֶם אָמְרוּ הָאֵחַ הָאֵחַ רָאֵתָה עֵינֵינוּ:

- 22 רְאִיתָהּ יְהוָה אֶל־תַּחֲרַשׁ אֲדָנִי אֶל־תִּרְחַק מִמֶּנִּי:
 23 הָעִירָה וְהִקְיָצָה לְמִשְׁפָּטִי אֱלֹהֵי וְאֲדָנִי לְרִיבִי:
 24 שִׁפְטֵנִי כְצַדִּיק וְהוּא אֱלֹהֵי וְאֶל־יִשְׁמְחוּ־לִי:
 25 אֶל־יֹאמְרוּ בְלִבָּם הָאִחַ נִפְשָׁנוּ אֶל־יֹאמְרוּ בְלַעֲנוּהוּ:
 26 וַיִּשְׂאוּ וַיִּחַפְּרוּ יַחְדָּו שְׂמֵחֵי רַעֲתֵי יִלְבְּשׁוּ־בִשְׂת וְכִלְמָה הַמַּגְדִּילִים עָלָי:
 27 וְרַנְנוּ וַיִּשְׂמְחוּ חֲפָצֵי צַדִּיקֵי וַיֹּאמְרוּ תָמִיד וַיִּגְדַּל יְהוָה הַחֲפֹץ שְׁלוֹם עֲבָדָיו:
 28 וּלְשׁוֹנֵי תְהַגֶּה צַדִּיקָד כָּל־הַיּוֹם תִּהְלֶתֶד:

1. (David's) Accuse, Lord, my accusers. Oppose my opponents.
2. Gird on shield and buckler and rise as my help
3. Draw spear and close (the way) to meet my pursuers. Say to my soul: I am your salvation.
4. Let them be ashamed and disgraced who seek my soul. Let them draw back and blush who think my evil.
5. Let them be as chaff before wind and the Angel of the Lord overthrow (them).
6. Let their way be dark and slippery. And the Angel of the Lord pursue them.
7. For without cause they hid a pit for their net for me; without cause they dug a pit for my soul.
8. Let destruction come on him not knowing, and let his net which he hid destroy him. In shame let him fall in it.
9. And my soul shall be glad in the Lord; it shall rejoice in his salvation.
10. All my bones will say: Lord, who is like You? saving the poor from those stronger, and the poor and needy from his despoiler.
11. False witnesses arise. They ask me what I do not know.
12. They repay evil for good bereaving my soul
13. And in their sickness I wore sackcloth, I humbled my soul with fasting and my prayer returned to my breast.
14. As though for my friend, for my brother I went about as mourning for a mother, mourning I bowed down.
15. And in my limping they joyed and gathered against me and I didn't know the smiters; they tore (cursed) and did not cease.
16. In impiety as jesters of feasts, by gnashing their teeth at me.
17. Lord, how long will You watch? Restore my soul from their

destructions, my only (life) from the lions.

18. I will thank You in the great assembly. Among the strong people I will praise You.

19. Let not my enemies rejoice in me falsely; my haters wink without cause.

20. For they will not speak peace; and against the quiet of the land they think fraudulent things.

21. And they open their mouth against me. They say: Aha aha, our eye saw it!

22. Lord, you saw, do not be silent. Lord, do not be far from me.

23. Watch and wake to my justice. My God and my Lord, as my defender.

24. Judge me, Lord my God, according to Your righteousness; and let them not rejoice in me.

25. Let them not say in their heart: Aha, our soul! Let them not say: We have swallowed him!

26. Let them be ashamed and blush together who rejoice in my trouble. Let them wear shame and reproach who boast in me.

27. Let them shout and rejoice whose delight is my righteousness and let them forever say: The LORD is great who wants peace for his servant.

28. And my tongue shall declare your righteousness; your praise all day long.

POINT TWO: The characteristic content of these psalms includes: 1. lament over enemies and what they have done; 2. lament over God's seeming delay; 3. invocation of God's justice and intervention to save his people and his plan; 4. imprecation of vengeance upon the enemies.

1. Lament over enemies and what they have done:

Psalm 35 does not mention any enemies by name, but speaks of “my enemies” (אויבי), “my accusers” (יריבי), “my opponents” (לוחמי), and “those who seek my soul” (מבקשי נפשי). Two pictures

are given here: a courtroom and a battlefield. “My accusers” (יריבי) are those who bring charges in court against another. This thought continues in the psalm as the psalmist calls for God to be his defender (v. 23: ליריבי) and to judge or vindicate him (שפטני); verse 11 speaks of false witnesses (ערי חמס) who arise who bring false charges against the believer. “My opponents” (לוחמי) are those who fight in battle; חלם is the regular Hebrew word for “fight,” מלחמה for “war.” Other psalms mention particular enemies and nations who fought against God’s people Israel, e.g. Psalm 83: Edom, the Ishmaelites, Moab, the Hagrites, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, and the Philistines. These enemies are not simply personal enemies who attack only for material gain. These nations, in attacking God’s chosen Old Testament people, were working against the eternal counsel and plan of salvation of the one true God. We must never forget that our salvation is inextricably bound together with the continuation of Old Testament Israel as a nation and a people. The Passover rescue from Egypt was also our rescue because there God kept his promise of the line of the Messiah. The Church is New Testament Israel and heir of all its spiritual heritage.

Psalm 83:4 makes it clear that the enemies sought this very destruction of Israel: “Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation; that the name of Israel be remembered no more.” The imprecatory psalms do not seek a Zionistic glory of the political nation of Israel on earth, for these were not simply enemy nations, but heathen and pagans who sought to destroy the true God and his believers. Their “evil counsel and purpose” was the same as with any spiritual enemy of the believer, both in the non-Christian world and even more dangerously and surreptitiously with false teachers and heretics since they have the appearance of godliness. These enemies seek after the very life and soul of the believer, as we read in Psalm 35:4.7.17&25: “who seek my soul; they dug a pit for my soul.” נפש can be translated “soul” or “life;” it is the essential part of the human being of which the enemies want to rob us: (מבקשי נפשי), “they seek after my soul.” (Verse 17 presents us with an interesting word, יהירתי. It means “my only.” KJV and Augustine translate “darling,” perhaps as Messianic or as referring to the loss of a loved one; LXX has μουσχευή with a similar understanding. NKJV and NIV have “my only life” and “my

precious life,” which give the true meaning of the word: “my only;” יחידה is something which cannot be replaced.) The imprecatory psalms lament over this wicked intent and purpose of our enemies and those who fight and contend against us.

2. Lament over God’s seeming delay:

During such times of affliction and danger (Luther’s *Anfechtung*) by these enemies, the believer may sometimes wonder whether God is listening and answering his prayers, and thus he laments also over God’s seeming delay and lays his concerns before the Lord in prayer, as in Psalm 35:17.22: “How long will you look on? ... You have seen it, O Lord, do not keep silent; O Lord, do not be far from me.”

3. Invocation of God’s just intervention to save his people and his plan:

The believer also begins to call for God’s judgment and justice, calling out in strong imperatives, as in Psalm 35:1.2.3.17.23.24:

רִיבָה לְחֵם הַחֹזֶק מִגֵּן וְצַנְהָ וְקוּמָה בְּעֶזְרָתִי

“Contend, Fight, Hold shield and buckler, Rise for my help, Draw spear, Rescue my soul, Arise and awake, Judge me!” These are cries of true faith, trusting that God will carry out this vengeance and this rescue since it is his will and promise to save his people from all spiritual danger.

4. Imprecation of vengeance upon the enemies:

Finally, the most notable characteristic of these psalms is the imprecation itself. “Let them be ashamed and disgraced; Let them draw back and blush; Let them be like chaff before wind with the Angel of the LORD driving them on; Let their way be dark and slippery, with the Angel of the LORD pursuing them.”

5 יִהְיוּ כַמֵּץ לַפְּנֵי־רִיחַ וּמִלְאֵךְ יִהְיֶה דוֹחָה:

6 יהי־ברכּם חשׁד וּנְחַלְקֵלְקוֹת וּמִלְאֵד יְהוּה רָדָפּם:

Two things are worthy of special notice: 1. There are imprecations that the enemy fall into his own snare and pit, himself becoming the victim of his evil plots; 2. Vengeance is called for at the hand of the Angel of the LORD; God himself (the Angel of the LORD - יְהוּה מִלְאֵד - a term which refers particularly to the preincarnate Christ) is to carry out this justice and this destruction.

POINT THREE: The PURPOSE of the imprecatory psalms and like prayers is two-fold: to shame the enemies into seeing their lost condition (a preaching of Law), and that they may turn from their evil ways and join the believers who are saved and rescued in praising and thanking God (a preaching of Gospel).

It is very important to note that this righteous judgment and justice is invoked to be performed by God; the believer calls on God as his avenger (יְהוּה אֶלֶה־יְהוּה and מִלְאֵד יְהוּה). The believer does not take this spiritual battle into his own hands or seek personal revenge. He prays for the destruction of his enemies only by God's meting out his righteous judgment (צָדִיק וּמוֹשָׁפֵט) for the salvation of the believer's soul. The believer prays that they might fall into their own pit only so that they might no longer be a threat to his soul and that they might see the destruction which their snares bring.

This is a battle between God and his opponents, a battle which is fought by Christ, the Messiah, as we sing in *A Mighty Fortress* (Luther's hymn on Psalm 46): "For us the One True Man doth fight./ The Man of God's own choosing./ Who is this chosen One?/ 'Tis Jesus Christ, the Son." Some of the imprecatory psalms are also Messianic. Augustine considers Psalm 35 to be Messianic, and the reference to the Angel of the LORD certainly gives some credence to his thought. Other psalms (such as 2 and 69) are clearly Messianic with direct prophecies of Christ and the events of his crucifixion (e. g., Psalm 69: 21: "They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."). The imprecatory psalms are best answered

and clearly fulfilled in the cross of Christ. Luther's thesis holds true: "Omnia bona in cruce et sub cruce abscondita sunt (All good things are hidden in and under the cross)." Dietrich Bonhoeffer also states this so well (*op. cit.*, p. 58f.):

Thus the imprecatory psalm leads to the cross of Jesus and to the love of God which forgives enemies. I cannot forgive the enemies of God out of my own resources. Only the crucified Christ can do that, and I through him. Thus the carrying out of vengeance becomes grace for all men in Jesus Christ.

Bonhoeffer also reminds us that we live in the time of fulfillment of these psalms, since Christ has loudly proclaimed on the cross his victory over his enemies: "It is finished! All our enemies are conquered! Satan's arrows broken lie."

Imprecation is a familiar part of the Christian's everyday life, though we may not always be aware of it as such. We pray against our enemies every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, especially the Third Petition: "Thy will be done." The correct explanation of this petition is given by Luther in the Catechism: "God's will is done when he breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will, which would not let us hallow his name nor let his kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world and our own flesh." We also learn to pray in this way from Luther's Morning and Evening prayers: "Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me."

It seems apparent that no one understood and loved the Psalter, including the imprecations, as much as Luther, as we read the vivid accounts of his bouts with Satan. Luther highly praised the Psalter and based many of his hymns on the Psalms. Some of those hymns include imprecatory thoughts, e.g., the third stanza of *O Lord, Look Down from Heaven, Behold (ELH 440)*: "May God root out all heresy/ And of false teachers rid us. ... Defend thy truth, O God, and stay/ This evil generation." Luther also wrote imprecatory prayers:

Lord God, dear Father, we beseech thee to hallow thy name both in us and in all the world. Destroy and exterminate the abominations, the idolatry, and the heresy of the Turk, the pope, and all false teachers and sectaries, who falsely bear thy name and so shamefully misuse and so terribly blaspheme it. ... Dear

Lord, convert or restrain them... (*What Luther Says*, #3538).

Imprecations are also included in the General Prayers of the Church: “Prosper what is good among us and bring to naught every evil counsel and purpose” (*ELH*, p. 48); “that justice may prevail and wickedness be hindered and punished” (*ELH*, p. 96). In the Litany we include the petition that God would “beat down Satan under our feet” (*ELH*, p. 137).

Such prayers are important because they involve our very salvation. Our salvation comes only through God’s pure word, not through heresy; our rescue comes only when Satan and all our spiritual enemies are routed and defeated, as we sing so powerfully on Easter morning: “My Jesus died triumphantly,/ And Satan’s arrows broken lie,/ Destroyed hell’s direst weapon” (*ELH*, 348).

Of course, such prayers also have as their final purpose the glory of God, our salvation, and the conversion of the heathen that they may join us in singing the eternal praise of the one true God and Savior. The believer praises God even as he sings this psalm, trusting in God to overcome his enemies, and looking to him as the only source of help and rescue. Again in Psalm 35:9&18 we read:

9 וְנַפְשִׁי תִגִּיל בַּיהוָה תְּשִׁישׁ בִּישׁוּעָתוֹ:

“And my soul shall rejoice in the LORD; it shall exult in his salvation.”

18 אֹרְךָ בְּקִהְל רַב בְּעַם עֲצוּם אֶתְהַלֵּךְ

“I will give you thanks in the great congregation; I will praise you among a mighty throng.” God is praised when we believe and proclaim his victory over our worst enemies: sin, death, and the power of the devil.

The purpose of the imprecatory psalms is not to wish anyone condemned to hell, but that by God’s justice and vengeance they might turn from their wicked way and live. Psalm 83:16-18 speaks in blessed contrasts, in holy paradoxes:

Fill their faces with dishonor, that they may seek Your name, O LORD. Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever; and let them be humiliated and perish, that they may know that You alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth.

POINT FOUR: The imprecatory psalms are in accord with all of Scripture, with the analogy of faith, and with Christ's command to love our enemies, because of their purpose to shame and convert the enemy through Law and Gospel.

Now we face the question of how these psalms stand in relation to Christ's command to love our enemies. The texts here are Matthew 5:43f.: “Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη, Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου καὶ μισήσεις τὸν ἐχθρόν σου. ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀγαπάτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν καὶ προσεύχεσθε ὑπὲρ τῶν διωκόντων ὑμᾶς, ὅπως γένησθε υἱοὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς,” “You have heard that it was said: You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven”; and Luke 6:27: “Ἀλλὰ ὑμῖν λέγω τοῖς ἀκούουσιν, ἀγαπάτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν, καλῶς ποιεῖτε τοῖς μισοῦσιν ὑμᾶς,” “But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.” How can the harsh statements of the imprecatory psalms (e.g., Psalm 35: 8: “Let destruction come upon him unawares; and let the net which he hid catch himself; into that very destruction let him fall.”) be in accord with the command of Jesus to love those who persecute us?

A distinction must be made concerning who these enemies are. There is no hope or rescue for Satan, for demons, and for the Old Adam; they are doomed to be condemned forever by the righteousness (צדקה) and justice (מִשְׁפָּט) of God. Satan is to be beaten down under our feet; demons cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus; the Old Adam is to be drowned and to die with all sins and evil lusts by daily contrition and repentance. Here we pray unconditionally that God would hinder and thwart their evil counsel and activity, as we do in the Sixth (and Seventh) Petition: “that God would guard and keep

us so that the devil, the world and our own flesh may not deceive us nor lead us into misbelief, despair and other shameful sin and vice.” We fervently pray that God will carry out the judgment and sentence he has already delivered on Satan and his followers by casting them “into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10). Thus we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, the General Prayer, the Litany, and in many hymns, e. g. *ELH* 259: “The kingdom Satan founded/ Shall now be overthrown.” In stanza 5 we pray to God: “That He for Jesus’ sake/ Would cleanse my soul and spirit/ Through Jesus’ blood and merit,/ And Satan’s power break.”

On the other hand, where there is hope for repentance and conversion, as with our fellow humans beings (though they be false teachers, heretics, and persecutors of the Christian Church), we pray that God would render his justice firstly to rescue and preserve our souls from their temptations and persecutions, and secondly that he would send his judgment upon them that they turn from their evil ways and live. Psalm 83:16-18 clearly illustrates that this is the purpose and intention of imprecation: “Fill their faces with dishonor, that they may seek your name, O LORD. Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever; and let them be humiliated and perish, that they may know that you alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth.” Augustine comments:

Again, he returns to these last, who in the same company of enemies are to be made ashamed for this purpose, that they may not be ashamed for ever: and for this purpose to be destroyed in as far as they are wicked, that being made good they may be found alive for ever. For having said of them, ‘Let them be ashamed and perish’, he instantly adds, ‘and let them know that Thy name is the Lord, Thou art only the Most Highest in all the earth.’ (Commentary on Psalm 83 §12)

It is in love (ἀγάπη) that we pray even the harshest imprecatory psalms. It is for the repentance and conversion of our enemies that we pray thus. Jesus tells us to love our enemies, using the word: ἀγαπάτε. Jesus does not expect that we will be able to nor that we should like (φιλεῖν) our enemies, but that we should have a true heartfelt love and concern for our enemy which wishes that he too could be converted

and saved by God's grace. Lenski, commenting on Matthew 5:44 (p. 247), says:

[True love's] inner motive is simply to bestow true blessings upon the one loved, to do him the highest good. I cannot like a filthy, vicious beggar and make him my personal friend; I cannot like a low, mean criminal who may have robbed me and threatened my life; I cannot like a false, lying, slanderous fellow who, perhaps, has vilified me again and again; but I can by the grace of Jesus Christ love them all, see what is wrong with them, desire and work to do them only good, most of all to free them from their vicious ways.

Similarly on Luke 6:27 Lenski writes: ἀγάπη “fills the loving heart with only the one desire and aim to free its enemy from his hate, to rescue him from his sin, and to save his soul.”

The imprecatory psalms as a pure preaching of the Law in its full severity and of the Gospel in all its sweetness and blessedness are rightly used out of Christian love for our enemies. We do our enemies no favor by excusing their evil or by minimizing our differences. By showing them Christian love through the pure preaching of God's Word we carry out Christ's injunction: ἀγαπάτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν. That preaching must also be accompanied with deeds of Christian charity, as we also learn in Psalm 35:12-14:

12 יִשְׁלְמוּנִי רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה שְׂכוּל לְנַפְשִׁי
 13 וְאֲנִי בַּחֲלוּתָם לְבוּשִׁי שֶׁקַּע עֲנִיתִי בְצוּם נַפְשִׁי וְתַפְלִתִּי עַל־חִיקְרֵי תְשׁוּבָה
 14 כִּרְעֵ־כַפָּאֵחַ לִי הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי כְּאֶבֶל־אֵם קָדַר שְׂחוּתִי

“They repay me evil for good, to the bereavement of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer kept returning to my bosom. I went about as through it were my friend or brother; I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother.”

This true Christian love (ἀγάπη) comes only by the grace of Jesus Christ and is learned only through the cross. Only when we see the result and consequence, the bitter punishment of all evil and all

sin on the cross of Christ do we truly see the danger of our enemies (both to us and to themselves). In the bitter sufferings and death of Christ we see the result of the snares and pits which our enemies dig for us. It is for rescue and salvation from that eternal condemnation that we pray in the imprecatory psalms, both for ourselves and for those who persecute us (ὑπὲρ τῶν διωκόντων). We pray for them, for their benefit (ὑπὲρ) by praying against them (Latin: *imprecari* = *in* <against + *precari* <pray). We pray that God's judgment and destruction would come upon them so that they see their own evil and its result in the crucifixion of Christ. Bonhoeffer (*op. cit.* p. 58) says: "God hates and redirects his enemies to the only righteous one, and this one asks forgiveness for them. Only in the cross of Jesus Christ is the love of God to be found."

From the cross we also hear the prayer of our Savior: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Only because Jesus, the One who suffered all the snares and attacks of the enemies, prays for forgiveness for his enemies, can we learn to pray in the same way. This does not put an end to imprecatory prayers, but is a natural, loving and Christian accompaniment to them. Both must continue for all time. Bonhoeffer speaks in the same way (p. 59):

Even today I can believe the love of God and forgive my enemies only by going back to the cross of Christ, to the carrying out of the wrath of God. The cross of Jesus is valid for all men. Whoever opposes him, whoever corrupts the word of the cross of Jesus on which God's wrath must be executed, must bear the curse of God some time or another.

CONCLUSION

Much of our Christian faith seems negative at first thought, but just as the Gospel does not have its true effect without the alien and preparatory work of the Law, so also the "negative" articles of faith have their place in illuminating the positive. Both must be maintained with full vigor. It is hard to imagine Paul having his pure clarity on the doctrine of justification without the *particulae exclusivae*: "You are saved by grace, **not of yourselves**; it is the gift of God, **not of works**." The Lutheran Confessions would not have their powerful

force if they did not contain both “We believe, teach, and confess” as well as “We condemn.” Ὁμολογοῦμεν must be accompanied by *damnamus*, lest we fall into the empty positivism of Robert Schuller and Norman Vincent Peale.

The psalms of lament and imprecation must stand right alongside the psalms of praise and thanksgiving. Both, when prayed in Christian faith and Christian love, have the same purpose and goal: “the maintenance of righteousness and the hindrance and punishment of wickedness.” In Christian love we use God’s own words in the psalms to pray against our enemy and for him at the same time. Thereby we fulfill both of Christ’s commands: “Abhor what is evil” (Romans 12:9) and “Love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44).

Vocabulary for Psalm 35

1. ריב - to contend in court as defender or advocate
2. החזק - in Piel, to gird on
חנה - large shield
3. הרק - to pour out. Hiphil of רוק: to close the way.
4. ויכלמו - Niphal, to be ashamed
יסגו אטור - to draw back
יחפרו - Qal, to be ashamed, to blush
5. דחה - to overthrow
6. חלקלקות - from חלק, to be smooth or slippery
7. טמן - to dig or bury, to make a hidden pit
שחת - a pit or snare
רשת - a net
חפר - to dig a pit
8. שואה - destruction
10. גול - to strip or despoil
11. עד חמס - a false witness. חמס is violent or wrong.
12. ישלמוני - Piel, to repay
14. קדר - to go in filthy garments as mourners
15. צלע - to limp
נכים - to smite, from נסה
קרעו - to tear (with words), thus to curse
דמו - from דמם, to cease
16. חנפי - impiety
לעני מעונ - “cake-mockers,” referring to jesters at banquets
17. יחידתי - “my only,” something that cannot be replaced, thus “my life”

Dealing With Public Evil Properly

by *Karl J. Anderson*

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Proper Determination of Sin and Sinner
 - A. Real and Imaginary Offenses
 - B. The Law of Corroboration
 - C. Witnesses and Evidence

- II. Public And Private Sin
 - A. The difference between secret and public sin
 - B. The Right of Privacy
 - C. Public confession

- III. Judging Public Persons and Public Evil
 - A. Reputation and Life
 - B. Judgment and Celebrity
 - C. Judgment and Governing Authorities
 - D. The Preacher as Judge

Conclusion

Introduction

Commentary on public evil is a responsibility of the office of pastor. The pastor by virtue of his office is the chief spokesman for the congregation, the local spokesman for his synod or church body, and, in so far as he proclaims the Word, spokesman for the Almighty.

Some occurrences are so clearly public, so shockingly evil, and of such high impact on the general population that some pastoral comment or reaction seems necessary. The 1998 Clinton-Lewinsky scandal (in the midst of which this paper was first assigned) is one example. Another is the September 11th terrorist attack on our nation. But few occurrences of public evil are that extraordinary or that demanding of commentary. The pastoral dilemma comes in regard to the usual, daily, ordinary, local, and congregational episodes of sinfulness. Should something be said? If not, then why not? If so, then how much should be said? When, where, and how should it be said? This paper is directed to those questions and that dilemma.

I. The Proper Determination of Sin and Sinner

Real and Imaginary Offenses

Preliminary to speaking against public evil is establishing whether in fact any sin has been committed. On what basis is some person or event judged evil? Secular society will determine the existence of public evil by its own arbitrary, humanistic standards. For example, contemporary secular society considers the Scriptural ethics of Evangelical Christianity evil. Consider the ongoing conflict on issues like abortion and human sexuality. Some Christian sects (Arminian, Pentecostal, Holiness), having developed pietistic and extra-biblical standards of morality, condemn as evil things such as dancing, card playing, movies, wine, popular music, and so on. We Lutherans believe that the Scriptures are the only rule and norm of doctrine and life. We are bound to the Scriptures in regard to good and evil. What the Scriptures forbid, we forbid. What the Scriptures command, we command. And regarding those things of which the Scriptures neither command nor forbid, we neither command nor forbid, but leave them as open questions or *adiaphora*. We must not accuse or even suspect people of sin (evil) except on the basis of the Ten Commandments. Likewise, events are evil only when they

involve the transgression of divine law.

Personal politics, customs, preferences, experiences, or suspicions must not interfere with sound judgment based on the Commandments. Either the person or event in question is in violation of the Lord's commandments or not.

Corroboration

Having established that a particular behavior is indeed a violation of the Commandments, next it must be determined that *that* sin has been committed by a particular person. And before any accusation can be made there must be corroboration:

Deuteronomy 19:15 One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Deuteronomy 17:6-7 At the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness. The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. You must purge the evil from among you.

Matthew 18:15-17 If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

2 Corinthians 13:1 This will be my third visit to you. Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

1 Timothy 5:19 Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.

Hebrews 10:28 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

This means that even if a Christian himself witnessed the unmistakable sin of another, yet if there are no other witnesses, he may not make it known publicly. Luther wrote vividly on this point in his Large Catechism:

Therefore God forbids you to speak evil about another even though, to your certain knowledge, he is guilty. All the more urgent is the prohibition if you are not sure but have it only from hearsay. But you say: “Why shouldn’t I speak if it is the truth?” I reply: “Why don’t you bring it before the regular judge?” “Oh, I cannot prove it publicly; I might be called a liar and sent away in disgrace. “ Ah, now do you smell the roast? If you do not trust yourself to make your charges before the proper authorities, then hold your tongue. Keep your knowledge to yourself and do not give it out to others. For when you repeat a story that you cannot prove, even if it is true, you appear as a liar. Besides, you act like a knave, for no man should be deprived of his honor and good name unless these have first been taken away from him publicly.

Every report, then, that cannot be adequately proved is false witness. No one should publicly assert as truth what is not publicly substantiated. In short, what is secret should be allowed to remain secret, or at any rate be reproved in secret, as we shall hear.¹

This is not to say that a Christian with first-hand knowledge of sin should not deal in any way with the sinner. Rather, he may not deal with the matter publicly. The sinner must still be dealt with, but privately. Jesus said, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you

have won your brother over.” (Matthew 18:15)

Valid Witnesses

Also the witnesses who bring charges against another must be evaluated carefully. The fact that there are two persons each with something to say about a particular person and a certain event does not mean that they are valid witnesses. Witnesses were also brought against Jesus, but they proved to be *false witnesses*, unable to agree in their testimony.² So witnesses who have their knowledge about a suspected sin and sinner by hearsay are not witnesses at all. Dr. A.L. Graebner wrote:

A witness is a person who testifies to what he knows by his own observation.... What a man knows from others only, though from most reliable witnesses, he cannot himself assert as a witness to the fact. A wife cannot testify as a witness to her husband's adultery committed in New York while she was in Chicago, even though her husband confessed to her; she can only testify as a witness to the confession....

...But in all cases the testimony of a witness can go only as far as his own observation has gone, and where that ended, his availability as a witness must end. What he may have *concluded* from what he had seen or heard is not evidence. It is for the court to make the conclusions, if they may or must be made...

Simple, however, and easy of application as this rule certainly is, it has often been neglected or misapplied. The oral statements of a witness and a letter written by him and produced in evidence by another person is not the testimony of two witnesses, but of one witness only. The testimony of three persons stating that they suspected a certain man of a certain act is not the testimony of three witnesses, nor even the testimony of one witness, to the act. In a case where five witnesses were ready to testify to a fact, it was found that none of them was a witness to a fact, but that all of them had their knowledge from the same informant, who was himself no witness in any sense. A man had been excommunicated on the testimony of two members of the congregation because of certain utterances, which he denied and refused to recant. The witnesses agreed in their statements as to the nature of the offense at issue; but when, on closer investigation, they were

asked where and under what circumstances the offense had been committed, the one declared that it was in a conversation between him and the accused in the rear of the church, no third person being present, while the other witness declared that the accused had made the offensive statement as he walked with him alone on the road half a mile away from the church. ... Yet the accused had to be acquitted and the excommunication rescinded as, in fact, nothing had been proved and nothing could be proved, there being, according to the statements of both witnesses, but one witness in each instance in the face of a persistent denial of the charge. In another case seven women had, in written depositions, preferred a number of heinous charges against the same man, each of them declaring that she had been alone with him when the offenses were committed. Although, also in this case, the accused emphatically denied all the immoral acts charged against him, there were those who held him convicted by the evidence of seven witnesses, while, according to the rule laid down by the Head of the Church, the charges fell to the ground, as each of the seven witnesses avowedly stood alone with her testimony to the acts alleged in her depositions. An indignity committed on A at X is not the same act with an indignity committed on B at Y or with the same kind of indignity committed on C at Z, and a person who has witnessed the one and the one only, cannot testify to the other which she has not witnessed. Two witnesses, to come under the rule, must by their own observation, be witnesses to the same act, not only the same in kind, but the same in number. ... Where the two or three witnesses to such particular act are wanting, the church must acquit for want of evidence, all the same whether the unsustained charges be few or many, with one witness, and only one, testifying to each, while the accused denies them all.³

Circumstantial Evidence

Caution must also be exercised in regard to the circumstantial evidence offered against a suspected sinner. Again Dr. Graebner:

Circumstantial evidence, in order to establish the truth of an allegation, must be conclusive as to the point or points at issue in a way to exclude a reasonable doubt. When a woman is found pregnant, this circumstance establishes the fact that she has had carnal intercourse, and if she be found in the said state a year after the

departure of her husband to a foreign country and before his return, extra connubial intercourse is to be assumed without further evidence. But these circumstances alone do not substantiate a charge of adultery against the woman; for she may have been the victim of rape committed upon her person against her will. When a man known to have been insane when last seen alive is found dead in his room with a discharged pistol in his clenched hand and a ball in his brain corresponding with the caliber of the pistol, these circumstances together with the well-known suicidal propensities of the insane, establish beyond a reasonable doubt a case of suicide without moral responsibility. But the occurrence of several incorrections in a treasurer's books, such as omissions of entries or faulty addition, does not suffice to stamp him a thief, even though all the errors had been to his profit, as all these inaccuracies may have been committed unintentionally and without his knowledge. That a stolen article has been found in a servant's trunk is not in itself conclusive evidence of that servant's guilt when for example, other inmates of the house, such as fellow-servants or children of the family can be shown to have had access to the trunk. Thus Benjamin, Joseph's youngest brother, was not a thief, though the silver cup was found in his sack, (Genesis 44:1 ff.).⁴

Certainty of a person's guilt based on legitimate, unimpeachable witnesses and irrefutable evidence is required before that person can be dealt with publicly as a sinner. Such certainty in Church discipline has become increasingly important in our society today. The worldlings judge and condemn each other based on sentiment, suspicion, gossip, and innuendo. The popular media seem preoccupied not with protecting and defending men's reputations, but with damaging and destroying them. Truth in our culture is too easily established — "It must be true... I read it in the *Enquirer*." Accusations need only be made, not proved. Entire television programs like *Entertainment*

Tonight and *Access Hollywood* deal little with facts and rely instead on innuendo, suspicion, hearsay, and out-of-context photos and “sound bites.” The Church and its pastors must not sink to the same level.

The preacher must not accept complaints about the private sins of others which are presented to him if these sins have not already been fruitlessly admonished privately. Rather he should reproach the complainant for revealing a sin which is still hidden and has not been rebuked and so transgressing the divine order and encourage him with all earnestness to observe the same. What Luther says... holds true in an even greater degree for a pastor. Only those sins belong before the pastor, as a public person, which he himself has witnessed or which are in the third stage of fraternal admonition. It is shameful for a preacher to lend an open ear to gossip.⁵

II. Public and Private Sin.

The Difference Between Public and Private Sin

There is a distinction between private, or hidden, sin and public, or manifest sin. The difference is not that some sins are secret and known to no one. The difference is the degree to which the sin is known to others and the number of those who have been offended.

Walther writes in his *Pastorale*:

Christian Kortholt says: “A distinction is primarily to be observed between hidden sins and manifest sins. But we do not call those sins hidden which are known to no one at all, for God alone judges them (Romans 2:16), but rather those which are known to a few and are not connected with an offense to many. But we call those sins manifest which are publicly known and are therefore

connected with an offense to many. As far as hidden sins are concerned, the minister of the church, no less than every upright Christian, has to observe the Savior's rule in Matthew 18:15 ff. But manifest sins are to be rebuked publicly."⁶

Walther also quotes Hartmann approvingly:

Hidden sins of those which are known only to a few are to be corrected not publicly but between you and the erring one alone. Therefore those who bring the hidden sins of their brothers before the congregation, without observing the steps prescribed by Christ for such fraternal dealings, are not to be heard but are rather to be rebuked and recalled to the law of love...⁷

Some sins by their nature or circumstance are manifest and public. For example, the thief who is apprehended by the police while committing his crime, arrested, booked, fingerprinted, jailed, and held for trial: Such sin becomes immediately a matter of public record, not by gossips or slanderers, but by public officials entrusted with the apprehension and trial of criminals. Other sins, such as lust, are matters known only to God and the sinner. That kind of sin becomes public only by the indiscretion of the sinner. Thus any sin can become public and manifest when enough people learn of it, and any sin might be considered hidden insofar as few people know about it. There is no absolute requirement to further publicize sins which, like theft, may be of public record. The Eighth Commandment requires us to

protect our neighbor's reputation, to speak well of him, and to put the best construction on everything.

As always, so here, too, love is the highest law. So if love for the one who has fallen requires that he first be admonished privately, the use of the right to rebuke him publicly right away would involve a severe wrong. Even public sins, known to all, are not to be rebuked publicly right away, the first time.⁸

In general, what is secret should be allowed to remain secret, or at any rate be reproved in secret, and only public sin is to be rebuked publicly.

The Right Of Privacy

The individual has a right to privacy, not only in the civil realm, but also in the Church. The Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution declares that no man “shall be compelled, in any criminal case, to be a witness against himself.” The right of privacy in Christian fraternal discipline consists, first of all, in that no one shall be forced to confess his sins.⁹ Luther wrote:

Up to now, as we all know from experience, there has been no law quite so oppressive as that which forced everyone to make confession on pain of the gravest mortal sin. Moreover, it so greatly burdened and tortured consciences with the enumeration of all kinds of sin that no one was able to confess purely enough. Worst of all, no one taught or understood what confession is and how useful and comforting it is. Instead, it was made sheer anguish and a hellish torture since people had to make confession even though nothing was more hateful to them. These three things have now been removed and made voluntary so that we may confess without coercion or fear, and we are released from the

torture of enumerating all sins in detail. (Large Catechism: *A brief exhortation to Confession.*)¹⁰

Similarly Walther:

The preacher indeed has the duty of asking one who comes to him for confession about an evil rumor he has heard. But he shall not deny him the Absolution if he maintains that the rumor is groundless and it cannot be proven. It is contrary to his office to seek out secret sins.

In the Saxon General Articles it says therefore: “The servants of the Church should not ask of their parishioners that which is not confessed to them, for this confession was not instituted to be an inquisition into secret and hidden sins, but rather primarily and alone for the teaching of the simple and the comfort of the troubled and assaulted conscience.”¹¹

The right to privacy applies, secondly, in that those sins that are confessed to the pastor may not be used against the penitent, but must be held in confidence.

The preachers must not reveal what has been confessed to him. In Luther’s Table Talk it says: “Someone asked Dr. M. Luther and said, If a pastor and father confessor had absolved a woman who had killed her child, and it was later revealed and made known by other people, would the preacher also have to testify to the judge if he were asked about it? Then he (Luther) answered: Absolutely not! For one must distinguish between churchly and worldly government since she has confessed it not to me but to the Lord Christ, and if Christ keeps it secret, I should also keep it secret and say nothing more than: I have heard nothing; if Christ has heard something, let Him tell it”...A preacher who gossips about what has been confessed to him has forfeited his office and deserved to be deposed¹²

Even when the pastor suspects that a person is guilty of some sin, but cannot establish the fact with witnesses and evidence, he must absolve the man if he requests it and admit him to the Lord’s Supper. It is not the pastor’s duty to search out secret sins, in spite of any suspicions he may have. In his pastoral theology manual J.H.C. Fritz wrote that “ministers in the Church have the command to remit sin;

they have not the command to investigate secret sins.”¹³

A pastor should altogether ignore occasional gossip that may be detrimental to a Christian's character; but whenever an evil report, which cannot be traced to a definite source, is in persistent circulation concerning any Christian, or if a Christian, by an evil report that has been spread, is directly accused of a certain sin, the pastor must call the person's attention to it and ask him whether or not what has been heard is true. If, however, the person denies his guilt and protests that he is innocent, and if his guilt cannot by any witnesses or otherwise be established, a pastor dare not refuse to such a one the Sacrament; he must consider him innocent, acting upon the principle that the Church does not search out, nor sit in judgment upon, sins that are hidden. Secret sins cannot be judged by a pastor, nor is that his business, and a mere suspicion that a person has committed a certain sin cannot exclude him from the Sacrament...¹⁴

There is no Biblical requirement that the sinner publicly confess his private sins. He must, of course, repent before God and, if possible, before the neighbor against whom he has sinned. It is a distortion of Biblical law when some assume that there is an absolute obligation to “tell the truth” when asked about even private matters. This happens, for example, when there are rumors and unsubstantiated charges against public officials, and the press pursue the individual with questions. If the man answers nothing, or if he does not answer in enough detail to satisfy reporters, it is interpreted as an evasion of the imagined obligation to tell “all the truth and nothing but the truth.” Consider the inconsistency: By law a man cannot be forced to testify against himself, yet anyone refusing to answer the questions of reporters is condemned as evasive and suspicious. Not Christian theology, but Humanism imagines an absolute obligation to reveal all the truth to anyone who asks.

But does God require us to tell the truth at all times? Such a proposition is highly questionable. The commandment is very clear: We are not to bear false witness against our neighbor, but this does not mean that our neighbor or our enemy is ever entitled to the truth from us, or any word from us, about matters of no concern to them, or of private nature to us. No enemy or criminal has any right to knowledge from us which can be used

to do us evil. Scripture does not condemn Abraham and Isaac for lying in order to avoid murder and rape (Genesis 12:11-13; 20:2; 26:6,7); on the contrary, both are richly blessed by God, and the men who placed them in such an unhappy position are condemned or judged (Genesis 12:15-20; so: 3-18; 26:10-16). Like examples abound in Scripture. No one who is seeking to do us evil, to violate the law in reference to us or to another, is entitled to the truth. More than that, it can with scriptural grounds be called an evil to tell the truth to evil men and enable them thereby to expedite their evil. To see theft and to be silent is to be party to theft. To see men planning theft or murder, and then to answer truthfully concerning the whereabouts of the man, woman, or property they mean to kill, rape, or steal, is to be party to their offense. In terms of this, Rahab, had she told the truth, would have been an accessory to the death of two men. (Joshua 2:1 ff).¹⁵

Luther wrote powerfully about letting secret sins remain secret. To talk publicly about sins which should be reproved privately is gossip and slander, which itself is sin requiring reproof.

There is a great difference between judging sin and having knowledge of sin. Knowledge of sin does not entail the right to judge it. I may see and hear that my neighbor sins, but to make him the talk of the town is not my business. If I interfere and pass sentence on him, I fall into a greater sin than his. When you become aware of sin, simply make your ears a tomb and bury it until you are appointed a judge and authorized to administer punishment by virtue of your office.¹⁶

Every report, then, that cannot be adequately proved is false witness. No one should publicly assert as truth what is not publicly substantiated. In short, what is secret should be allowed to remain secret, or at any rate be reproved in secret, as we shall hear. Therefore, if you encounter somebody with a worthless tongue who gossips and slanders someone, rebuke him straight to his face and make him blush for shame. Then you will silence many a one who otherwise would bring some poor man into disgrace, from which he could scarcely clear himself. For honor and good name are easily taken away, but not easily restored.¹⁷

Public Confession

It is a general rule that those who have fallen into public, manifest sin must also show public repentance. Walther quotes Matthew 5:23-24 in support of this rule.¹⁸

Not all sins require public repentance. “If sins of weakness required it, it would become cumbersome, commonplace, and meaningless. It is only for open and manifest sins of malice that have caused public offense.”¹⁹

In the event that a public apology is required, Walther gives two important recommendations: First, that an apology need not always be made in person by the offender. It may be made through the pastor from the pulpit, or at the congregational meeting, committee, or council. Second, the form of an apology is guided by the “severity of the offense, the nature of the one who has fallen, and the congregation’s level of knowledge.”²⁰

The term *public apology* may be preferable to *public repentance*. Repentance is, after all, a matter of the heart and will have been accomplished prior to any public announcement. A public apology cannot take the place of true, heartfelt repentance. Walther points out that the public repentance is only a sign of the true repentance of the heart.²¹ Public repentance might also be

misunderstood as a satisfaction, or penalty, required because of the sin committed. Likewise the impression might be given that a public form of repentance is somehow more efficacious than private repentance. The Augsburg Confession rejected “those who teach that forgiveness of sin is not obtained through faith but through the satisfactions made by man.”²²

III. Judging Public Persons and Public Evil

Reputation and Life

In the Large Catechism Luther opened his discussion of the 8th Commandment by saying that next to life itself a man’s most precious treasure is his good name and reputation. Slander can even be likened to murder because the effect of both is the destruction of life.

Slander is a form of murder: It seeks to destroy the reputation and the integrity of a man by insinuating falsehoods. The reason why the rabbis regarded it as worse than idolatry, incest, and murder was because its moral consequences are fully as deadly if not worse, and it is a crime easily committed and not too readily detected. Moreover, slander, because it passes from mouth to mouth quickly, involves far more people in a very short time than does idolatry, incest, or murder.²³

Knowing that a man’s name, reputation, honor, and life are at stake, we must be sure of our motivation for speaking about him and his sins publicly. Our Lord’s words “if he listens to you” and “you have won your brother over” indicate the godly motivation pervading the entire exercise of fraternal discipline.

Matthew 18:15-17 If your brother sins against you, go and show

him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that “every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

In these steps of fraternal discipline only the last two are public: “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church;” and, “If he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” The matter becomes public only after the earlier, private attempts at admonition have failed.

It is generally admitted that when dealing with public offense the private steps of admonition need not be followed. That is so because the sinner himself, by having given public offense, has thereby put his case before the congregation or the public. Walther refers to St. Paul’s public rebuke of St. Peter (Galatians 2:11-14) as an example. However, as the persistent motivation throughout the steps of admonition is, “If he listens to you, you have won your brother over,” so the same motivation applies to matters of public sin. The “highest law is love:”

The highest law, however, is under all circumstances the law of Christian charity. If Christian charity therefore demands that a public offender be spoken to privately, it would be unjust at once to proceed against him publicly; for the purpose of church discipline is to bring a sinner to a knowledge of his sins and to true repentance. By bringing the case at once to the attention of the congregation (although according to the letter of Matt. 18 we would have the right to do so), we might keep the sinner from confessing his guilt, either because he feels ashamed to do so for other reasons. Of course, even if a public offender has been dealt with privately and brought to repentance, the congregation which has been offended must be subsequently informed of the happy outcome, so that the offense will be removed.²⁴

Celebrity

In this communication-information age, where news of every kind is instantaneously and continuously available at the click of a mouse button or a TV remote control, the failings of public

figures are top news stories. In pursuit of audience share the news media sacrifice concern for name and reputation for the sake of new, exciting headlines. Public persons, professional athletes, entertainers, and politicians, are viewed as fair game. It seems to be an unspoken, yet universally accepted, rule that celebrity or public office are automatically accompanied by a forfeiture of privacy. It may be true that the attention and visibility which accompany celebrity make privacy more difficult to protect, but that does not negate the right to privacy. The eighth commandment does not differentiate between public and private *neighbors*. The principles presented in these pages suggest that public figures have no less right to privacy than ordinary private citizens.

In fact we have a special obligation to all who experience peculiarly intense attacks on their good name and reputation. The 8th Commandment requires us to speak well of and defend our neighbor and always put the best construction on everything. If public figures suffer more abuse from the world in regard to reputation, then Christians are obligated to defend them with greater effort.

The Governing Authorities

We have a special obligation to the honor of the governing authorities because of the fourth commandment. Honor and respect include an obligation to defend and speak well of the authorities especially because they so often suffer the most scurrilous attacks from political foes and from the press.

Paul Althaus in his book, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, writes that Luther's opinion of kings and princes was often harsh. Yet Luther recognized that in spite of all the evil in them, governments do not cease to be God's institution and order. Government and the State are the tools through which God works. "God is still able to rule and to preserve peace and order even through a thoroughly bad government. However a government may have come into existence and however it may conduct its affairs, its all too human nature sustains God's order."²⁵

Because the Christian honors and supports the government,
he also does not become involved in the complaints about the

government which are so popular among the people of this world, that is, he avoids the “secret backbiting” and the evil slanders which people use to arouse opposition to the government. Criticism of the government is the concern of those whose office requires it of them. And it is their task to express their criticism openly and publicly. However, God has forbidden those who are not called to exercise this office to comment on these matters. Nothing is easier than discovering the mistakes and errors of those who administer their office in full view of the public. Such critics however need to be reminded of the saying about the mote and the beam (Matthew 7:1-5). The irresponsible and inappropriate nature of their comments is evident when their concern to depose the government leads them to ignore the merits of the governing authorities and permits them to speak only of their mistakes.²⁶

The Christian must obey the governing authorities for the sake of God, because God has established them. That obedience is due whether the government acts justly or unjustly. Luther said:

The lords sit in high places and everyone sees their sins and

faults most of all. And because men see them most of all, no sin is more prevalent than speaking evil of lords. Everyone loves to do it, for in so doing he forgets his own unrighteousness. Even though their lord had every virtue and they could discover in him only one vice as small as a mote, while they themselves were full of vices as large as beams, yet they see the mote in high places before they see the virtues, and they do not see the beams in the depths of all vices.²⁷

Thus we must endure the power of the prince. If the prince misuses his authority, I ought not for that reason avoid him, take vengeance on him, or do something to punish him. I must obey him for God's sake, for he stands in the place of God. No matter how oppressive their taxes, I must obey them and endure everything patiently for God's sake. Whether they act justly or unjustly will all be worked out at its proper time. Therefore, if the government takes away your possessions, your body, your life, and everything you have, then say: "I am glad to give it to you because I recognize you as my lord. I am happy to obey you. Whether or not you use the power God has given you for good or for evil is a matter for you to be concerned about."²⁸

Pastors As Judges

Finally, Pastors do have responsibility to respond to public evil, whether it is a matter of the congregation, the local area, or the nation's capitol. The office of Pastor is the office of judge in a limited sense. Luther wrote in the Large Catechism:

So you see that we are absolutely forbidden to speak evil of our neighbor. Exception is made, however, of civil magistrates, preachers, and parents, for we must interpret this commandment in such a way that evil shall not go unpunished.Although no one has in his own person the right to judge and condemn anyone, yet if they whose duty it is fail to do so, they sin as much as those who take the law into their own hands without such a commission. Necessity requires one to report evil, to prefer charges, to attest, examine and witness. It is no different from the situation of the Physician who, to cure a patient, is sometimes compelled to examine and handle his private parts. Just so, magistrates, parents, even brothers and sisters and other good friends are under mutual obligation to reprove where it is necessary and beneficial.²⁹

There is an interdependence of the political and preaching offices, both of which are divinely instituted for the preservation of order in the world.

The political office and the preaching office of the ministry encounter each other at the point of God's law. Political authority is basically the office of the law. However, both the gospel and the preaching of the law have been committed to the church. And the preaching of the law has been committed to the church not merely insofar as, understood in its depth, it reveals the sin of men and leads them toward the Gospel but also insofar as it is intended to preserve order in the world.³⁰

The office of preaching is important to the political order because "it instructs people in all the stations of life that the orders in which they act are the work of God."³¹ This is not the primary purpose of preaching, but "there is no doubt that it is one of the tasks of preaching." Althaus quotes Luther:

For a preacher confirms, strengthens, and helps to sustain authority of every kind, and temporal peace generally.³²

But this task of preaching to the political order does not mean that the preachers should give instructions about politics and government.

The Word of God does not intend to instruct political understanding, but to summon the conscience before God and to remind it that the meaning of the political office lies in its character as service.³³

Luther himself is an example of this task of the preaching office toward the political realm. He offered instruction from the

Book Review:

God's Gift to You: A Devotional Book on the Lord's Supper

by Michael K. Smith

Gaylin R. Schmeling, *God's Gift to You: A Devotional Book on the Lord's Supper*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001. 132 pp.

Order from our Bethany College Bookstore at
1-800-944-1722. Price \$11.95.

How often do you wake up on Sunday morning and suddenly remember, *It's a communion Sunday!* You may not feel sufficiently prepared to receive the Sacrament. Or if you do remember and prepare prior to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, you may feel limited to a review of Luther's "Christian Questions and Answers" from the *Small Catechism*. But should not the sacramental nature of the Lutheran Church be reflected more strongly in the devotional life of the Christian?

Gaylin Schmeling, President of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, has produced a superb supplement for the Christian to use to prepare to receive Holy Communion. From the Introduction to the suggested prayers which close this volume, the Gospel permeates and predominates. Writing in a casual yet reverent style, President Schmeling achieves his purpose well: "The purpose of this book of devotions is to assist us in properly preparing for this blessed Sacrament and to deepen our appreciation for its many blessings" (p. vi.).

The book is divided into four primary parts. Part One focuses on "The Lord's Supper and the Holy Scriptures," providing a general review of the Sacrament of the Altar, concentrating especially on the blessings bestowed through it. Part Two, the longest portion of the book, is composed of the bulk of the devotions and is simply entitled, "The Lord's Supper and the Church Year." Each section of this part,

subdivided into the seasons of the Church year, begins with a brief introduction of each season and how it relates to the Lord's Supper. For example, in the introduction to "The Sacrament in the Easter Season" President Schmeling states:

The very Christ who showed himself alive to Mary and the disciples is present for us in the Supper with all his Easter blessings. As he stood in the midst of his disciples that first Easter night declaring, "Peace be with you," so he is in our midst under the form of bread and wine imparting forgiveness, life, and salvation. Yes, he lives and meets us face-to-face in the Supper (p. 65).

Part Three presents additional devotions whose goal it is to help the communicant prepare for the Sacrament in everyday life, and especially in times of specific spiritual stress. Part Four lists various prayers to be employed before, during, and after reception of the Supper. A few of these prayers are from other sources. All of them would be useful for private use, but perhaps could also be included in worship bulletins.

Since the emphasis of this book is devotional use, a few comments regarding some of the devotions are in order. In the first devotion for use during the Advent season, this reviewer especially enjoyed President Schmeling's emphasis on the *three*-fold coming of our Lord.

The word *Maranatha* in the liturgy of the ancient church not only reminded the faithful of the Lord's coming in Bethlehem but also of his coming in the Holy Supper. As certainly as the child came to Mary that first holy night, so he comes to us with his body and blood in the Sacrament. At the altar the Christmas miracle, the mystery of the incarnation, is made present for us, a great and mighty wonder (pp. 20-21).

The final devotion for use during Lent properly promotes the "last will and testament" of Christ, as opposed to the "new covenant" of Christ given on Maundy Thursday. Regarding what Jesus left us as a last will and testament (which was Luther's stress also) helps us to recognize the necessity of Christ's death and our status as heirs of an eternal inheritance.

In one of the devotions for use during the Pentecost season President Schmeling focuses on "The Divine Service." In these

times when worship has become “contemporary,” tradition has been de-emphasized, and sanctuaries have become auditoriums, it is refreshing to read:

In the divine service, we leave our mundane work-a-day world for an hour and have heaven on earth for a moment. This is the very portal of heaven, the gateway to the eternal. We have a foretaste of heaven, for we meet Jesus face-to-face and receive all his blessings. This is our closest relationship with the Savior on this side of heaven (p. 84).

Here is Jesus! The nebulous spirituality which seems to have overtaken the collective conscience of the world is shown by the stark reality of the Lord’s Supper to be void of meaning. Pastors will glean sermon material from this volume. They should definitely recommend this volume to their parishioners.