

The Canons of Dort

The Synod of Dordrecht

November 13, 1618—May 9, 1619

5 HEADS OF DOCTRINE

1. Divine Election and Reprobation
2. The Death of Christ, and the Redemption of Men Thereby
3. The Corruption of Man
4. Man's Conversion to God, and the Manner Thereof
5. The Perseverance of the Saints

First Head of Doctrine

Divine Election and Reprobation

FIRST HEAD: ARTICLE 1.

As all men have sinned in Adam (*Rom 5:12*), lie under the curse (*Gen 3:17-19; Gal 3:10*), and are deserving of eternal death (*Gen 2:17; 1Cor 15:22*), God would have done no injustice by leaving them all to perish and delivering them over to condemnation on account of sin, according to the words of the apostle: "that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God." (*Rom 3:19*). And: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (*Rom 3:23*). And: "For the wages of sin is death." (*Rom 6:23*).

I.e., God would have been completely just in the eternal condemnation and extermination of human beings – those made in His image and likeness – who had transgressed His command (to not eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil) and betrayed His glory.

FIRST HEAD: ARTICLE 2. But in this the love of God was manifested, that He "sent his one and only Son into the world, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (*1 John 4:9, John 3:16*).

I.e., Why are all men not eternally condemned and exterminated according to God's justice? God – because of His great love – instead of eternally condemning and exterminating the human race, which He would have been just to do (I.1), sent His Son into the world as a means by which humans might have the eternal life which they forfeited in Adam's transgression, if only they will "believe in Him."

FIRST HEAD: ARTICLE 3. And that men may be brought to believe, God mercifully sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings to whom He will and at what time He pleases; by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (*Rom 10:14-15*).

I.e., How can men hear about such "joyful tidings" of eternal life offered by God? God, in His mercy, has not only provided a means by which men might regain eternal life through faith in His Son (I.2), but also has provided messengers by which to carry this Good News of repentance from sin and faith in the crucified Son, and these messengers are dispersed to whom God wills and in God's perfect timing.

FIRST HEAD: ARTICLE 4. The wrath of God abides upon those who believe not this gospel (*John 3:36*). But such as receive it and embrace Jesus the Savior by a true and living faith (*Jam 2:14-26*) are by Him delivered from the wrath of God (*Rom 5:9*) and from destruction, and have the gift of eternal life conferred upon them (*John 3:36*).

I.e., What are the end of those who either do not believe or, conversely, embrace such Good News? Those who reject the Good News of the crucified Christ will have God's wrath against sin remaining on them; those who receive and embrace this Good News "by a true and living faith" are delivered from God's just wrath and receive, in its place, eternal life.

FIRST HEAD: ARTICLE 5. The cause or guilt of this unbelief as well as of all other sins is no wise in God, but in man himself (*Rom 1:20*); whereas faith in Jesus Christ and salvation through Him is the free gift of God, as it is written: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (*Eph 2:8*). Likewise: "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him" (*Phil 1:29*).

I.e., Who is responsible for the pagan's unbelief – rejection of the Gospel – and who, in turn, is responsible for the Christian's faith? The pagan himself is responsible for his own unbelief – for he has no excuse (*Rom 1:20*); however, the faith of the Christian finds its root in God alone, who grants faith to men as a free gift.

FIRST HEAD: ARTICLE 6. That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God's eternal decree. "For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (*Acts 15:18 A. V.*). "who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (*Eph 1:11*). According to which decree He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe (*Ex 33:19; Rom 9:15*); while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy (*Rom 1:24,26,28*). And herein is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men equally involved in ruin; or that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of God, which, though men of perverse, impure, and unstable minds wrest it to their own destruction (*2Pet 3:16*), yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation (*Rom 5:1; Phil 4:7*).

I.e., Given that men are responsible for their unbelief, and that God is solely responsible for dispensing the free gift of faith to those who believe, how (and when) is this distinction made between those who will and will not believe? The distinction between those who will and will not believe is determined by God via His eternal, secret decree "from of old" (*Acts 15:18 ESV*).

Those who will believe – called the Elect – are moved upon by God that they might believe regardless of the intensity of their obstinacy and opposition to Him; God, conversely, does not move upon the non-Elect and thus they remain in their wickedness and unbelief.

This glorious doctrine of Election as found in the word of God displays God's profound, merciful, and at the same time righteous plan for the salvation of His people, providing great comfort to the Elect, though this same doctrine is twisted by perverse, unstable, and impure men to their own ruin.