**INSERT**

You do not often hear us Lutherans talk about the election. You more so find Reformed and Baptist people talk about the election. However, the Bible speaks about it. Where we differ, is on our understanding of “How the Bible speaks about it.”

Election for Reformed people is the most important dogma, and this dogma or teaching regulates or controls all other doctrines. Putting it very simple: For Reformed theologians the election is the chief part of Christian doctrine. That is where you start!

And for Lutherans? Well, for Orthodox, Confessional Lutherans election is merely a dogma supporting other, more important central doctrines. Saying, we do not start as Reformed people with the election, nor is it for us, “the chief part of Christian doctrine.”

Conversations with Reformed or Baptist people somehow goes in the direction of: “You also believe in the election, so, how come you say, we differ.” Listen to Luther and learn how we differ.

Luther also warns against all speculations concerning this dogma. His argument is that when we speak as if we know what the “hidden God” has been thinking and doing, we lie. We are foolish and presumptuous and even wicked to think that we can investigate the secret counsels, judgments and ways of God, for they are unsearchable. We only know of God what God revealed to us. And there we as Lutherans stay.

In our Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article XI, which is about God’s Eternal Foreknowledge and Election, we address John Calvin’s teaching on the “double predestination.” He teaches that God had foreordained and predestined some people to go to hell, no matter what, while others He has foreordained and predestined to go to heaven. This we reject. In the Reformed world, reading their Confessions, we know that not all supported Calvin’s “double predestination.”

When it comes to the Election know that it is meant only for Christians. It is meant to comfort Christians during hard and difficult trials. The Bible says in election that our salvation in Christ is so sure and certain that our relationship with God was known by Him before the foundation of the world.

**SERMON. -  God’s Election.  Deuteronomy 7:1-11; Romans 8:26-34 ; John 10:22-29**

In Deuteronomy 7 we read that God chose Israel to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. Did Israel choose God? No, very simple, God chose Israel. That is where the word, “elect” comes from. In a political election, you choose a candidate, meaning, out of all the possible candidates, you choose, or elect one to be your candidate. “Choosing” or “electing” seems to say the same thing.

Why did God choose Israel to be his treasured possession? Was it because they were a great people, influential, beautiful, rich, or lived a high moral life, as a people? Meaning, they were good people and that is why God chose them. Well, reading Deuteronomy we hear God say, No!

It was not because they were bigger or mightier than other nations. They were in fact, the smallest, most insignificant. Put it this way: God did not choose them because there was something in them that drew his attention. And it was most definitely not because they seek Him. We know, as the Psalmist say in **Psalm 14**, “Nobody seeks God. No one has done any good. No one understands. All people have turned away from God and together they have become corrupt.”

The idea of man who has a free will, is not what the Bible teach. When it comes to spiritual matters, man is dead in his trespasses. How can a dead man have something that is still “alive” in him, such as a “free will.”

God did not choose Israel because Israel was so great, or, because Israel chose him for they had a free will to do so. No! As all people on this earth, they were also dead in their trespasses.

So how does it happen that Israel, or us, come to be a relationship with God. After all, God is not in a relationship with dead people. God makes people alive to be in a relationship with Him. But how come God makes certain people alive and not all people.

It is Paul who says in **Romans 8:29,** *“for those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.”* So, God somehow knew who will be saved in Christ. Luther warns that we should not speculate about this, and try to “climb into the mind of God.” We do not know how God “knows” what will happen in future, who will be saved in Christ. So, don’t argue about something you do not know.

How then do we think about God who knows who will be his children. And how do we know that we are those whom God has chosen to be his children. Luther will advise us to work only with what we know. What then do we know? We only know what God tells us.

For example, Paul says in **Romans 8:30,** : *“Those whom God predestined [saying, God decided before-hand] he also called.*” How does God call those whom He has chosen? God does not call without means. God calls through the preaching of his Word. And, when his Word is preached, He commanded *“that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name”* **(Luke 24:47).**

Paul is saying the same thing in **2 Corinthians 5:20,** *“Therefore we are ambassadors of Christ, God making his appeal though us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”*

Think of what Paul says this way. The King calls the guests that He wants to have at His Son’s wedding though the ministers (pastors) He sends out. And the King still today, through the preaching of his Word, every Sunday, calls the guests He wants to have at His Son’s wedding through the preaching of the pastor.

If you and I want to think about our eternal election [God choosing us) to be saved, in a helpful way, we must hold very strongly and firmly to this truth: just as the preaching of repentance is universal - it is for everybody, so also the promise of the Gospel is universal, that is, it belongs to all people.

Christ Himself said this in **Luke 24:47**, *“Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations.”* And the very well-known text in **John 3:16** says it all, *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son.”*

How does Jesus describes the “elect,” those “chosen by God”? Jesus says, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life”* **(John 10:27-28).**

Holy Scripture also testifies that God, who has called us, is faithful. So when He has begun the good work in us, He will also preserve it to the end and perfect it, if we ourselves do not turn from Him, but firmly hold on to the work begun to the end.

How then do you think about yourself, as being one of the “elect,” or being “chosen” by God? The advice given to us by our fathers in the Book of Concord is this: “Concern yourself with what God revealed, with what you know God said in the Bible. He said, through the preaching of the Word, He calls us, and the Holy Spirit bestows grace, power, and ability for this purpose.

Do not try to dig into the depths of what is hidden in God. There are many things hidden in God, things we do not know. As Jesus went on his way through towns and villages, teaching, a person came up to Him and said: *“Lord, will those who are saved be few?*” Jesus answered him, *“Strive to enter through the narrow gate”* (**Luke 13:23-24)**.

Luther explained it this way: Worry first about Christ and the gospel, that you may recognize your sin and His grace. Then fight your sin, as the first eight chapters of Romans teaches. When you come to chapter 8 of Romans, know that you are under the cross and suffering, and this will teach you correctly of predestination [ what God decided is going to happen in the future, with you], which you find in chapters 9, 10, and 11, and how comforting it is.

Do not speculate about what you do not know. But know this, as you repent of your sins, as you receive Christ in body and in blood, you belong to Him. You are his sheep. Follow Him.

**AMEN.**

As Lutherans we did not have differences within the Church of the Augsburg Confession regarding election. Discussions started to flare up with the arrival of the Reformed, and specifically John Calvin. The Reformed rejected the true presence of Christ’s body and blood in the bread and in the wine. Calvin also made of Election the most important doctrine, and Erasmus rejected it all together. So, how do we as Lutherans talk about election.

When we as Lutherans talk about election, we start by making a distinction between God’s eternal foreknowledge and the eternal election of His children to eternal salvation. **God’s foreknowledge** is nothing else than this: God knows all things before they happen, as it is written in **Daniel 2:28,** “*… but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.”*

Foreknowledge means that God sees and knows everything before it happens. This is called God’s foreknowledge, which extends over all creatures, good and bad. In other words, He foresees and foreknows everything that is or will be, that is happening or will happen, whether it is good or bad. For all things, whether they are past or future, are clear and present before God. This is written in: **Matthew 10:29,** *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.”*

God’s foreknowledge foresees and foreknows what is evil, yet not in the sense that it is God’s gracious will that evil should happen. Everything that the perverse, wicked will of the devil and of people wants and desires to try and do, God sees and knows before it happens. His foreknowledge preserves order also in wicked acts or works, since a limit and measure is fixed by God for the evil that God does not will.

He limits how far it should go, how long it should last, and when and how He will hinder and punish it. God the Lord rules over all[1] of this so that it must flow to the glory of the divine name and to the salvation of His elect, and for that reason the godless must be astonished. So Paul said in Corinthians that there are no rulers who understood the secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory, for if they did, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (**1 Corinthians 2:7-8)**.

When you think of the foreknowledge of God, know therefore, God does not create and cause evil, nor does He help or promote it because He knows the beginning, and because He knows who causes it. The cause of evil is the wicked, perverse will of the devil and of people.

Now that we established what God’s foreknowledge is, let’s come to God’s eternal election. It is in **Luke 22:44-48** that Jesus said to the disciples: *“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.*”

All of the Old Testament is a witness of Jesus Christ. We can only come to understand election, once we come to know Jesus Christ. Election is meant only for those who are in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are going to avoid speculation about God’s secret and mysterious foreknowledge. What we will learn of God and of ourselves, we can learn only in Jesus Christ, for in Jesus Christ God meets man.

The Bible as a whole speaks about how God guides us, what God’s purpose is, and how God orders the world, and us in it. And God does all of this in Christ Jesus. He is the true Book of Life. And it is only God’s Word that reveals that to us.

In other words. We do not only talk of election. We talk the way Jesus taught the disciples. We talk about redemption, call, justification and salvation. Paul followed Jesus’ example in **Romans 8:29,** when he said, “*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified*.”

When God speaks of the human race, He does not say, “I chose those and I rejected those.” We come to learn how God speaks about the human race when we come to learn why He send his Son. God send his Son to redeem all of humanity. Christ came to reconcile all of humanity with God. Not only some for God condemned the others to hell.

Christ told the disciples, and the church, that we should preach what He came to do. We should preach to all people that Christ through his innocence, obedience, suffering, and death merited the righteousness that avails all people before God.

We should preach to all people that Christ gives us, offers us, eternal life which is in Him through his Word and Sacraments. Meaning, come to a Divine Service, believe in Jesus Christ whom you will receive in Word and in Sacrament, and you receive all that He had done for you.

When we preach Christ, as He taught us, the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, will make what Christ offers and gives us in Word and in Sacrament, true in our lives. When we hear his Word preached, the Holy Spirit converts us to truly repent of our sins, and the Holy Spirit preserves us in the true faith.

When it comes to Election, do not judge according to your reason, or according to the Law or from any outward appearance. Neither should you attempt to investigate the secret, concealed depth of divine predestination. Instead, listen to God’s revealed will. For He has made *“known to us the mystery of His will”* (**Ephesians 1:9**) and made it clear through Christ so that it might be preached **(2 Timothy 1:9**).

We continue to preach the Word of Christ, and Christ describes the elect as follows:

*“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one will snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one”* ***(John 10:27-30)***

**You know the “elect.” You are one of them. You receive forgiveness of your sins through the death and resurrection of Christ. You receive Christ in body and blood through your mouth. You partook in his death and resurrection in your Baptism. You belong to Him, so He says. Have faith in Him.**

**AMEN.**

[1] (**Psalm 103:19**)