

long ago, it is as though I were to come to a great gate with a sign over it saying, "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish"; and I were to pass through the gate, turn around, and notice that on that side of the sign now facing me the words were emblazoned, "You were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world." This is the way assurance of my eternal election is obtained, and it is the only way! I simply cannot have any assurance until I actually come. Then I can, by means of my effectual calling, be assured of my eternal election

13. "This doctrine does not comport with certain Scriptures."

Our consideration of this objection is fraught with enormous possibility for polemic (which, according to *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, means "an aggressive attack on or refutation of the opinions or principles of another; the art or practice of disputation or controversy"), and especially in two areas: (1) the hermeneutic which each of us has adopted and actually employs in practice; and (2) the many preconceptions which each of us has developed over a period of time and with which we now approach these texts. In view of this possibility, perhaps two guiding principles should be enunciated at the outset of our consideration. The first of these may be stated as follows: It is not necessary that all possible interpretations of a text comport with the doctrine as it has been presented; it is only necessary that one possible interpretation do so. Of course, this principle should immediately be qualified by the assertion that the proposed interpretation must have the characteristics of self consistency (it must not contradict itself), relevance (it must pertain to and fruitfully interact with the text, and must not miss the "point"), and integrity (it must retain the integrity of the individual Scripture and the integrity of Scripture as a whole; it must take into serious consideration the exegetical, historical, and theological components and contexts of the text, considered as one part of that system of God's truth which is truly but not exhaustively revealed in the Scriptures).

The second of these two guiding principles may be stated as follows: In our considerations of the varied possibilities of meaning of a text, we ought to attempt to follow one another to the roots of our varied understandings; and having found the grounds upon which we stand, agree to disagree with one another, in the confident expectation that the truth is fully able to carry itself, and will prevail, if not immediately, then perhaps a little later, but surely in the end! This does not preclude fruitful discussion and reasoning; it merely commends a type of approach and atmosphere within which such reasoning can be edifying, and not destructive of present communion and future opportunity for further interaction. This principle underlies much of what we do in our theological work: the goal which we set before us is not so much agreement as understanding. This is not a principle which bristles with risk and is prolifically fruitful of theological indecisiveness; rather it encourages the doing of one's own exegesis and thinking, and the forming of one's own convictions. The risk is minimized by the confidence that what is being presented in our classes is eminently reasonable. The concern that students will not become sufficiently decisive in their theological views is usually dissipated after they have begun their own ministries, have had time for their convictions to settle and be further clarified, and to grow and develop (sometimes they even grow to become as