

### **The Comfort of Election for the Mission of the Church**

The doctrine of election or predestination is of great comfort to Christians. This doctrine tells us that our salvation is in God's hands. If salvation was in our hands, we would never be saved. Thus, we are comforted that it is up to God and His great love and mercy which He has shown us in sending His Son to suffer and die for us. *We cannot believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him by our own reason or strength, but the Holy Spirit calls us to faith by the Gospel and keeps us with Jesus Christ in that one true faith* (SC II.3).

God does not elect without calling and justifying. The Apostle Paul writes, "*He also called those whom He had predestined. He also justified those whom He had called, and He also glorified those whom He had justified,*" (Rom. 8:30). Election always comes with God's declaration of righteousness and with eternal life. God's election always results in faith and eternal salvation.

This is of great comfort to the church as she seeks to make disciples of all nations by baptising them and teaching them to keep all that Jesus has commanded (Matt. 28:19). It is of great comfort even as the church reaches out with God's Word and that Word is rejected by the world.

The doctrine of election is not an excuse for the church to be lazy in teaching the Gospel purely or in administering the sacraments rightly. Quite the opposite. It provides comfort that even if the world rejects the pure teaching of the Gospel and is offended by the right administration of the sacraments, it is still those means of grace through which the Holy Spirit calls the elect to faith.

The comfort of election is wonderful because it constrains the church from wandering away from the pure teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments to seeking God to work apart from His Word and Sacraments (enthusiasm). If the Word of God is rejected, the doctrine of election leads the church away from trying to make disciples of all nations through means other than those instituted by Christ.

Without a proper understanding of the doctrine of election, the church is more likely to seek alternatives to the means of grace for drawing sinners into the church. Bait and switch strategies become a popular trap, as churches try to draw people in with ploys and manipulations. Draw in the crowds by luring them in with some marketing event or gimmick, and once they take the bait, complete the strategy by switching to try to get them to join the church. Bait and switch strategies seldom work because today's "consumer" is aware of such manipulations and gets turned off by someone offering one thing and then giving them something else, or pretending to be their friend while in reality holding a hidden agenda. What often ends up happening is the church ceases to complete the strategy, and ends up only baiting people, and then simply giving them what they want, trying to appeal to their felt needs.

Give them entertainment to hook them. Give them a rock band to appeal to them. Commune them without teaching them so that they are not offended. Create novel spectacles never seen before in church, whether it be ribbon sticks, streamers, or liturgical dance. Such a church feels pressure and guilt to somehow, somehow, anyway lure in people. Such a church feels the results of their outreach are in their hands. They don't trust the Word of God to bring sinners to repentance, so they forget about repentance altogether, and just lure people in with whatever means necessary. Such a church over time ceases to be a church of God and becomes a church of man.

The world doesn't accept God's Word because their works are evil (John 3:19). If the church fails to tell sinners their works are evil, the church is not fulfilling the command of Christ to teach the nations all that He has commanded. If the church fails to use the means of grace to bring sinners to faith, then the church is using human ploys to lure people into an assembly that is not the church. Numbers may grow and the marketing gimmicks may be considered "successful," but the outward marks of such a gathering are not the pure teaching of the Gospel of the right administration of the sacraments.

The church is to scatter the seed of God's Word and to water what has been planted, but it is God who gives the growth (Luke 8:4-15; 1 Cor. 3:6). Yes, the Word will be rejected by many. It will fall onto the path, and onto rocky or thorny ground. If because of this the church decides to start sowing weeds instead, sure, there will be growth. Weeds will grow and spread and can even choke out whatever good seed is growing. What will be growing is not the church of God, but the fruit of the devil. Only God's Word can create faith so that it takes root and grows and yields a hundredfold.

Either we believe that the means of grace have the power promised by God to save, or we do not. If we do, then we can abandon everything else as a means to reach out to the world, and continue to preach the Gospel purely and administer the sacraments according to the institution of Christ despite what the results are; despite the rejection of the Word by the world. If we do, then we are comforted that salvation is in God's hands, not ours.

Let us cling to the comfort of election. God will call and justify those whom He has elected from the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Thus, as the church reaches out with the Word of God, we can do it without guilt and anxiety if the world rejects it, and we can rejoice when it is received with great joy by the elect, as salvation is in the hands of God, where it is sure and certain. We stand comforted because salvation is up to a loving and merciful Father *who desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim. 2:4).