

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 15
Saturday, August 31, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, September 1, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

“You Shall Not Add to the Word, Nor Take From It”

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

Last week, I mentioned how the relationship of God to His people is to be like the best that a marriage can be. The wife honors and submits to the authority of her husband; elevates him. The husband honors his wife, puts her on a pedestal; elevates her. He defends and protects her even to the point of his own death if that is what it takes. Women and children get in the lifeboat first.

God took this approach to Adam and all of Adam’s children. Throughout the Old Testament, God says, “I was a husband to the house of Israel.” We continually speak of Christ and His bride, the church. You are the church, and Christ loved His bride so much that He willingly gave up His life so that you could live.

As I said last week, if Christ would have been selfish or less concerned, after Adam and Eve sinned, He could have said to God the Father, “You know, we haven’t really known them that long. We could just judge them, wipe them out,

and start over.” That would certainly simplify things for Jesus. There would be no need for Him to come to earth, be born, suffer, and die on a cross.

But God loved Adam as a true child. God loves you as a true child. So much so that your life is His highest priority, even though, from our perspective, He hasn’t known us that long. From His perspective, He has known you since before He laid the foundation of the world. That is what He says in Scripture. God says to Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.” In Revelation 13:8, we are told that our names were written the Lamb’s book of life “before the foundation of the world.”

That got me thinking about the doctrine of election or predestination. Last Sunday night, I stumbled upon a very interesting video on YouTube from Rev. Bryan Wolfmuller entitled: “What is the Doctrine of Election”; which got me very excited to come to the office on Monday morning and write my sermon. Having an idea what I want to write about is more than half the battle.

The doctrine of election is tricky because it demands that you believe something that Scripture clearly says, but is inscrutable, unknowable, is an obvious paradox which comes with a warning from Moses and the Lord Himself.

We hear in Deuteronomy, “You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it.” Likewise, God closes Scripture with the warning from Revelation 22: “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God

will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”

This being the case, the doctrine of election puts forth three truths which logic only allows you to believe two of. To believe all three requires faith. The three truths are: 1) Christ died for and covers the sins of all of Adam’s children. 2) We are saved solely through God’s grace alone, through faith alone, apart from any work of ours, solely through the work of the Holy Spirit. We do not assist or cooperate with God in any way to bring about our faith or salvation. 3) Those outside of faith in Christ will be judged and condemned.

If you want to use human reason and answer the question of why are some saved and not others, you have to get rid of one of these three truths of Scripture which Scripture says is a really bad idea.

If you get rid of number one (that Christ died for all), you end up a Calvinist who said Christ only died for the elect and God condemned all the others from eternity, and there is nothing you can do to change the reality that you are either saved or condemned. One of my professors jokingly said that Calvin’s cross is a question mark. How do you know if you are elect? This is why you find very few true Calvinists.

If you get rid of number two (that we are saved by grace alone, apart from any works) you end up a Methodist or any of the other churches of the radical reformation where you have to “go find Jesus” – as if the lost sheep are the ones who find the Shepherd. Or you end up in the Roman church with the sacrament

of Penance where you have to do certain acts, say Our Father's or Hail Mary's to tap into that grace.

Or you can get rid of number three (that some will be judged and condemned to hell for eternity) and you end up a Universalist. Unfortunately, there are more and more churches who are striving to eliminate the idea of judgement or hell.

The doctrine of election does not answer the question of why some are saved and not others. The doctrine of election comes to those who have faith in God already, grabs ahold of that faith and locks it in. It is the confirming of the confirmation of faith. "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you."

Peering into God's secret and hidden will is a fool's errand. This is why God closes Scripture with a reiteration of the warning from Deuteronomy that you dare not add to or take away anything in this book. But like all of Scripture, we find in John's Revelation that the Gospel predominates and the good news is "Blessed are those who wash their robe (in the blood of the Lamb), so that they may have the right to the tree of life."

You will enter the city by the gate and will live forever in the safety and security of the New Jerusalem. And the good news is, Jesus says, "Surely I am coming soon." We join in John's concluding prayer at the close of Revelation saying, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" Amen.