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Reading Summary- Pieper p.p. 473-503, Eternal Election

Pieper states that dogmaticians disagree as when to present the doctrine of eternal election he thinks it fits nicely after the church because, “Scripture addresses those who by faith have become members of the Church as the elect” (p. 473). Those who are elect are that way only because of the action of God which goes back before the creation of the world. Pieper states, “God did not—this bears constant repetition—blindly reach into the mass of mankind with His almighty hand and with his bare omnipotence seize a number of men as His elect” (p. 476). This election is different than the eternal foreknowledge of God. God knows all our days as well as our election. This comes in Christ and through the means of Grace. The “elect” are not all humans but only those who are actually saved. There is a difference between predestination to salvation and the foreknowledge of God. Even though grace is universal, election is not.

A person can be unsure of election if he thinks that assurance comes from divine foreknowledge, because we can never know the thoughts of God this can not give us assurance. If a person rejects universal grace, the assurance of election is in doubt as well. A third cause of uncertainty is when a person thinks that their election is contingent upon something that they do (synergism). Pieper writes, “The assurance of our election, however, we can and should gain from the Gospel. For the substance of the Gospel is that the grace of God in Christ is for all sinners without exception, and that this grace is actually grace, contingent nothing whatever in man” (p. 483). The assurance of the elect is a certainty of faith.

Eternal election is grasped only by the hand of faith. Pieper quotes Walther, “We teach that God, as He saves us by faith in time, has also in eternity resolved to save the elect by faith; and according to God’s Word, our Confessions, and our teaching it is just this fact that constitutes the election of grace” (p. 486). The teaching that election is based on faith at the moment of death has no support in Scripture. The

purpose of the doctrine of election is to confirm the idea of salvation (and election) by grace alone (*sola gratia*). The election of the Israelites in the Old Testament occurred in the same fashion. Election does not depend in any way shape or form upon the individual but solely upon God. This is consoling to those who have come to understand their own sinfulness and standing before God but it is terrifying to others who claim some merit for election. Pieper mentions one other purpose and that is to keep Christians on track in their lives through sanctified living.

An important point to remember is that Scripture clearly teaches election unto salvation it does not teach election unto wrath or damnation. The so-called “necessary reverse” or logical counterpoint of election unto salvation is a human invention. Two scriptures bring this out clearly. In Acts 13 v. 48 the faith of the Gentiles is traced back to their eternal election while in v. 46 the unbelief of the Jews is not traced back to their election unto damnation. In Romans 9:22-23 the vessels of mercy are in the active voice and have their beginning in God while the vessels of wrath are in the passive voice and cannot be traced back to God. Piper writes, “Thus the use of the active in regard to the one group and the passive in regard to the other indeed indicates that the preparation for glory and the fitting unto damnation do not have the same author. The fitting unto destruction is not traced back to God” (p. 497). Scripture is also clear that God desires all to be saved. Piper again writes, “Christ Himself teaches us in John 3:17-18 that God first of all intends to save all men, and only secondarily intends to condemn those who through not believing on the name of the only-begotten Son leave Him no other choice” (p. 498). If grace is indeed universal then a teaching of predestination to damnation is not possible.

This doctrine will never be fully understood this side of heaven. While we are here the attempts at understanding this have caused others to deny other key doctrines of the faith. The Calvinist must teach double predestination because of their denial of universal grace. The synergists deny grace alone to try to understand election. Why are some saved and others not? In the end we cannot answer this question. The Lutheran position upholds the mystery of this doctrine by teaching: Whoever is saved, is saved by God’s grace alone; whoever is lost, is lost solely by his own fault.