

9 8. Therefore we are to make judgments regarding our election to eternal life neither on the basis of reason nor on the basis of God's law. Such a course of action would lead us either into a wild, irresponsible, Epicurean life, or into despair—and would awaken harmful thoughts in human hearts. Whenever people follow their reason, they can hardly escape such reflections as these: "As long as God has chosen me for salvation, I cannot be condemned no matter what I do!" or, "I have not been chosen for eternal life, so it does not help when I do good; everything is really in vain."

10 9. Instead, the true meaning of election must be learned from the holy gospel of Christ. It clearly states, "God imprisoned all in unbelief that he may be merciful to all," and that he wants no one to be lost but rather that everyone repent and believe on the Lord Christ [Rom. 11:32; 1 Tim. 2:4; cf. Ezek. 33:11; 18:23].

11 10. This teaching is useful and comforting for all those who are concerned about the revealed will of God and follow the order which St. Paul observed in the Epistle to the Romans. There he first of all points people to repentance, acknowledgment of their sins, and then to faith in Christ and obedience to God before he speaks of the mystery of God's eternal election.

12 11. That "many are called and few are chosen" [Matt. 20:16] does not mean that God does not want to save everyone. Instead, the reason for condemnation lies in their not hearing God's Word at all or arrogantly despising it, plugging their ears and their hearts, and thus blocking the Holy Spirit's ordinary path, so that he cannot carry out his work in them; or if they have given it a hearing, they cast it to the wind and pay no attention to it. Then the fault lies not with God and his election but with their own wickedness [cf. 2 Peter 2:9-15; Luke 11:47-52; Heb. 12:15-17, 25].

13 12. A Christian should only think about the article of God's eternal election to the extent that it is revealed in God's Word. The Word holds Christ before our eyes as the "Book of Life," which he opens and reveals for us through the preaching of the holy gospel, as it is written, "Those whom he has chosen, he also called" [Rom. 8:30]. In Christ we are to seek the Father's eternal election. He has decreed in his eternal, divine counsel that he will save no one apart from those who acknowledge his Son Christ and truly believe in him. We should set aside other thoughts, for they do not come from God but rather from the imagination of the evil foe. Through such thoughts he approaches us to weaken this glorious comfort for us or to take it away completely. We have a glorious comfort in this salutary teaching, that we know how we have been chosen for eternal life in Christ out of sheer grace, without any merit of our own, and that no one can tear us out of his hand [John 10:28-29]. For he has assured us that he has graciously chosen us not only with mere words. He has corroborated this with an oath and sealed it with the holy sacraments. In the midst of our greatest trials we can remind ourselves of them, comfort ourselves with them, and thereby quench the fiery darts of the devil.

14 13. Along with this we should strive as diligently as possible to live according to God's will and to "confirm our calling," as Saint Peter admonishes [2 Peter 1:10]. We should especially abide by the revealed Word that cannot and will not fail us.

15 14. This short explanation of God's eternal election gives God his honor fully and completely. On the basis of his pure mercy alone, without any merit of ours at all, he saves us "according to the purpose of his will" [Eph. 1:11]. In addition, no one is given reason either for faintheartedness or for a reckless, wild life.

### *Antitheses or Negative Theses*

#### False Teaching regarding This Article

Accordingly, we believe and maintain that those who present the teaching of God's gracious election to eternal life either in such a way that troubled Christians cannot find comfort in it but are driven to faintheartedness or despair, or in such a way that the impenitent are strengthened in their arrogance, are not preaching this teaching according to the Word and will of God but rather according to their own reason and at the instigation of the accursed devil, because (as the Apostle testifies) "whatever was written was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope" [Rom. 15:4]. Therefore, we reject the following errors:

1. When it is taught that God does not want all people to repent and believe <sup>17</sup> the gospel.

2. Likewise, that when God calls us to himself, he does not seriously intend <sup>18</sup> that all people should come to him.

3. Likewise, that God does not desire that everyone should be saved, but <sup>19</sup> rather that without regard to their sins—only because of God's naked decision, intention, and will—some are designated for damnation, so that there is no way that they could be saved.

4. Likewise, that the cause of God's election does not lie exclusively in God's <sup>20</sup> mercy and the most holy merit of Christ but that there is also a cause in us, because of which God has chosen us for eternal life.

These are blasphemous, horrible, and erroneous teachings, which take away <sup>21</sup> from Christians all the comfort that they have in the holy gospel and in the use of the holy sacraments. Therefore, these errors dare not be tolerated in the church of God.

This is the brief and simple explanation of the contested articles which for a <sup>22</sup> time theologians of the Augsburg Confession taught and discussed in ways that contradicted each other. From this every simple Christian can recognize, according to the direction of God's Word and the simple catechism, what is correct and incorrect. For here we have set forth not only the pure teaching but

have also exposed and rejected contrary, erroneous teaching. In this way the offensive divisions that had arisen are completely resolved. May the almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus grant the grace of his Holy Spirit, that we may all be one in him [John 17:20-21] and steadfastly remain in this Christian and God-pleasing unity.

XI.  
Concerning the Eternal Predestination and Election of God

On this article there has been no public conflict among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession.<sup>74</sup> However, because it is an article of comfort when properly treated, it is also explained in this document so that no offensive dispute may arise in the future.

*Affirmative Theses*

The Pure, True Teaching concerning This Article

Key Reference!

1. First of all, the difference between *praescientia* and *praedestinatio*, that is, between God's foreknowledge and his eternal election, must be carefully noted.
2. God's foreknowledge is nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen, as it is written, "God in heaven reveals mysteries. He has disclosed to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in future times" (Dan. 2[:28]).
3. This foreknowledge extends equally over godly people and evil people, but it is not a cause of evil. It is not the cause of sins, when people act wrongly (sin proceeds originally from the devil and the wicked, perverted human will), nor of human corruption, for which people are responsible themselves. Instead, God's foreknowledge provides order in the midst of evil and sets limits to it. It determines how long evil can continue and determines also that everything, even if it is evil in itself, serves the welfare of God's elect.
4. *Praedestinatio*, however, or God's eternal election, extends only to the righteous, God-pleasing children of God. It is a cause of their salvation, which God brings about. He has arranged everything that belongs to it. Our salvation is so firmly grounded on it [cf. John 10:26-29] that "the gates of hell will not prevail against it" [Matt. 16:18].
5. This election is not to be probed in the secret counsel of God but rather is to be sought in the Word, where it has also been revealed.
6. However, the Word of God leads us to Christ, who is the "Book of Life" [Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5], in whom are inscribed and chosen all who shall be eternally saved, as it is written, "He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world" [Eph. 1:4].
7. This Christ calls all sinners to himself and promises them refreshment. He is utterly serious in his desire that all people should come to him and seek help for themselves [cf. Matt. 11:28; 1 Tim. 2:4]. He offers himself to them in the Word. He desires them to hear the Word and not to plug their ears or despise his Word. To this end he promises the power and activity of the Holy Spirit, divine assistance in remaining faithful and attaining eternal salvation.

<sup>74</sup> On the background of this article, see SD XI, 641, n. 318, below.