

**A Catechism:
Election
&
Predestination**



This catechism on election and predestination is a tract by the Rev. C.F.W. Walther (St. Louis, MO., 1881; translated by J. Humberger) and the Eleventh Article of the Formula of Concord of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; revised by the Rev. Stewart Crown, Ascension 2014.

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1. *In short, what is predestination?*

The ordaining of God unto salvation.

2. *What is the difference which, in the first place, ought to be accurately observed in the doctrine of predestination?*

In the first place, the difference between foreknowledge and eternal election of God ought to be accurately observed.

3. *What is the foreknowledge of God?*

The foreknowledge of God is that God sees and knows all things before they come to pass.

4. *Does the foreknowledge of God extend to all creatures?*

Yes. The foreknowledge of God extends to all creatures, the good and the bad: namely, He sees and knows all things before, that which now is or will be, that which now occurs or will occur, whether it be good or bad, since before God all things, whether they be past or future, are manifest and present. For it is written: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father" (Matthew 10:29); and "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139:16); and "I know your sitting down and your going out and coming in, and your raging against me" (Isaiah 37:28).

5. *Does the eternal election of God, as well as the foreknowledge, extend to all men, the good and the bad?*

No. The eternal election or predestination of God, that is, the ordaining of God unto salvation, does not pertain both to the good and to the bad, but only to the children of God.

6. *To what particular children of God does the eternal election of God extend?*

Only to the children of God, who were elected and ordained to eternal life, before the foundation of the world.

7. *By what do you prove from the Holy Scriptures, that the eternal election is not universal, but extends only to the children of God, ordained to eternal life?*

By this, that Paul declares: “Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace” (Ephesians 1:4-6).

8. *Does God's foreknowledge not only foresee evils, but is it also a cause of the evil?*

The foreknowledge of God foresees evils also, and knows them before they happen, but this is not to be understood as if it were God's gracious will that they should occur. But that which the perverse and evil will of the devil and of men propose and desire to do, God foresees and foreknows. And this foreknowledge, even in evil things and deeds, continues to act in its proper mode, so that God prescribes certain limits to these evils, which He neither desires nor approves; and definite bounds are assigned, which they cannot transgress, and limits are imposed declaring how long they may endure, and the time and the mode according to which they shall

again be arrested and be subjected to punishment. And God so regulates all these things, that they contribute to the glory of His divine name, and to the salvation of His elect, while the wicked are confounded and put to shame.

9. *Is, then, God's foreknowledge also the cause of evil, which it foresees and foreknows?*

No. The foreknowledge of God is not the origin or the cause of evil (for God does not create or cause evil, nor does he facilitate or promote it); but the wicked, perverted will of the devil and of men is the cause of evil. For thus it is written: "He destroys you, O Israel, for you are against Me, against your Helper" (Hosea 13:9); and "For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with You" (Psalm 5:4).

10. *Does the election of God only foresee and foreknow the salvation of the elect, or is it also a cause of their salvation and of everything that belongs to the obtaining of the same?*

The eternal election of God not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but through His gracious will and good pleasure in Christ Jesus, is also the cause which procures, works, facilitates, and promotes our salvation and whatever pertains to it.

11. *Is it so important that the eternal election of God is a cause of our salvation, and that it procures, works, facilitates, and promotes whatever pertains to it?*

Yes indeed; for upon this our salvation is so firmly grounded that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

12. *By what do you prove that the salvation of the elect is so firmly and immovably grounded upon the eternal election of God?*

From this, that it is written: “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28); and “As many as were appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

13. *Is it right to contemplate the eternal election merely in the secret, inscrutable council of God?*

No, this eternal election or ordination of God to everlasting life must not be contemplated merely in the secret, inscrutable council of God, as if it comprehended nothing more, or required nothing more, or as if nothing more were to be taken into consideration, than the fact that God foresees what men and how many will secure salvation, and what men and how many shall perish forever, or as if the Lord would institute a certain military review, saying, this one shall be saved, but that one shall be lost; this one shall persevere to the end, but that one shall not persevere.

14. *Why should we not contemplate election thus, as though it comprehended nothing more than that God foresaw what men and how many would secure salvation, what men and how many would perish forever?*

For, from this opinion, many derive and adopt strange, perilous, and pernicious thoughts, which produce and confirm either security and impenitence, or discouragement and despair; so that they indulge in hazardous reflections, saying: “Since God has predestined His elect to salvation, before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4,5), and God’s

election cannot fail, or be obstructed or changed by any one (Isaiah 14:27; Romans 9:19), if therefore, I am elected to salvation, it cannot be impaired, even if I commit every manner of sin and shame without repentance, even if I do not regard the Word and Sacraments, nor concern myself about repentance, faith, prayer, or piety; for I shall and must nevertheless be saved, because the election of God must stand; but if I am not predestined, it will avail nothing even if I do adhere to the Word, repent, believe, etc., for I can neither hinder nor change the predestination of God.”

15. *Do such thoughts arise in the minds even of true Christians when they contemplate the eternal election according to their reason?*

Yes. Such thoughts may arise in the minds even of the pious although through the grace of God they repent, believe, and have a desire to live piously when they thus address themselves: “If you are not elected to salvation in eternity, it is all still in vain.” And especially do these thoughts present themselves, when the individual takes into consideration his own weakness, and views the examples of those who persevered not, but afterwards fell away.

16. *What is a firm and sure position which cannot deceive our expectation, and which should be taken in opposition to this false opinion and perilous thoughts concerning election?*

This is certain: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” not to contribute to a feeling of security, and to impenitence, but to be “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). It is also certain, that

all things in the Word of God are prescribed unto us, not to drive us into despair, but “that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope” (Romans 15:4). Therefore, it is without any doubt, that that in no way is the sound sense, or the legitimate use of the doctrine concerning the eternal predestination of God, by which either impenitence or despair is excited or confirmed.

17. How does the Holy Scripture also set forth this doctrine?

Nor is this doctrine set forth in the Scriptures in any other manner, than to direct us to the Word of God (Ephesians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 1:7-8); to admonish us to repentance (2 Timothy 3:16); to encourage us to godliness (Ephesians 1:4,13; John 15:3); to strengthen our faith, and to assure us of our salvation (Ephesians 1:4,13; John 10:28; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

18. Dare we regard the doctrine of election as useless or even injurious?

No. The doctrine concerning this article, if it be set forth according to the analogy of the divine Word, neither can nor should be regarded as useless or unnecessary, much less as offensive or injurious, since the Holy Scriptures mention this article not only at one place casually, but copiously treat and inculcate it in many places.

19. But should we not rather remain entirely silent on the doctrine of election, on account of the abuse and misunderstanding of the same?

Far be it! Nor should the doctrine of the divine Word be neglected or rejected on account of the abuse or errors of others, but much rather should the true

sense in reference to this matter be explained according to the authority of the Scriptures, for the purpose of averting all abuses and errors.

20. *To what should we accustom ourselves, if we would reflect and discourse correctly and with advantage upon the eternal election or predestination and ordination of the children of God to everlasting life?*

We should accustom ourselves, not to speculate upon the bare, hidden, secret, inscrutable foreknowledge of God, but to meditate on it in the manner in which the counsel, the purpose, and ordination of God, in Christ Jesus, who is the right and true book of life, are revealed unto us through the Word. Therefore, the whole doctrine concerning the purpose, the counsel, will, and ordination of God, belong to our redemption, call, justification and salvation should be comprised together. For in this manner Paul treats and explains this article (Romans 8:29,30; Ephesians 1:4,5). And the same is also taught by Christ in the parable, Matthew 22:1-14.

21. *What has God in the first place ordained in His purpose and council, as it is revealed unto us in Christ by the Word?*

(a) That the human race shall be truly redeemed and reconciled to God through Christ, who by His innocent obedience, suffering and death, has merited for us that righteousness which avails before God, and eternal life.

22. *What has God further ordained in His purpose and council, as it is revealed unto us in Christ by the Word?*

- (b) That this merit of Christ and His benefits should be offered, administered, and distributed to us, through His Word and Sacraments.
 - (c) That by His Holy Spirit, through the Word, when it is preached, and considered, he will be efficacious and active in us, to turn our hearts unto true repentance, and to preserve us in the true faith.
 - (d) That He will justify all those who in true repentance embrace Christ in genuine faith, graciously receive them, and adopt them as children and heirs of eternal life.
 - (e) That He will sanctify those in love, who are thus justified, as St. Paul, Ephesians 1:4, testifies.
 - (f) That He will defend them in their great weakness, against the devil, the world, and the flesh; will govern and lead them in His ways, and, if they should stumble, raise them up again, and comfort and preserve them in trials and temptations.
 - (g) That He will strengthen and extend in them that good work which He has commenced, and preserve them unto the end, if they adhere to the Word of God, are diligent in prayer, persevere in the grace of God, and faithfully use the gifts received.
23. *What has God finally ordained in His purpose and council, as it is revealed to us in Christ by the Word?*
- (h) That He will finally render those whom He has elected, called, and justified, eternally happy and glorious in everlasting life.

24. *Has God in this His counsel, purpose and ordination prepared the salvation of His children in general only?*

No. In this counsel, purpose, and ordination God has mercifully considered also all and each person of the elect, who will ultimately be saved through Christ, has elected them to salvation, and decreed, that in the manner now mentioned He will, through His grace, gifts, and operation, bring them to this salvation, assist them in it, promote it, and strengthen and preserve them.

25. *Does all this really belong to the doctrine of election?*

Yes; all this, according to the Scripture, is comprehended in the doctrine concerning the eternal election of God to the adoption of children, and to everlasting salvation, and should be understood in this article; it ought never to be excluded or omitted, when we discourse of the purpose, predestination, election, and ordination of God to salvation.

26. *Can the doctrine of election cause security or despair, if it be so presented, that first the general redemption of Christ be laid as the ground, and then the manner be shown how God brings the elect unto salvation?*

No. If our views are thus formed in reference to this article, agreeably to the Scriptures, we can, by the grace of God, properly understand it.

27. *What belongs to a fuller explanation and salutary use of the doctrine of the predestination of God to salvation?*

This, namely that we should know by what means and whence it can be discerned who the elect are,

who can and should embrace this doctrine to their own consolation.

28. *Why does it belong to a salutary use of this doctrine, that we should know who the elect are?*

Because only the elect will be saved.

29. *According to what should we not judge, if we would know who the elect are?*

In reference to this point, we should not judge according to our reason, or to the law, or to any external appearance; nor should we attempt to scrutinize the concealed, hidden depth of the divine predestination.

30. *To what should we rather attend, if we would know who the elect are, who can and should embrace this doctrine to their own consolation?*

We should attend to the revealed will of God. “For He has made known unto us the mystery of His will” and brought it to light through Christ, that it might be preached (Ephesians 1:9-11; 2 Timothy 1:9,10).

31. *But how is the mystery of the will of God revealed unto us?*

This is revealed to us in this way, as Paul declares: “And those who He predestined” (elect and ordain), “He also called” (Romans 8:29,30).

32. *How does God call?*

Now God does not call without means, but through the Word; hence He has commanded repentance and remission of sins to be preached. And Paul also testifies the same thing, where he writes: “Therefore,

we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). And the guests, whom the king desired to have at the marriage of his son, he caused to be called by his servants whom he sent forth (Matthew 22:3,4). And the householder called into his vineyard, some at the first hour, others at the second, third, sixth, ninth, and even the eleventh hour (Matthew 20:1-6).

33. *What must we firmly and constantly observe if we would profitably consider our eternal election to salvation?*

This: that as the preaching of repentance is universal, so is also the promise of the Gospel, that is, it extends to all persons. Therefore Christ commanded, “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations” (Luke 24:47); and “For in this way God loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son” to it (John 3:16; John 1:29; 6:51; 1 John 5:7; Matthew 11:28; Romans 11:32; 2 Peter 3:9; Romans 10:12; John 6:40). Thus it is the command of Christ (Luke 24:47; Mark 16:15), that in general unto all, unto whom repentance is preached, this promise of the Gospel should also be presented.

34. *Is the call of God by His Word always meant in earnest?*

Yes. This call of God, which is given through the preaching of his Word, we should not regard as pretended and unreal, but we ought to know that through it God reveals His will; namely, that in those whom He thus calls, He will operate through the Word; so that they may be enlightened, converted, and saved. For the Word through which we are called,

is a ministration of the Spirit, which imparts the Spirit, and through which the Spirit is conferred (2 Corinthians 3:8); and is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). And since the Holy Spirit will be efficacious through the Word, strengthen us, and administer power and ability, it is the will of God, that we should receive and believe the Word, and be obedient to it.

35. *Hence, how are those who belong to the elect, described in the Scriptures, in order that every one may know whether he belongs to them or not?*

Hence the elect are thus described: “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” (John 10:27,28); and Ephesians 1:11,13: “In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,” hear the Gospel, believe in Christ, pray, and return thanks, and are sanctified in love, have hope, patience, and consolation in trials (Romans 8:16,25); and although all these are very weak in them, yet they “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matthew 5:6). Thus the Spirit of God bears witness to the elect, that they are the children of God, and as they know not what they should pray for as they ought, He makes intercession for them with groanings which cannot be uttered (Romans 8:16,26).

36. *But, must we not doubt whether we belong to the elect, when we remember that many, who were called and came to faith, have not persevered unto the end?*

By no means! The Holy Scriptures, moreover, testify that God, who has called us, is so faithful that when He has begun this good work in us, He will also maintain it to the end, and accomplish it, if we do not turn ourselves away from Him, but hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end; to which end also He has promised His grace (1 Corinthians 1:9; Philippians 1:6,7; 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Peter 3:9,15,18; Hebrews 3:14).

37. *Hence what should we do, as God's will is so plainly revealed in His Word?*

With this revealed will of God we should occupy ourselves, and follow it, and study it diligently, since the Holy Spirit, through the Word, through which He calls us, grants grace, power, and ability for this purpose; and we should not pry into the abyss of the secret predestination of God. Someone said to Christ Jesus, “ `Lord, will those who are saved be few?’ And He said to them, `Strive to enter through the narrow door’ ” (Luke 13:23,24).

38. *But when will a person first learn to understand how consolatory the doctrine of election is?*

Thus says Luther in his preface to the Epistle to the Romans: “Proceed in the order observed in the Epistle to the Romans. Concern yourself in the first place with Christ and His Gospel, that you may perceive both your sins and His grace; then, strive with sin, as Paul teaches from the first to the eighth chapter. Afterwards, if (in the eighth chapter) you are tried by temptations and afflictions, you will be taught in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters how consolatory the doctrine of divine predestination is.” Now this doctrine is salutary and consolatory to those

who regard the revealed will of God, and pursue the order which St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans observes; for he first leads men to repentance, to a knowledge of sin, to faith in Christ, to obedience to God's commands, before he speaks concerning the mystery of the eternal election of God.

39. *But is it not written: "Many are called and few are chosen;" how then can the call be a sure sign by which God reveals the mystery of His will towards us?*

The divine vocation, which takes place through the Word, is not the cause that many are called, while few are chosen (Matthew 20:16); as if such were the meaning of God: "Externally, through the Word, I call you all, indeed, to My kingdom, to whom I give My Word, but in My heart I do not intend it for all, but for a few only; for it is My will, that the greater part of those, whom I call through the Word, should not be enlightened and converted, but be and remain damned, although I have declared Myself otherwise towards them, through the Word by which they are called."

40. *Why would it be against God to accept that God indeed calls us externally to salvation, but means it differently in the heart?*

Because, in this manner it would be taught that God, who is the eternal truth, contradicts Himself; when at the same time God punishes such insincerity even in men, when a person declares a thing, and means and intends another in his heart (Psalm 5:9; 12:3).

41. *What necessary foundation of our faith would thereby be overthrown, if we dare not believe that God by the call reveals the mystery of His will toward us?*

In this way the necessary and consolatory foundation of our faith would also be rendered entirely uncertain and be destroyed, by which we are daily reminded and admonished that from the Word of God alone, through which He confers with us, and calls us, we should learn and determine what His will towards us is, and that whatever it assures and promises us, we should firmly believe, and not doubt in reference to it.

42. *Hence, what arrangement has Christ prepared, so that every individual Christian can apply the general promises of the Gospel to himself also in particular?*

Christ causes the promise of the Gospel to be proposed not only in general, but He also seals it with the Sacraments, which He has attached as seals of the promise, and thus He confirms it to each believer in particular.

43. *Do we not for this very reason retain private absolution, in order that every individual may thereby become assured of the will of God towards him?*

Yes: for this reason we retain private absolution, as the Augsburg Confession declares in the eleventh article, and we teach that it is the command of God that we should believe in this absolution, and feel assured that when we believe the words of the absolution, we are as truly reconciled to God, as if we had heard a voice from heaven; as the Apology explains this article. But we should be wholly and entirely deprived of this consolation, if, from that call

which is made through the Word and Sacraments, we should not infer what the will of God towards us is.

44. *Would not the doctrine of the power of the Word also be overthrown, if we could not know God's gracious will toward us by our call through the Word?*

Certainly. The foundation of the Christian faith would be subverted, namely, that the Holy Spirit is truly present when the Word is preached, heard, and considered, and will be efficacious and operate through it.

45. *Many being called and few chosen, can those also be the elect, who despise the Word by which they are called?*

No. It must by no means be understood, as we have mentioned a little before, that those are the elect, who condemn, reject, blaspheme, and persecute the Word of God (Matthew 22:5,6; Acts 13:46); who, hearing the Word, harden their hearts (Hebrews 4:2; 6:7); who resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51); who persevere in sins without repentance (Luke 14:18); who do not truly believe in Christ (Mark 16:16); who have only an external appearance of piety (Matthew 7:22,23; 22:12); or, seek, apart from Christ, other ways of righteousness and salvation (Romans 9:31).

46. *To what has God rather ordained those who are elect unto salvation at the same time in His eternal counsel?*

To this, that the Holy Spirit shall call, enlighten, and convert the elect through the Word, and that He will justify and save all those who receive Christ through true faith.

47. *But what has God at the same time decreed in His counsel concerning those also, who do not follow the call?*

This, that He will harden, reject, and condemn those who are called through the Word, if they cast off the Word, resist the Holy Spirit, who desires to be efficacious and to operate in them through the Word, and persevere in this course.

48. *Why, then, are many called, but few chosen?*

Because few receive the Word and obey it. The greater part despise the Word, and will not come to the marriage-feast.

49. *Hence what is not the cause of this despising the Word?*

The cause of this contempt of the Word is not the foreknowledge of God, but the perverted will of man, which rejects or perverts the means and instrument of the Holy Spirit, which God offers unto it through the call, and it resists the Holy Spirit, who would be efficacious and operate through the Word; as Christ says: "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37).

50. *What is also not the cause, that many indeed accept the Word with joy, but afterwards again fall away? (Luke 8:13.)*

The cause is not, because God would not grant unto those, in whom He has begun this good work, His grace in order to perseverance; for this is contrary to the declaration of St. Paul (Philippians 1:6); but because they obstinately turn away again from the holy command, grieve and offend the Holy Spirit,

entangle themselves in the pollutions of the world, and garnish the habitation of their hearts for Satan again. The latter end with these is worse than the beginning (2 Peter 2:10,20; Luke 11:25,26; Hebrews 10:26; Ephesians 4:30).

51. *Is, then, the doctrine of election useless, or even injurious, if we contemplate it as it is revealed in God's Word, and when we continue in and hold fast to it?*

No; it is then very useful, salutary, and consolatory.

52. *What principal article of the Christian faith does this doctrine of predestination confirm, when it is contemplated and presented according to God's Word?*

It confirms most forcibly the article, that we are justified and saved by pure grace for the sake of Christ alone, without any of our own works and merit.

53. *Why does the true doctrine of predestination so forcibly confirm the doctrine of justification (alone by grace for Christ's sake)?*

Because, according to the doctrine of predestination, before the world began, before we existed, indeed, before the foundation of the world, when certainly we could have done nothing good, we were elected to salvation by grace in Christ, according to the purpose of God (Romans 9:11; 2 Timothy 1:9).

54. *Does the true doctrine of predestination confirm the doctrine also, that the natural will of man is not free?*

Yes. By this doctrine, all false opinions and errors concerning the powers of our natural will, are overthrown; since, before the world began, God

decreed and ordained in His counsel, that He Himself, by the power of His Holy Spirit, through the Word, would effect and work in us all that belongs to our conversion.

55. *Is, then, the true doctrine of election comforting in general only, or does it also give each individual Christian comfort for his own person in particular?*

Yes. This doctrine affords the eminent and precious consolation, that God took so deep an interest in the conversion, righteousness, and salvation of each Christian, and so faithfully provided for these, that before the foundation of the world, in His counsel and purpose, He ordained the manner in which He would bring me to salvation, and preserve me there.

56. *Does the true doctrine of election give the Christians a beautiful and glorious comfort then also, when they consider that they can so easily lose their salvation through the weakness and wickedness of the flesh, or through the fraud and power of the devil and the world?*

Yes. The true doctrine of election also gives the beautiful and glorious comfort, that God wishes to secure my salvation so truly and firmly, that in His eternal purpose, which cannot fail or be overthrown, He decreed it, and to secure it, placed it in the omnipotent hands of our Savior Jesus Christ, out of which none shall pluck us (John 10, 28). For, if our salvation were committed to us, it might easily be lost through the weakness and wickedness of our flesh, or be taken and plucked out of our hands, by the fraud and power of the devil and of the world. Hence Paul says: "Since we are called according to the purpose of God, who shall separate us from the love of God,

which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord?" (Romans 8:28,35-39).

57. *Does the true doctrine also give us a substantial comfort under the cross and in temptations?*

Yes. In afflictions and temptations most precious consolation may be derived from this doctrine. For it teaches that, before the world was made, God determined and decreed in His counsel, that in all our necessities He would be at our side, grant us patience, give us consolation, awaken hope in us, and produce such results as would tend to our salvation. Hence, St. Paul in consolatory terms teaches that God ordained in His purpose before the world was made, by what crosses and afflictions He would conform each one of His elect to the image of His Son, and that the crosses of each one must work together for his good, because he is called according to the purpose of God. Hence, Paul draws the sure and certain conclusion, that "neither tribulation nor distress, etc., neither death nor life, etc., can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (Romans 8:28,29,35,38,39).

58. *Does the true doctrine of election also give the comfort, that in spite of the persecutions of tyrants and in spite of the errors of heretics the Church can not be overthrown?*

Yes. This article also affords us a noble testimony that the Church of God will remain, and resist all the powers of hell.

59. *Does the true doctrine of election give comfort against the offense, that the true Church is in such a pitiable plight and it is so well with the false church in this world?*

Yes. It teaches likewise which is the true Church of God, so that we may not stumble at the great power of the false church (Romans 9:24,25).

60. *Does the true doctrine of election contain not only comfort, but also admonitions and warnings?*

Yes. From this article very serious admonitions and warnings are deduced; as, Luke 7:30, "They rejected the purpose of God for themselves;" and "I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste My banquet" (Luke 14:24); and "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 20:16; 22:14); and "He who has ears to hear, let him hear," and "Take care then how you hear" (Luke 8:8,18).

61. *According to this, how can the doctrine of this article be used?*

In a useful, consolatory, and most profitable manner.

62. *What distinction must be observed in regard to the doctrine of election when teaching the same?*

A very accurate distinction must be made between that which is expressly revealed in the Word of God in reference to this matter, and that which is not revealed.

63. *Did not God reveal everything concerning election?*

No. For, besides those things which we have thus far said, and which are revealed in Christ, God has also concealed and kept secret many things concerning

this mystery, and reserved them for His own wisdom and knowledge alone.

64. *Should we not also seek to find out with our reason the mysteries of election not revealed in God's Word?*

No. Into these things we ought not to search, nor indulge our imagination, nor inquire curiously, nor attempt to determine; but we should adhere to the revealed Word.

65. *Why is the admonition so very highly necessary, that we should not indulge in subtle inquiries and draw inferences in this matter?*

Because, our curiosity always occupies itself with these things, rather than with those which God has revealed to us in His Word with respect to this matter, since we are unable to reconcile them in our minds, which indeed we are not commanded to do.

66. *But is it not certain that God has already from eternity foreseen, and still knows, what will certainly take place?*

Yes. There is no doubt that God foresaw precisely, and with the greatest certainty, before the world was made, and He knows still, who among those that are called, will believe or will not believe; also, who among the converted will remain steadfast, and who will not remain steadfast; who, if they fall back into sin, will return, and who will become hardened. Nor is there any doubt that the number of those who will be saved, and of those who will be lost, is known and seen of God.

67. *Are we allowed to draw all kinds of conclusions with our reason from this, that God has already foreseen and still knows everything?*

No. Since God has reserved this mystery to His own wisdom, and has revealed nothing of it to us in His Word, much less commanded us to search it out with our thoughts, but has earnestly restrained us from the attempt (Romans 11:33), therefore we should not draw inferences in our minds, nor indulge in useless inquiries in reference to it, but we should adhere to His revealed Word to which He has referred us.

68. *But does not God know the reason and time of the call and conversion of each person also, and has He not Himself determined, when He will call and convert him?*

Yes. God knows without any doubt, and has appointed the season and time of each one's call and conversion; and when He will again raise him up after he has fallen.

69. *Should ministers, therefore, in their preaching, and hearers in hearing the Word, wait for this hour determined of God?*

Far be it! Since He has not revealed these things to us, we understand that it is enjoined upon us to occupy ourselves continually with the Word of God, but to commit the season and time to God (Acts 1:7).

70. *Do we not also observe that God in distributing His grace manifests Himself quite differently toward entire countries and individual persons, although they are equally guilty?*

Yes. We see that God gives His Word to one region, but not to another; that He withdraws it from one

people, but allows it to remain with another; or that one man is hardened, blinded, and given over to a reprobate mind, but that another, though equally guilty, is converted to God, etc.

71. *How shall we judge concerning this mystery that God treats man so differently, and how shall we apply it to our salvation?*

It is our duty, in such cases, to remember that Paul has assigned certain limits to us, beyond which we are not allowed to inquire (Romans 11:22,23). He instructs us to consider the judgment of God to be just, in the case of those who perish. For it is the well-merited punishment of sin, when, in the case of any country or people, God so inflicts punishment on account of the contempt of His Word, that it extends also to succeeding generations, as we perceive to be the case with the Jews; thus, in the case of some countries or individuals, God exhibits His severity, or the penalties which we have deserved, and of which we are worthy, since we, too, did not walk in a manner worthy of God's Word, but often deeply grieved the Holy Spirit; so that, being thus admonished, we might live in the fear of God, and acknowledge and praise the goodness of God, shown to us and in us, without or contrary to our merit, to whom He gives the Word, whom He allows to retain it, and whom He does not harden and reject.

72. *Why should we acknowledge the just judgment of God in those, from whom He takes away His Word, and who become hardened and blind?*

Because:

(a) For, since our nature is corrupted by sin, and worthy of and exposed to divine wrath and

everlasting condemnation, God is not under any obligation to bestow upon us His word, His Spirit, or His grace; and

- (b) Even when He graciously grants us His gifts, we often reject them, and render ourselves unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46).

73. *Why does God permit us, who have His Word and grace, to behold this His just and well-merited judgment in certain countries, people, and persons?*

In order that, by comparing ourselves with them, and by discovering our great similarity to them, we may see and praise with so much the greater diligence, the pure, unmerited grace of God, manifested to the vessels of mercy (Romans 9:23). For those who suffer punishment and receive the wages of their sins, are not dealt with unjustly. But in the case of those to whom God gives and preserves His Word, by which men are enlightened, converted, and saved, the Lord commends His boundless grace and unmerited mercy.

74. *Do we remain in the right path, when we without minutely inquiring and drawing inferences acknowledge the justice of God in those who experience His judgments, but acknowledge His pure unmerited grace in those to whom God gives His Word and enlightens and preserves?*

Yes; when we proceed thus far in this article, we remain in the right path, as it is written: "He destroys you, O Israel, for you are against Me, against your Helper" (Hosea 13:9).

75. *Is it right, if we desire in this article on election to search out and fathom and reconcile every thing with human reason?*

No. Whenever our thoughts would transcend these limits in this investigation, we should immediately repress them as St. Paul does, remembering the declaration: “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?” (Romans 9:20).

76. *Does not the great Apostle Paul himself bear witness, that we can not and should not reconcile in our minds, search out and fathom all that is contained in this article?*

Yes. The distinguished Apostle Paul, after having largely discussed this article, agreeably to the revealed Word of God, as soon as he is led to speak of those things which God has reserved unto His hidden wisdom concerning this mystery, desists, and at once closes with these words: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?” (Romans 11:33,34); that is, besides and above that which He has revealed to us in His Word.

77. *Do we contemplate the eternal election of God properly, when we seek to search out the secret counsel of God?*

No. This eternal election of God must be considered in Christ, and not apart from, or without Christ.

78. *How do you prove that the eternal election of God must be considered in Christ, and not outside of, or without Christ?*

In this way: in Christ, as the holy Apostle Paul testifies, we were chosen before the foundation of the world, as it is written: “In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:4-6).

79. *Whereby is this election revealed to us from heaven?*
Through the preached Word, when the Father says: “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him” (Matthew 17:5; Luke 3:22). And Christ says: “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). And concerning the Holy Spirit Christ says: “He will glorify Me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14).

80. *To whom does the entire Holy Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, direct all persons in whom they shall seek the eternal election of the Father?*

To Christ, as to the book of life.

81. *How do you prove, that the entire Holy Trinity directs all persons to Christ, in whom they shall seek the eternal election of the Father?*

By three arguments:

(1) This was decreed from eternity by the Father, that those whom He would save, He would save through Christ; as Christ Himself says: “No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6); and “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9).

- (2) But Christ, as the only-begotten Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18), has revealed the will of the Father to us, and consequently our eternal election to everlasting life too; namely when He says: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15); and “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40); and “For in this way God loved the world ...” (John 3:16). These declarations the Father desires all men to hear, in order that they may come to Christ. But Christ will not cast from Himself those who come, for it is written: “All that the Father gives me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out” (John 6:37).
- (3) Now, in order that we may come to Christ, the Holy Spirit works true faith in us through the hearing of the Word, as the Apostle testifies, when he say: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17), when, namely, it is preached in purity and sincerity.

82. *Should, therefore, a person who desires to be saved, trouble or harass himself with thoughts concerning the secret counsel of God, whether he is also elected, and ordained to eternal life; by which anxieties Satan is accustomed maliciously to disturb and torment pious minds?*

By no means; but he should rather listen to Christ, who is the book of life and of the divine, eternal election of all the children of God to everlasting life;

and who testifies to all men without distinction, that God desires all men to come to Him, who are burdened with sins and heavy-laden, in order that they may have rest and be saved.

83. *What should all those who desire to be saved do, according to this doctrine of Christ, instead of tormenting themselves with God's secret counsel?*

We should abstain from sin, repent, and believe His promise, and rely wholly and entirely upon Him. But, since we are unable to do this by our own powers and of ourselves, the Holy Spirit desires to work in us repentance and faith, through the Word and Sacraments. And, in order that we may be enabled to proceed onward in this course, persevere, and remain steadfast, we should call upon God for His grace, which He has promised us in Holy Baptism, and not doubt that He will impart it unto us according to His promise. For thus Christ has promised, saying: "If his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:9-11).

84. *Dare believers, who can and shall accept the doctrine of election to their comfort, be inactive or even resist the operation of the Spirit of God?*

No. Inasmuch as the Holy Spirit dwells in the elect, who now believe in Christ, as in His temple (1 Corinthians 3:16), and is not inactive in them, but impels the children of God to obey the commands of God, believers should likewise not be inactive, much less resist the operation of the Spirit of God, but

exercise themselves in all Christian virtues, in all piety, modesty, temperance, patience, and brotherly love, and use all diligence to make their calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10).

85. *Why should believers, who can and shall accept the doctrine of election to their comfort, not be inactive, but exercise themselves in all Christian virtues?*

That they may doubt the less, the more they feel the power and energy of the Spirit in themselves. For the Spirit of God bears witness to the elect that they are the children of God (Romans 8:16).

86. *Must not believers doubt in their election and salvation, when at times they do not perceive the power of the Spirit?*

Far be it! If at any time they fall into such strong temptations, that they think they no more perceive the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, and say with David: "I had said in my alarm, I am cut off from your sight;" yet, as David immediately adds, they should say again with him, whatever they may discover in themselves: "But You heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to You for help" (Psalm 31:22).

87. *But must we not on this account doubt in our election and salvation, because it is possible for us to fail?*

No. Since our election is not founded upon our piety or virtue, but alone upon the merit of Christ and the gracious will of His Father, who cannot deny Himself, because He is immutable in His will and essence; therefore, if His children fall from obedience and stumble, He causes them to be called again unto repentance, through the Word; and the Holy Spirit

will be efficacious in them unto conversion, through the Word; and when they return unto Him again in true repentance, through genuine faith, He will even manifest His paternal love towards all those who tremble at His Word (Isaiah 66:2), and return to Him with their hearts, for thus it is written (Jeremiah 3:1).

88. *Should we, perhaps, on this account doubt in our election and salvation, because it is written: "No man can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him?"*

Not at all; the declaration that "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44) is righteously and truly made. The Father, however, will draw no one without means; but He has instituted His Word and Sacraments as the ordinary means and instruments, for this purpose. And it is not the will of the Father or of the Son, that any person should neglect the preaching of His Word, or condemn it, and wait until the Father draws, without the Word and the Sacraments. For the Father draws indeed by the power of His Holy Spirit, yet according to His ordinary mode, through the hearing of His holy, divine Word, yet according to His ordinary mode, through the hearing of His holy, divine Word, as with a net, by which the elect are snatched out of the jaws of Satan. And to the preaching of this Word, each miserable sinner should betake himself, hear it diligently, and not doubt the drawing of the Father. For the Holy Spirit with His power will accompany the Word, and operate through it. That is the drawing of the Father.

89. *However, may we from this, that not all come to faith who have heard the Word of God, draw the*

conclusion that God does not desire to give them salvation?

Not at all. The reason that all who hear the Word of God, do not believe, and, therefore, meet with a deeper condemnation, is not found in God's unwillingness to bestow salvation; but they themselves are in fault, because they so hear the Word, not to learn, but only to scorn, to blaspheme, and to profane it, and because they resisted the Holy Spirit, who desires to operate in them through the Word; as was the case with the Pharisees and their adherents in the time of Christ.

90. *Has God made "the vessels of wrath" and "of dishonor," as Paul writes about them?*

No. The Apostle distinguishes with special diligence the work of God, who makes vessels of honor alone, from the work of the devil and of man, who by the impulse of the devil, and not of God, has made himself a vessel of dishonor. For thus it is written: "What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory" (Romans 9:22,23). For here the Apostle clearly asserts, that God endured the vessels of wrath with much long-suffering, but he does not say, that God made them vessels of wrath. For, if this had been the will of God, there would have been no need for long-suffering. But it is the fault of the devil and those individuals themselves, and not of God, that they are fitted to destruction.

91. *Whence then, does all preparation or fitting to destruction proceed?*

Every preparation or fitting to destruction proceeds from the devil and men, through sin, and by no means from God, who does not desire that any man should be damned; how then should He Himself fit or prepare any person for damnation?

92. *How do you prove that God is not the cause of the damnation of any person?*

As God is not a cause of sin, so he is also no cause of the punishment, that is, damnation; but the only cause of damnation is sin. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). And, as God neither desires the commission of sin, nor has pleasure in it, so He likewise neither desires the death of the sinner nor has pleasure in his damnation. "The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). For thus it is written: "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" (Ezekiel 18:23,32); and "As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 33:11).

93. *May we from this that God Himself prepares the vessels of mercy, conclude that He also Himself prepares the vessels of dishonor?*

No. St. Paul testifies in definite terms, that (out of vessels of dishonor, vessels of honor may be made through the power and operation of God; when he writes thus: "Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself

from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work” (2 Timothy 2:21). For he that purges himself must previously have been impure, and consequently have been a vessel of dishonor. But concerning the vessels of mercy he asserts clearly, that the Lord Himself has prepared them for glory, which he does not say in reference to the damned, who themselves, and not God, have made themselves vessels of damnation.

94. *May we from this that God punishes sin by sin, conclude that He never desired that those whom He thus punishes, should be saved?*

Absolutely not! On the contrary, it must also be carefully observed, when God punishes sin by sin, - that is, in the case of those who had been converted, on account of their subsequent security, impenitence, and wanton sins, punishes with hardness of heart and blindness of mind that this is not to be so understood, as if it had never been God's gracious will that such persons should come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved.

95. *Why must we, then, believe both: as well that God desires to save all men, as also that God will harden the persevering sinners?*

For this is the revealed will of God:

- (a) God will receive all those in grace, who repent, and believe in Christ.
- (b) He will also punish those who willfully turn away from His holy commands, and entangle themselves again in the pollutions of the world (2 Peter 2:20); garnish their hearts unto satan (Luke 11:25); grieve the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:29), and

that such, if they persevere in these things, shall be hardened, blinded, and eternally damned.

96. *Hence, what was not the reason, why Pharaoh was lost?*

Pharaoh (concerning whom it is written: “But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you My power, so that My name may be proclaimed in all the earth” [Exodus 9:16; Romans 9:17]) did not perish because God would not grant him salvation, or because it was the pleasure and will of God that he should be damned and lost. “The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 33:11).

97. *But whence is it, that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, so that Pharaoh persisted in the perpetration of sins, and became the more obdurate the more he was admonished?*

All this was a punishment of his former sins, and of the atrocious tyranny which he had, in very many instances, practiced most inhumanly in the case of the children of Israel, and contrary to the reproaches of his own conscience.

98. *But why did God finally abandon Pharaoh?*

Inasmuch as God caused His Word to be preached and His will to be declared to him, and Pharaoh nevertheless willfully rebelled against all these admonitions and warnings, God abandoned him, and thus his heart was hardened, and God executed His judgment upon him; for he deserved nothing else than hell-fire.

99. *To what purpose only does the holy Apostle in Romans 9 introduce this example of Pharaoh?*

Only to show the justice of God administered in the case of the impenitent and the despisers of His Word.

100. *In what sense is it by no means meant, when the Apostle Romans 9 quotes the example of Pharaoh?*

It is by no means the meaning of Paul that God would not grant him, or any other man, salvation, nor that in His secret counsel He had ordained him to eternal damnation, so that he neither could nor might be saved.

101. *We can we certainly believe that the doctrine of election, as it has been here explained, is the true divine doctrine of this article?*

Because by this doctrine and explanation of the eternal and saving election of the elect children of God, the honor of God is wholly and fully attributed to.

102. *Why is the honor of God wholly and fully attributed to Him by this doctrine?*

Because, it is taught thereby, that through pure mercy in Christ, without any of our merits or good works, He saves us according to the purpose of His will.

103. *Do the Holy Scriptures teach that God alone by His mercy in Christ according to the purpose of His will, saves us?*

Yes! For it is written: "In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:4-6).

104. *Is this, then, the true doctrine, if it be taught that in us also there is a cause of the election of God?*

Far be it! On the contrary, the following doctrine is, therefore, false and erroneous, namely, that not the mercy of God alone, and the most holy merit of Christ are the cause, but that in us also there is a cause of the election of God, on account of which God has elected us to everlasting life.

105. *How do you prove that in us there is no cause of election?*

We prove it in this way: For, not only before we have done any good, but also before we were born yes, before the foundation of the world, He elected us in Christ; that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of Him who calls — she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Romans 9:11-13; Malachi 1:2,3).

106. *When does this doctrine of election also give no one occasion either to despond, or to lead a dissolute or wicked life?*

When people are taught that they must seek eternal election in Christ and His holy Gospel, as in the book of life. For the Gospel excludes no penitent sinner, but calls and invites all poor, all troubled and afflicted sinners to repentance, to the acknowledgement of their sins, and to faith in Christ; it promises the Holy Spirit for their purification and renovation.

107. *What consolation does this doctrine afford to troubled and agitated minds?*

The surest consolation, since thereby they know that their salvation is not entrusted to their hands, else

they would lose it more easily than Adam and Eve lost it in Paradise, and that, too, every hour and moment, but that it depends on the gracious election of God, which He has revealed unto us in Christ, out of whose hand no one shall pluck us (John 10:28; 2 Timothy 2:19).

108. Hence, who certainly and without any doubt teaches a false doctrine on election?

If any one inculcates this doctrine, concerning the gracious election of God, in such a manner that distressed Christians cannot console themselves by it, but are rather led into despair, or that the impenitent are encouraged in their wickedness, it is undoubtedly certain and true, that this doctrine is set forth, not according to the Word and will of God, but according to mere human reason and the suggestions of the devil.

109. How do you prove, that the doctrine of election is certainly not understood and interpreted according to the Word of God, when it does not give the troubled and tormented Christians the surest comfort?

This we prove in this way: as the Apostle testifies: “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4). But where this comfort and hope are impaired, or taken away from us entirely by the Scripture, it is certain, that the Scripture is understood and explained contrary to the will and meaning of the Holy Spirit.

II0. *Shall we Lutherans, therefore, remain true and faithful to the doctrine of our dear confession on election also until death?*

Yes! To this simple, perspicuous, and profitable explanation, which has a good and sure foundation in the revealed will of God, we adhere.

III. *What questions and speculations should we Lutherans, however, when we treat of this doctrine, shun and avoid?*

All refined, curious and useless speculations and questions.

II2. *Finally, what should we Lutherans, as regards this doctrine, reject and condemn?*

Whatever is contrary to these simple and profitable explanations.

II3. *In regard to the doctrine of election, what are the errors which our Evangelical Lutheran Church has expressly rejected in her confession?*

- (a) When it is taught, that God is not willing, that all persons should come to repentance, and believe the Gospel.
- (b) Again, that when God calls us, it is not His earnest desire that all men should come to Him.
- (c) Again, that God is not willing that all men should be saved, but without regard to their sins, solely through the bare counsel, purpose, and will of God, some are destined to damnation, so that they cannot be saved.
- (d) Again, that the mercy of God, and the most holy merit of Christ are not the only cause of the election of God, but that in us also there is a

cause, on account of which God has elected us to eternal life.

II4. What judgment does our church pronounce on all these errors in regard to the doctrine of election?

The Church declares: All these doctrines are false, odious, and blasphemous, by which all the consolation, which Christians have in the holy Gospel and in the use of the holy Sacraments, is taken away from them; and for this reason these doctrines should not be tolerated in the Church of God.

II5. But why is the doctrine of our Evangelical Lutheran Church certainly the true doctrine, revealed by God Himself in His Word, by which we can live and die cheerfully?

For the following two irrefutable grounds: by this brief explanation of the eternal election of God, the honor is fully and entirely attributed to God, that He saves us through mercy alone, according to the purpose of His will, without any merit of our own; and besides, no cause is given to any one for faintheartedness, or for a dissolute life.

In his commentary on Genesis 29:9, Martin Luther comforts with the clear teaching of election and predestination. (*Luther's Works, AE 5:42-49*).

But it pleases me to take from this passage the opportunity to discuss doubt, God, and the will of God; for I hear that here and there among the nobles and persons of importance vicious statements are being spread abroad concerning predestination or God's foreknowledge. For this is what they say: "If I am predestined, I shall be saved, whether I do good or evil. If I am not predestined, I shall be condemned regardless of my works." I would be glad to debate in detail against these wicked statements if the uncertain state of my health made it possible for me to do so. For if the statements are true, as they, of course, think, then the incarnation of the Son of God, His suffering and resurrection, and all that He did for the salvation of the world are done away with completely. What will the prophets and all Holy Scripture help? What will the sacraments help? Therefore let us reject all this and tread it underfoot.

These are devilish and poisoned darts and original sin itself, with which the devil led our first parents astray when he said: "You will be like God" (Genesis 3:5). They were not satisfied with the divinity that had been revealed and in the knowledge of which they were blessed, but they wanted to penetrate to the depth of the divinity. For they inferred that there was some secret reason why God had forbidden them to eat of the fruit of the tree which was in the middle of Paradise, and they wanted to know what this reason was, just as these people of our time say: "What God has determined beforehand must happen. Consequently, every concern about religion and

about the salvation of souls is uncertain and useless.” Yet it has not been given to you to render a verdict that is inscrutable. Why do you doubt or thrust aside the faith that God has enjoined on you? For what end did it serve to send His Son to suffer and to be crucified for us? Of what use was it to institute the sacraments if they are uncertain or completely useless for our salvation? For otherwise, if someone had been predestined, he would have been saved without the Son and without the sacraments or Holy Scripture. Consequently, God, according to the blasphemy of these people, was horribly foolish when He sent His Son, promulgated the Law and the Gospel, and sent the apostles if the only thing He wanted was that we should be uncertain and in doubt whether we are to be saved or really to be damned.

But these are delusions of the devil with which he tries to cause us to doubt and disbelieve, although Christ came into this world to make us completely certain. For eventually either despair must follow or contempt for God, for the Holy Bible, for Baptism, and for all the blessings of God through which He wanted us to be strengthened over against uncertainty and doubt. For they will say with the Epicureans: “Let us live, eat, and drink; tomorrow we shall die” (see 1 Corinthians 15:32). After the manner of the Turks they will rush rashly into the sword and fire, since the hour in which you either die or escape has been predetermined.

But to these thoughts one must oppose the true and firm knowledge of Christ, just as I often remind you that it is profitable and necessary above all that the knowledge of God be completely certain in us and that we cling to it with firm assent of the heart. Otherwise our faith is useless. For if God does not

stand by His promises, then our salvation is lost, while, on the other hand, this is our comfort, that, although we change, we nevertheless flee for refuge to Him who is unchangeable. For in Malachi 3:6 He makes this assertion about Himself: "I the Lord do not change." And Romans 11:29 states: "The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable." Accordingly, this is how I have taught in my book *On the Bondage of the Will* and elsewhere, namely, that a distinction must be made when one deals with the knowledge, or rather with the subject, of the divinity. For one must debate either about the hidden God or about the revealed God. With regard to God, insofar as He has not been revealed, there is no faith, no knowledge, and no understanding. And here one must hold to the statement that what is above us is none of our concern. For thoughts of this kind, which investigate something more sublime above or outside the revelation of God, are altogether devilish. With them nothing more is achieved than that we plunge ourselves into destruction; for they present an object that is inscrutable, namely, the unrevealed God. Why not rather let God keep His decisions and mysteries in secret? We have no reason to exert ourselves so much that these decisions and mysteries be revealed to us.

Moses, too, asked God to show him His face; but the Lord replies: "*You shall see My back, but you will not be able to see My face*" (see Exodus 33:23). For this inquisitiveness is original sin itself, by which we are impelled to strive for a way to God through natural speculation. But this is a great sin and a useless and futile attempt; for this is what Christ says in John 6:65 (see John 14:6): "*No one comes to the Father but by Me.*" Therefore when we approach the unrevealed

God, then there is no faith, no Word, and no knowledge; for He is an invisible God, and you will not make Him visible.

Furthermore, God has most sternly forbidden this investigation of the divinity. Thus when the apostles ask in Acts 1:6, *“Has it not been predestined that at this time the kingdom should be restored?”* Christ says to them: *“It is not for you to know the times”* (Acts 1:7). *“Let Me be hidden where I have not revealed Myself to you,”* says God, *“or you will be the cause of your own destruction, just as Adam fell in a horrible manner; for he who investigates My majesty will be overwhelmed by My glory.”*

And it is true that God wanted to counteract this curiosity at the very beginning; for this is how He set forth His will and counsel: *“I will reveal My foreknowledge and predestination to you in an extraordinary manner, but not by this way of reason and carnal wisdom, as you imagine. This is how I will do so: From an unrevealed God I will become a revealed God. Nevertheless, I will remain the same God. I will be made flesh, or send My Son. He shall die for your sins and shall rise again from the dead. And in this way I will fulfill your desire, in order that you may be able to know whether you are predestined or not. Behold, this is My Son; listen to Him (see Matthew 17:5). Look at Him as He lies in the manger and on the lap of His mother, as He hangs on the cross. Observe what He does and what He says. There you will surely take hold of Me.”* For *“He who sees Me,”* says Christ, *“also sees the Father Himself”* (see John 14:9). If you listen to Him, are baptized in His name, and love His Word, then you are surely predestined and are certain of your salvation. But if you revile or despise the Word, then you are damned; for he who does not believe is condemned (Mark 16:16).

You must kill the other thoughts and the ways of reason or of the flesh, for God detests them. The only thing you have to do is to receive the Son, so that Christ is welcome in your heart in His birth, miracles, and cross. For here is the book of life in which you have been written. And this is the only and the most efficacious remedy for that horrible disease because of which human beings in their investigation of God want to proceed in a speculative manner and eventually rush into despair or contempt. If you want to escape despair, hatred, and blasphemy of God, give up your speculation about the hidden God, and cease to strive in vain to see the face of God. Otherwise you will have to remain perpetually in unbelief and damnation, and you will have to perish; for he who doubts does not believe, and he who does not believe is condemned (Mark 16:16).

Therefore we should detest and shun these vicious words which the Epicureans bandy about: *“If this is how it must happen, let it happen.”* For God did not come down from heaven to make you uncertain about predestination, to teach you to despise the sacraments, absolution, and the rest of the divine ordinances. Indeed, He instituted them to make you completely certain and to remove the disease of doubt from your heart, in order that you might not only believe with the heart but also see with your physical eyes and touch with your hands. Why, then, do you reject these and complain that you do not know whether you have been predestined? You have the Gospel; you have been baptized; you have absolution; you are a Christian. Nevertheless, you doubt and say that you do not know whether you believe or not, whether you regard as true what is

preached about Christ in the Word and the sacraments.

But you will say: "I cannot believe." Thus many are troubled by this trial, and I recall that at Torgau a little woman came to me and complained with tears in her eyes that she could not believe. Then, when I recited the articles of the Creed in order and asked about each one whether she was convinced that these things were true and had happened in this manner or not, she answered: "I certainly think that they are true, but I cannot believe." This was a satanic illusion. Consequently, I kept saying: "If you think that all these things are true, there is no reason why you should complain about your unbelief; for if you do not doubt that the Son of God died for you, you surely believe, because to believe is nothing else than to regard these facts as the sure and unquestionable truth."

God says to you: "Behold, you have My Son. Listen to Him, and receive Him. If you do this, you are already sure about your faith and salvation." "But I do not know," you will say, "whether I am remaining in faith." At all events, accept the present promise and the predestination, and do not inquire too curiously about the secret counsels of God. If you believe in the revealed God and accept His Word, He will gradually also reveal the hidden God; for "He who sees Me also sees the Father," as John 14:9 says. He who rejects the Son also loses the unrevealed God along with the revealed God. But if you cling to the revealed God with a firm faith, so that your heart is so minded that you will not lose Christ even if you are deprived of everything, then you are most assuredly predestined, and you will understand the hidden God. Indeed, you understand Him even now if you acknowledge the

Son and His will, namely, that He wants to reveal Himself to you, that He wants to be your Lord and your Savior. Therefore you are sure that God is also your Lord and Father.

Observe how pleasantly and kindly God delivers you from this horrible trial with which Satan besets people today in strange ways in order to make them doubtful and uncertain, and eventually even to alienate them from the Word. “For why should you hear the Gospel,” they say, “since everything depends on predestination?” In this way he robs us of the predestination guaranteed through the Son of God and the sacraments. He makes us uncertain where we are completely certain. And if he attacks timid consciences with this trial, they die in despair, as would almost have happened to me if Staupitz had not delivered me from the same trial when I was troubled. But if they are despisers, they become the worst Epicureans. Therefore we should rather impress these statements on our hearts, such as John 6:44: “No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him.” Through whom? Through Me. “He who sees Me also sees the Father” (see John 14:9). And God says to Moses: “You cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live” (Exodus 33:20). And we read: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority. But go, and carry out what I command” (Acts 1:7). Likewise: “Seek not the things that are too high for you, and search not into things above your ability; but the things that God has commanded you, think on them always, and in many of His works be not curious” (Ecclesiasticus 3:22). Listen to the incarnate Son, and predestination will present itself of its own accord.

Staupitz used to comfort me with these words: “Why do you torture yourself with these speculations? Look at the wounds of Christ and at the blood that was shed for you. From these predestination will shine. Consequently, one must listen to the Son of God, who was sent into the flesh and appeared to destroy the work of the devil (1 John 3:8) and to make you sure about predestination. And for this reason He says to you: ‘You are My sheep because you hear My voice’ (see John 10:27). ‘No one shall snatch you out of My hands’” (John 10:28).

Many who did not resist this trial in such a manner were hurled headlong into destruction. Consequently, the hearts of the godly should be kept carefully fortified. Thus a certain hermit in *The Lives of the Fathers* advises his hearers against speculations of this kind. He says: “If you see that someone has put his foot in heaven, pull him back. For this is how saintly neophytes are wont to think about God apart from Christ. They are the ones who try to ascend into heaven and to place both feet there. But suddenly they are plunged into hell.” Therefore the godly should beware and be intent only on learning to cling to the Child and Son Jesus, who is your God and was made flesh for your sake. Acknowledge and hear Him; take pleasure in Him, and give thanks. If you have Him, then you also have the hidden God together with Him who has been revealed. And that is the only way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Apart from it you will find nothing but destruction and death.

But He manifested himself in the flesh to snatch us from death, from the power of the devil. From this knowledge must come great joy and delight that God is unchangeable, that He works in accordance with

unchangeable necessity, and that He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13) but keeps His promises. Accordingly, one is not free to have such thoughts or doubts about predestination; but they are ungodly, vicious, and devilish. Therefore when the devil assails you with them, you should only say: "I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, about whom I have no doubt that He was made flesh, suffered, and died for me. Into His death I have been baptized." This answer will make the trial disappear, and Satan will turn his back.

Thus on other occasions I have often mentioned the noteworthy example of a nun who underwent the same trial. For under the papacy there were also many godly persons who experienced these spiritual trials, which are truly hellish and thoughts of the damned. For there is no difference at all between one who doubts and one who is damned. Therefore whenever the nun felt that she was being assailed with the fiery darts of Satan (Ephesians 6:16), she would say nothing else than this: "I am a Christian."

We must do the same thing. One must refrain from debates and say: "I am a Christian; that is, the Son of God was made flesh and was born; He has redeemed me and is sitting at the right hand of the Father, and He is my Savior." Thus you must drive Satan away from you with as few words as possible and say: "Be gone, Satan! (Matthew 4:10.) Do not put doubt in me. The Son of God came into this world to destroy your work (1 John 3:8) and to destroy doubt." Then the trial ceases, and the heart returns to peace, quiet, and the love of God.

Otherwise doubt about some person's intention is no sin. Thus Isaac doubts that he will live or have a pious host. About a man I can be in doubt. Indeed, I

should be in doubt. For he is not my Savior, and it is written: “Put not your trust in princes” (Psalm 146:3). For man is a liar (Psalm 116:11) and deceitful. But one cannot deal doubtfully with God. For He neither wants nor is able to be changeable or a liar. But the highest form of worship He requires is your conviction that He is truthful. For this is why He has given you the strongest proofs of His trustworthiness and truth. He has given His Son into the flesh and into death, and He has instituted the sacraments, in order that you may know that He does not want to be deceitful, but that He wants to be truthful. Nor does He confirm this with spiritual proofs; He confirms it with tangible proofs. For I see the water, I see the bread and the wine, and I see the minister. All this is physical, and in these material forms He reveals Himself. If you must deal with men, you may be in doubt as to the extent to which you may believe a person and as to how others may be disposed toward you; but concerning God you must maintain with assurance and without any doubt that He is well disposed toward you on account of Christ and that you have been redeemed and sanctified through the precious blood of the Son of God. And in this way you will be sure of your predestination, since all the prying and dangerous questions about God’s secret counsels have been removed—the questions to which Satan tries to drive us, just as he drove our first parents.