



St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
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The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Chapter 8 Verses 26-39

Last week we heard that Christians are going to suffer in the present tense. Life under the sun is tough; however, the glory 'to come' is better. And so, we Christians live with 'hope' knowing that as bad as it gets, we have the future glory of the new heaven and the new earth at the great eschaton.

But what about the tough-ness of the here and now? How can Christians be sustained with present hope as they go through the pilgrimage of life?

Verse 26-39 begins to teach us about the doctrine of 'Election.' The doctrine of Election is a profound *comfort* to Christians as they live their life under the sun. However, this doctrine of election is often very misunderstood.

So, what is the doctrine of Election? It is simply this: God moved by His grace and the merit of Jesus – and not anything good foreseen by God in a human person – chose them to be His own.

Think of it this way. How did you feel when you were chosen for a team when playing a schoolyard game? How did you feel when you were chosen for a job? And perhaps – if you are adopted – how do you feel about your parents choosing

You to be their son or daughter? The reality is that this 'election' (choosing) grants great comfort. It grants assurance! This is the purpose of Election – it is a doctrine of comfort!

And so, one of the most important things to understand is that the doctrine of Election belongs to the category of Gospel, not the category of the Law. Whenever the scripture uses the term of election, some 70 times, it is applied only to the believing Christian. Therefore, if the hearer finds himself reacting negatively to the doctrine of Election, his ears are not hearing the doctrine of Election correctly. If the hearer is reacting negatively he is most assuredly the doctrine of Election through the lens of Law and old Adam and not the Gospel/New Man.

We must keep in mind that the old Adam will not be able to hear about Election as a Gospel gift. Rather than hearing comfort, the old Adam will most definitely hear the doctrines of Election as a threat to his dominion and attempts at preserving the notion of free will. Yes, the old Adam takes a tremendously comforting doctrine such as Election and turns it into something that threatens man. Oh, the perverse tactics of the old man!

Two worthwhile quotes from Martin Luther on this subject:

"Our election is not based on worthiness and merit on our part. If it rested on such a foundation, the devil could make it uncertain and overthrow it every moment. It rests in God's hand and is based on His mercy, which is unwavering and eternal. For this reason it is also called the election of God; and that is why it is certain and cannot fail. When, therefore, you sin and unworthiness assail you and the thought occurs to you that you are not elected by God, that the number of the elect is small but the mass of the godless large, and you are frightened at the terrible instances of divine wrath and judgment, then do not argue at length why God does this or that as He does and why He does not act differently even though He does and why He does not act differently even though He is well able to do so. Nor venture to explore the depth of divine election with your reason. Otherwise you will certainly go wrong. You will either despair or become reckless. Rather hold to the promise of the Gospel. This will teach you that Christ, God's Son, came into the world in order to bless all the nations on earth, that is, to redeem them from sin and earth, to justify and save them. This He has done at God's command and in accordance with the gracious will of God, His heavenly Father, who "so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16)."

And the second,

"I frankly confess that, for myself, even if it could be, I should not want 'free-will' to be given to me, nor anything to be left in my own hands to enable me to endeavor after salvation; not merely because in face of so many dangers, and adversities, and assaults of devils, I could not stand my ground and hold fast my 'free-will'; because, even were there no dangers, adversities, or devils, I should still be forced to labor with no guarantee of success, and to beat my fists at the air. If I lived and worked to all eternity, my conscience would never reach comfortable certainty as to how much it must do to satisfy God. Whatever work I had done, there would still be a nagging doubt as to whether it pleased God, or whether He required something more. The experience of all who seek righteousness by works proves that; and I learned it well enough myself over a period of many years, to my own great hurt. But now that God has taken my salvation out of the control of my own will, and put it under the control of His, and promised to save me, not according to my working or running, but according to His own grace and mercy, I have the comfortable certainty that He is also great and powerful, so that no devils or opposition can break Him or pluck me from Him."

Certainly, no one can pluck us from the Lord. This is the comfort that comes from the doctrine of Election! This is the assurance that our pulpits need to proclaim! This is the assurance that our Lord wants us to possess!

