

## **Evangelism and Election**

A Study Paper prepared by Rev. Dr. Ken Schurb, reviewed, edited and endorsed by the Missouri District's Praesidium

*Brother Pastors,*

*With The Ablaze mission initiative of the Synod, including the goal of witnessing the Gospel to 100,000,000 by the year 2017, starting 2,000 new LCMS congregations and revitalizing 2,000 existing congregations, much discussion has occurred regarding mission work and evangelism. I requested Dr. Schurb to prepare a study paper for the Praesidium on the topic of Evangelism and Election. Dr. Schurb presented a study paper was presented to the Praesidium. The Praesidium reviewed it, discussed and provided suggested changes. The following is the most current iteration of this paper which we are presenting to you for your review, discussion and reflection. If you have comments or questions, please send them to [Ray.Mirly@mo.lcms.org](mailto:Ray.Mirly@mo.lcms.org). The goal of this paper is that we in the Missouri District, and we pray in the entire LCMS, will have a right Biblical and Confessional understanding of missions and evangelism.*

*President Mirly*

1. *One of the most precious aspects of the Gospel is the universal grace of God in Christ Jesus.*

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." FC SD XI 68-69: "The Father wills that all men should hear this proclamation and come to Christ . . . In order that we may come to Christ, the Holy Spirit creates true faith through the hearing of God's Word . . . ."

2. *God does not elect people to go to hell.*

1 Timothy 2:4: God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Matthew 25:34, 41: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world . . . Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

FC SD XI 80: "The apostle [in Romans 9:22] says in unmistakable terms that God 'endured the vessels of wrath with much patience.' He does not say that God made them vessels of wrath. If that had been his will, he would not have needed any long-suffering."

### **Antithesis:**

"God does not want everybody to be saved, but that merely by an arbitrary counsel, purpose, and will, without regard for their sin, God has predestined certain people to damnation so that they cannot be saved" (antithesis mentioned in FC Ep XI 19).

3. *God elects people only to go to heaven.*  
 Romans 8:29: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren.”  
 FC Ep XI 5: “Predestination or the eternal election of God, however, is concerned only with the pious children of God in whom he is well pleased. It is a cause of their salvation, for he alone brings it about and ordains everything that belongs to it.”
  
4. *God’s election also emphasizes another precious aspect of the Gospel, salvation in Christ sola gratia.*  
 Ephesians 1:4-6: God “chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”  
 FC SD XI 43-44: “Thus far God has revealed the mystery of foreknowledge to us in his Word. If we stay with this and hold ourselves thereto, it is indeed a useful, salutary, and comforting doctrine, for it mightily substantiates the article that we are justified and saved without our works and merit, purely by grace and solely for Christ’s sake. Before the creation of time, ‘before the foundation of the world was laid’ (Eph. 1:4), before we even existed, before we were able to have done any good, God elected us to salvation ‘according to his purpose’ by grace in Christ (Rom. 9:11; II Tim. 1:9). This also completely refutes all false opinions and erroneous doctrines about the powers of our natural will, for in his counsel God has determined and decreed before the world began that by the power of his Holy Spirit through the Word he would create and effect in us everything that belongs to our conversion.”
  
5. *All those who are elected by God will go to heaven.*  
 Matthew 24:22, 24, 31: “And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened . . . For false Christ’s and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect . . . [Christ] will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”  
 FC SD XI 14, 22-23: “in his purpose and counsel God has ordained the following . . . 8. That, finally, he would eternally save and glorify in eternal life those whom he has elected, called, and justified. In this his eternal counsel, purpose, and ordinance God has not only prepared salvation in general, but he has also graciously considered and elected to salvation each and every individual among the elect who are to be saved through Christ, and also ordained that in the manner just recounted he wills by his grace, gifts, and effective working to bring them to salvation and to help, further, strengthen, and preserve them to this end.”

**Antithesis:**

Human sin (e.g., lethargy in spreading the Gospel) keeps God's elect from being saved.

6. *Only those who are elected by God will go to heaven.*

Romans 8:30 "And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified."

FC SD XI 25: "Since only the elect 'whose names are written in the book of life' will be saved, how can and should one know, and wherefrom and whereby can and should one discover, who the elect are who can and should comfort themselves with this teaching?"

**Antitheses:**

Human work or will can add anyone to the elect.

By redoubling efforts to spread the Gospel, human beings can increase the total number of God's elect -- that is, the total number of those who will go to heaven.

7. *Christians should not speculate about who or how many are among the elect.*

Romans 11:33: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!"

FC SD XI 33: "We should not explore the abyss of the hidden foreknowledge of God, even as Christ answered the question, 'Lord, will those who are saved be few?' by saying, 'Strive to enter by the narrow door' (Luke 13:23, 24)."

**Antithesis:**

Christians can and/or should be motivated to evangelization by mentioning the "population of heaven" in any way that suggests that even partial numerical data concerning this population is available in this world.

8. *"God has ordained . . . that the Holy Spirit would call, enlighten, and convert the elect through the Word" (FC SD XI 40).*

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14: "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning *for salvation in sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

**Antitheses:**

"If I have been foreknown to salvation, it will do me no harm if I live in all kinds of sin and vice without repentance, despise Word and sacraments, and do not concern myself with repentance, faith, prayer, and godliness . . . But if I am not foreknown, then everything is in vain, even though I were to hold to the Word, repent, believe, etc., since I cannot hinder or alter God's foreknowledge" (erroneous thoughts characterized in FC SD XI 10).

The proclamation of the Gospel and efforts that encourage or help Christians to tell the Good News make no difference in the salvation of sinners.

9. *In the Gospel God reaches out to all sinners with serious grace, desiring their salvation.*

Luke 24:47: “. . . repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations.”

FC SD XI 28-29, 34-35: “Hence, if we want to consider our eternal election to salvation profitably, we must by all means cling rigidly and firmly to the fact that as the proclamation of the repentance extends over all men (Luke 24:47), so does the promise of the Gospel . . . And we should not regard this call of God which takes place through the preaching of the Word as a deception, but should know certainly that God reveals his will in this way, and that in those who he thus calls he will be efficaciously active through the Word so that they may be illuminated, converted, and saved. For the Word through which we are called is a ministry of the Spirit – ‘which gives the Spirit’ (II Cor. 3:8) and a ‘power of God’ to save (Rom. 1:16) . . . The reason why ‘many are called and few are chosen’ is not that in his call, which takes place through the Word, God intended to say: ‘Externally I do indeed through my Word call all of you, to whom I give my Word, into my kingdom, but down in my heart I am not thinking of all, but only of a certain few. For it is my will that the majority of those whom I call through the Word are not to be illuminated or converted, but are to be and remain under condemnation, although I speak differently in my call to them.’ In this way it would be taught that God, who is the eternal Truth, contradicts himself.”

**Antitheses:**

“. . . that God is not serious about wanting all men to come to him when he calls to them” (antithesis in FC Ep XI 18).

The Gospel as spoken by Christians is not a powerful means of grace for all people.

10. *Christians should not seek assurance of their election apart from God’s Word.*

2 Thessalonians 2:13: “God chose you from the beginning *for salvation in sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*”

FC SD XI 38-39: “We would be deprived of this comfort [of absolution] completely if we could not determine God’s will toward us from the call which comes to us through the Word and through the sacraments. This would also overturn and destroy for us the foundation, namely, that the Holy Spirit wills to be certainly present with and efficacious and active through the Word when it is proclaimed, heard, and meditated upon.”

11. *The church does not try to determine who will and will not believe, but instead sticks to God’s Word.*

Mark 4:14: “The sower sows the word.” See the entire parable, Mark 4:1-20.

FC SD XI 54: “Thus there is no doubt that before the world began God foresaw right well and with utter certainty, and that he still knows, who of those who are called will believe and who will not; likewise, who of the converted will persevere and who will not persevere; and who after falling away will return and who will become obdurate. God is also aware and knows exactly how many there will be on either side. But because God has reserved this mystery to his own

wisdom and not revealed anything concerning it in his Word, still less has commanded us to explore it through our speculations but has earnestly warned against it (Rom. 11:33), therefore we are not, on the basis of our own speculations, to make our own deductions, draw conclusions, or brood over it, but cling solely to his revealed Word, to which he directs us.”

**Antithesis:**

The church can relax its efforts to bring God’s Word to certain people because it knows that they will not believe or that they will not persevere in faith.

12. *The church continues to proclaim the Word through which sinners are drawn and disciples are made.*

Matthew 28:19-20: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

FC SD XI 76: “It is indeed correct and true what Scripture states, that no one comes to Christ unless the Father draw him. But the Father will not do this without means, and he has ordained Word and sacraments as the ordinary means or instruments to accomplish this end. It is not the will of either the Father or the Son that any one should refuse to hear or should despise the preaching of his Word and should wait for the Father to draw him without Word and sacraments.”

**Antitheses:**

The church can sit back and do no outreach with the Gospel, figuring that the elect will somehow be saved without the proclamation of the Word.

If Christians speak the Good News out of a less than biblical motivation, no good is done.

13. *Christians joyfully confess the faith, telling the Good News about Jesus over against the world’s indifference to Christ and His Word. Failure to do so is a sin. Christ Jesus came to save sinners also from this sin.*

2 Corinthians 4:13 (Psalm 116:10): “I believed, and so I spoke.”

Matthew 10:32-33: “So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”

FC SD XI 95-96: “. . . we have no intention (since we have no authority to do so) to yield anything of the eternal and unchangeable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquillity, and outward harmony . . . We desire such harmony as will not violate God’s honor, that will not detract anything from the divine truth of the holy Gospel, that will not give place to the smallest error but will lead the poor sinner to true and sincere repentance, raise him up through faith, strengthen him in his new obedience, and thus justify and save him for ever through the sole merit of Christ . . .”

1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

*In sum:* Christians can and should be exhorted to speak the Gospel to their neighbors and to support the church's outreach efforts in which they may not personally be involved. This accords with the first table of the law, for God wants his Gospel to be proclaimed in all the world. It also accords with the second table of the law, for we love our neighbors by giving them the Gospel, God's power unto salvation. Further, Christians can reach out with the Gospel knowing that they do so not only because of God's command (as a Calvinist might), but also in the confidence that the Gospel remains a powerful means of grace through which God seriously intends to convert and save everyone. As always in this sinful world, the law accuses those who fail to keep it. It is proper for Christians to be told of the sin of failing to spread the Gospel, and it is vital to proclaim God's forgiveness in Christ for this and all other sin.

God's election of grace is an aspect of the Gospel, not the law. It should be proclaimed in proper distinction from the law. Thus, secure sinners who are slow to speak the Gospel should not be told that they need not concern themselves with evangelization since God will bring it about that His elect eventually come into contact with the Gospel by hearing it or reading it -- any more than secure sinners should be told that if they are elect their own salvation is assured. On the other hand, troubled sinners who are ridden with guilt over their failure to speak the Gospel can be comforted that no one is able to snatch from God's hand those whom he has chosen, and that the Good Shepherd sees to it that his sheep hear His voice.

The biblical Gospel of *gratia universalis* and salvation *sola gratia*, while paradoxical and therefore difficult for us to reflect, empowers and frees Christians for evangelization. First, we can rejoice that God gives us the privilege of speaking to others not mere historical data but the living and life-giving Word through which he saves. Even the speaker of the Word can be said to save people by speaking it, as Paul told Timothy to save himself and his hearers through the proclamation of sound doctrine (1 Timothy 4:16). In this sense, we have the opportunity to save people! Second, we have the assurance that none of God's elect will be lost because we have not personally brought them the Good News. Our speaking the Word saves, yet no one is lost due to our not speaking the Word. It's all good, nothing bad!