

**A DEVOTIONAL STUDY OF THE
CANONS OF DORDT**



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The Canons of Dordt

Formally Titled

The Decision of the Council of Dort

on the Five Main Points of Doctrine

in Dispute in the Netherlands

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The First Main Point of Doctrine

Divine Election and Reprobation

The Judgment Concerning Divine Predestination

Which the Synod Declares to Be in Agreement with the Word of God

and Accepted Till Now in the Reformed Churches,

Set Forth in Several Articles

THE CANONS OF DORDT

“He that is not interested in the eternal election of God the Father, in the atoning blood and justifying righteousness of God the Son, in the work and witness of God the Holy Ghost, whatever be his name, sect, denomination or profession; whatever be his outward conduct, the doctrines he professes, or the creed to which he signs his name, he will...never see the King in His beauty, never see the land afar off, never see the new Jerusalem, nor the blood of sprinkling, ‘that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.’”

J. C. Philot

From November 13, 1618 through May 9, 1619, the Synod of Dort convened at the request of Prince Maurice and the States-General of Holland, who supported his efforts to solidate political authority. Judgment was to be passed upon the Arminian controversy that plagued Christendom. Great religious decisions were asked to be made in the Netherlands City of Dordrecht. Intended to be a general council of the Calvinistic Churches, Dutch delegates met with twenty-six delegates from eight foreign countries. Representatives from England, the Palatinate House, Switzerland and Bremen were present.

Concentrated attention was to be given to the teachings of Jacob Arminius (1559-1609), a theological professor at Leiden University in Germany (1603-1609). Arminius had questioned the teaching of John Calvin and other Reformers on important doctrinal matters including grace (the unmerited favor of God shown towards sinners) and predestination (the biblical doctrine that God determines beforehand who will be saved). In 1592 a colleague, Franciscus Gomarus, brought formal charges against Arminius charging him with Pelagianism (an emphasis on free will), an unhealthy reliance upon the early Church fathers, departure from the Calvinistic standards of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism which he had vowed to uphold, and erroneous teaching on predestination.

Desiring to give the human will a more active part in the salvation of the soul, Arminius taught a conditional election in which the will of an individual might or might not affect the divine order of salvation. With this seed thought before them, the followers of Arminius enlarged upon the role of a free will and in 1610 presented their views on five particular doctrinal points in a document known as the Remonstrance. In this document or in later more explicit writings, the Arminians taught specific concepts.

- Election is based on foreseen faith. God’s predestination is and was conditioned by human choice.
- The atonement was universal.
- The depravity of man was partial not total.
- Divine grace is irresistible.
- A person who had become a Christian could fall from grace or lose their salvation.

In the Canons, the Synod of Dort rejected these views and set forth once more the Reformed doctrine.

- Election to salvation is not based upon foreseen faith or good works but is unconditional.
- The intent of the atonement was for the elect and only the elect. There was a definite or limited atonement made to save those whom the Father had chosen to be the heirs of salvation.
- The depravity of man is total.
- Saving grace is compelling and is irresistible grace.
- Those who are saved will persevere in the faith.

The Canons have a special place in the Church because of their original purpose as a *judicial* decision on the doctrinal points in dispute between the Calvinist and the Arminians. This is somewhat ironical because it was Arminius who had suggested the calling of a national synod, “an orderly and free convention of the parties that differ from each other” (*On Reconciling Religious Dissensions among Christians*, 1606).

Reflecting the sentiment for an honest examination of the doctrinal issues, the original preface to the Canons of Dort called upon the assembly to bring a "judgment, in which both the true view, agreeing with God's Word, concerning the aforesaid five points of doctrine is explained, and the false view, disagreeing with God's Word, is rejected."

Realistically, the Canons have a limited scope of inquiry in that they do not cover all of biblical doctrine, but focus on the five points of doctrine in dispute. Each of the main points consists of a positive and a negative section, the first being a presentation of the Reformed doctrine on the subject, followed by a renunciation of the reflected errors.

It will be noted that in the official form there are only four points because the Canons were structured to correspond to the five articles of the 1610 Remonstrance. Main Points III and IV were combined into one.

Special notes

- All Scriptural references are in red. On the CD, the doctrinal position of the Arminians within the document is highlighted in bold blue.
- For the sake of emphasis and clarity the phrase in brackets [**The Synod rejects the errors of those**] has been added before each major section dealing with an area of concern by the Council.
- This translation of the Canons, based on the only extant Latin manuscript among those signed at the Synod of Dort, was adopted by the 1986 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church. The biblical quotations are translations from the original Latin and so do not always correspond to current versions. Though not in the original text, subheadings have been added to the positive articles and to the conclusion in order to facilitate study of the Canons.
- In more recent days the argument has been set forth that John Calvin did not teach or believe in the doctrine of a definite redemption or limited atonement. For those who are interested, attention is invited to read *Calvin's Institutes* (Book III, Chapters XXI through XXIV).

THE CANONS OF DORT

Formally Titled

*The Decision of the Synod of Dort on
the Five Main Points of
Doctrine in Dispute
in the Netherlands*

The First Main Point of Doctrine

Divine Election and Reprobation

**The Judgment Concerning Divine Predestination
Which the Synod Declares to Be in Agreement
with the Word of God and
Accepted Till Now in the Reformed Churches,
Set Forth in Several Articles**

Article 1: God's Right to Condemn All People

Since all people have sinned in Adam and have come under the sentence of the curse and eternal death, God would have done no one an injustice if it had been his will to leave the entire human race in sin and under the curse, and to condemn them on account of their sin. As the apostle says: *The whole world is liable to the condemnation of God* (Rom. 3:19), *All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God* (Rom. 3:23), and *The wages of sin is death* (Rom. 6:23).

Commentary

The justice of God in the act of condemnation of all men is based upon the reprobate condition the Fall created. As the result of man's perverse mind, which stubbornly refuses to obey God's will, he has become "disqualified" (Gk. *adokimos*) "morally corrupt" and, "unfit for any good deed" (cf. Rom. 1:28; 2 Cor 13:5-7; 2 Tim. 3; 8; Titus 1:16). "The Divine record of the Fall is the only possible explanation of the present condition of the human race. It alone accounts for the presence of evil in a world made by a beneficent and perfect Creator. It affords the only adequate explanation for the universality of sin. Why is it that the king's son in the palace, and the saint's daughter in the cottage, in spite of every safeguard which human love and watchfulness can devise, manifest from their earliest days an unmistakable bias toward evil and tendency to sin? Why is it that sin is universal, that there is no empire, no nation, no family tree from this awful disease? Reject the Divine explanation and no satisfactory answer is possible to these questions. Accept it, and we see that sin is universal because all share a common ancestry, all spring from a common stock, in Adam all die. The Divine record alone explains the mystery of death." (A. W. Pink)

Article 2: The Manifestation of God's Love

But this is how God showed his love: *he sent his only begotten Son into the world, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

Commentary

God's election of certain ones to salvation is a merciful provision. Unless God's sovereign grace in sparing a remnant, all of Adam's descendants had perished in their sins.

*The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell,
It goes beyond the highest star
And reaches to the lowest hell*

Frederick M. Lehman

Article 3: The Preaching of the Gospel

In order that people may be brought to faith, God mercifully sends pro-claimers of this very joyful message to the people he wishes and at the time he wishes. By this ministry people are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. *For how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without someone preaching? And how shall they preach unless they have been sent?* (Rom. 10:14-15).

Commentary

“No sermon is of any value, or likely to be useful, which has not the three R's in it: ruin by the fall, redemption by Christ, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit.” (John C. Ryland, 1723-1792)

Article 4: A Twofold Response to the Gospel

God's anger remains on those who do not believe this gospel. But those who do accept it and embrace Jesus the Savior with a true and living faith are delivered through him from God's anger and from destruction, and receive the gift of eternal life.

Commentary.

Repentance leads to life eternal only when it is accompanied by saving faith in the redemptive work of Christ (Acts 20:21; Mark 1:15). Apart from genuine repentance the wrath of God keeps on abiding on the lost (John 15:1-4; 3:18). The confession of every Christian should affirm the confession that says, “I believe in a God of absolute and unbounded love, therefore I believe in a loving anger of His which will and must devour and destroy all that is decayed.” (Charles Kingsley, 1819-1875)

Article 5: The Sources of Unbelief and of Faith

The cause or blame for this unbelief, as well as for all other sins, is not at all in God, but in man. Faith in Jesus Christ, however, and salvation through him is a free gift of God. As Scripture says, *It is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is a gift of God* (Eph. 2:8). Likewise: *It has been freely given to you to believe in Christ* (Phil. 1:29).

Commentary

As to the ultimate origin of evil the Bible makes no attempts to vindicate God apart from contending that He is absolutely sovereign, that He is righteous in all that He does, and that He had decreed the existence of both good and evil for His own glory. "The sacrifice of Christ gives the humble believer not a solution but a satisfying reply. There must have been some good reason for allowing evil, but this does not imply a defect in God or in His benevolence. If there had been any defect in Him, He would hardly have sent His holy Only Begotten Son, who was worth more than all worlds, to save one." R. L. Dabney (*Theology*, 1927)

Article 6: God's Eternal Decision

The fact that some receive from God the gift of faith within time, and that others do not, stems from His eternal decision. For all His works are known to God from eternity (Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:11).

In accordance with this decision He graciously softens the hearts, however hard, of His chosen ones and inclines them to believe, but by His just judgment He leaves in their wickedness and hardness of heart those who have not been chosen.

And in this especially is disclosed to us His act - unfathomable and as merciful as it is just - of distinguishing between people equally lost. This is the well-known decision of election and reprobation revealed in God's Word. This decision the wicked, impure, and unstable distort to their own ruin, but it provides holy and godly souls with comfort beyond words.

Commentary

The decree of God by itself determines the course of history. It is never the course of history or the decisions of men which determines in any manner or modifies the decree of God. Therefore, since God is sovereign He has a right to decree as He wills and that without being impugned by finite creatures. That God in His mercy has decreed some, but not all to salvation, reflects His mercy. That God in His wisdom has decreed some, but not all to reprobation, reflects His justice. In all matters He will be glorified (Matt. 11:25, 26; Rom. 9:17-18, 21-22; 2 Tim. 2:19-20; Jude 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:8).

Undergirding these truths is the ground of creation. “We say, that God made man neither to damn him nor to save him; neither salvation nor damnation were God’s ultimate end in making man, but His own glory, which will be answered one way or another, either in his salvation or damnation.” (John Gill)

*“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.”*

Article 7: Election

Election [or choosing] is God's unchangeable purpose by which He did the following:

Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of His will, He chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from its original innocence into sin and ruin. Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery. He did this in Christ, whom He also appointed from eternity to be the mediator, the head of all those chosen, and the foundation of their salvation.

And so He decided to give the chosen ones to Christ to be saved, and to call and draw them effectively into Christ's fellowship through His Word and Spirit. In other words, He decided to grant them true faith in Christ, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of His Son, to glorify them. God did all this in order to demonstrate His mercy, to the praise of the riches of His glorious grace.

As Scripture says, *God chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, so that we should be holy and blameless before him with love; he predestined us whom he adopted as his children through Jesus Christ, in himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, by which he freely made us pleasing to himself in his beloved* (Eph. 1:4-6). And elsewhere, *Those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified* (Rom. 8:30).

Commentary

“Election is the pitching of everlasting love, or the good pleasure of God, choosing and decreeing to eternal life: it is the great charter of heaven, God’s special and free grace deed of gift to His chosen ones, made over in trust unto Jesus Christ, for their use and benefit. Now, in deeds of gift (to make them authentic) there must be inserted the name of the donor, or person that gives; the name of the donee, or person to whom; the quality and extent of the thing that is given; the time when it was done; the consideration that moved thereto; and, in the case of impotency, it is usual and necessary to ordain some frier as the officer in trust, who is to stand seized or possessed of the gift for the donee’s use: all of which are evidently found in scripture election, and may be summed into this proposition: “That there is a peculiar people, who were personally chosen of God in Christ, according to His own good pleasure, and ordained to eternal life, before the world began” (Elisha Coles, *Election*).

Article 8: A Single Decision of Election

This election is not of many kinds; it is one and the same election for all who were to be saved in the Old and the New Testament. For Scripture declares that there is a single good pleasure, purpose, and plan of God's will, by which He chose us from eternity both to grace and to glory, both to salvation and to the way of salvation, which He prepared in advance for us to walk in.

Commentary

The mind and the counsel of God is the same, *yesterday, today, and forever* (Heb. 13:8). Therefore the apostle speaks of God, that there is no shadow of change or turning in Him (James 1:17). *God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent: hath he said, and shall He not do it?* (Num. 23:19). And shall He decrees, and not execute it? Shall He purpose and not perform it? *I the Lord, I change not.* (Mal. 3:6) *The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations* (Psa. 33:11) With God “there is neither succession of counsels and purposes, nor yet plurality; but, as with one opening of His eye, He beholds all things as they are, so with one inclination, or nod of His will, He hath given a law, and appointed all things.” (Hugh Binning, *Of the Decrees of God*)

Because God has only one decree of salvation all systems which advocate salvation apart from Christ must be renounced. *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved* (Acts 4:12).

“*The streams of love I trace
Back to their fountain God;
And in His wondrous mercy see
Eternal thoughts of love to me.*”

Article 9: Election Not Based on Foreseen Faith

This same election took place, not on the basis of foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition, as though it were based on a prerequisite cause or condition in the person to be chosen, but rather for the purpose of faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, and so on. Accordingly, election is the source of each of the benefits of salvation. Faith, holiness, and the other saving gifts, and at last eternal life itself, flow forth from election as its fruits and effects. As the apostle says, *He chose us (not because we were, but) so that we should be holy and blameless before him in love* (Eph. 1:4).

Commentary

“The Arminian, because he cannot contest the mention of predestination in the Scriptures, in faithfulness to his own peculiar theories, must needs invest it with a meaning which the word was never meant to bear, and thus predestination in Scripture is regarded as meaning God’s foreseeing what will come to pass through the exercise of the free-will of the creature, in virtue of which He confirms and thus ordains what He foresees. But this is not predestination. It is simply a confirming of that which is foreseen by the exercise of a certain power, which is known among men as the gift of prophecy. In fact, is playing with words. If God foresees that certain things will come to pass, what need is there for Him to ordain them? If they are to come to pass, they will come to pass, ordination or no ordination. And if God sees certain things in the future as bound to come to pass, what makes them bound to come to pass but His own will? And if he has willed them before they come to pass, wherein lies the difference between this and scriptural predestination?” (K.A MacRae, *Resurgence of Arminianism*).

No, it is not man’s merits, nor even his will that saves (John 1:13), but Christ through His atoning work at Calvary.

*There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gates
Of Heaven, and let us in.*

Article 10: Election Based on God's Good Pleasure

But the cause of this undeserved election is exclusively the good pleasure of God. This does not involve his choosing certain human qualities or actions from among all those possible as a condition of salvation, but rather involves his adopting certain particular persons from among the common mass of sinners as his own possession. As Scripture says, *When the children were not yet born, and had done nothing either good or bad...*, she (Rebecca) was told, *The older will serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated* (Rom. 9:11-13). Also, *All who were appointed for eternal life believed* (Acts 13:48).

Commentary

We are not told why God does not save all mankind when all were equally undeserving, and when the sacrifice on Calvary was that of a Person of infinite value, amply sufficient to save all men had God so desired it. But the Scriptures do tell us that not all will be saved. However, we can say that the atonement, which was worked out at an enormous cost to God Himself, is His own property, and that He is at liberty to make whatever use of it He chooses. No man has any claim to any part of it.

We are told repeatedly that salvation is by grace. And grace is favor shown to the undeserving, even to the ill deserving. If any part of man's salvation were due to his own good works, then indeed there would be a difference in men, and those who had responded to the gracious offer could justly point the finger of scorn at the lost and say, "You had the same chance that I had. I accepted, but you refused. Therefore you have no excuse." But no. God has so arranged this system that those who are saved can only be eternally grateful that God has saved them.

It is not for us to ask why God does as He does, for the Scripture declares: *Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Or hath no the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering vessels fitted unto destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy which he afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he also called* (Rom. 9:20-24). (Lorraine Bottner, *Major Doctrinal Differences of Reformed Theology and the Rest, Arminianism*)

Article 11: Election Unchangeable

Just as God himself is most wise, unchangeable, all knowing, and almighty, so the election made by him can neither be suspended nor altered, revoked, or annulled; neither can his chosen ones be cast off, nor their number reduced.

Commentary

The election of souls to salvation is unchangeable because the will of God "is irresistible, His counsel shall stand; who can turn Him from His purpose, and who can hinder him from performance? Therefore He attains His end in the most superlative degree of certainty and infallibility, Himself will not change His own purpose; for why should He do it? If He changes to the better, than it reflects on His wisdom; if He changes to the worse, it reflects both on His wisdom and goodness. Certainly He can see no cause why He should change it." (Hugh Binning) *He is in one mind, and who can turn Him?* (Job 23:13) *God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man that He should repent* (Num. 23:19). *I am the Lord, I change not* (Mal. 3:6). *The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations* (Psa 33:11).

*"The Lord our God, is clothed with might,
The winds and waves obey His will;
He speaks, and in the shining height
The sun and rolling worlds stand still.*

*Rebel ye waves, and o'er the land,
With threatening aspect foam and roar,
The Lord hath spoken His command
That breaks your rage upon the shore.*

*Ye winds of night, your force combine—
Without His holy high behest
You shall not in a mountain pine
Disturb the little swallow's nest.
His voice sublime is heard afar;
In distant peals it fades and dies;
He binds the cyclone to His chariot
And sweeps the howling murky skies.*

*Great God! How infinite art Thou,
What weak and worthless worms are we,
Let all the race of creatures bow
And seek salvation now from Thee.*

*Eternity, with all its years
Stands every present to Thy view,
To Thee there's nothing old appears.
Great God! There can be nothing new.*

*Our lives though varied scenes are drawn,
And vexed with mean and trifling cares:
While Thine eternal thought moves on
They Fixed and undisturbed affairs.”*

Article 12: The Assurance of Election

Assurance of this their eternal and unchangeable election to salvation is given to the chosen in due time, though by various stages and in differing measure. Such assurance comes not by inquisitive searching into the hidden and deep things of God, but by noticing within themselves, with spiritual joy and holy delight, the unmistakable fruits of election pointed out in God's Word - such as a true faith in Christ, a childlike fear of God, a godly sorrow for their sins, a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on.

Commentary

A person may believe himself or herself to be saved when that is not the case. A person may also fear that they are not saved when in actual fact regeneration has taken place (Isa. 50:10; Luke 18:11-14) Assurance of salvation may be found objectively and subjectively. Objectively, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit comes to give assurance of salvation by leading believers to rest on God's promises. The Spirit also produces in the lives of the elect love for Christ, for righteousness, and for others. Because of the Spirit's work the saint is enabled to call upon God as the loving Father in heaven (2 Tim. 1:12; John 14:21; 1 John 3:14; Rom. 8:14-16; 1 John 2:5;

5:13; John 10:27-28). Subjectively, assurance of salvation may be detected insofar as there is a growth in grace and knowledge of Jesus and a forsaking of known sin (1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 7:1; 13:5). “It must be held to be an universally acknowledged point, that no man is a Christian who does not feel some special love for righteousness.” (John Calvin)

Article 13: The Fruit of This Assurance

In their awareness and assurance of this election God's children daily find greater cause to humble themselves before God, to adore the fathomless depth of his mercies, to cleanse themselves, and to give fervent love in return to him who first so greatly loved them. This is far from saying that this teaching concerning election, and reflection upon it, make's God's children lax in observing his commandments or carnally self-assured. By God's just judgment, this does usually happen to those who casually take for granted the grace of election or engage in idle and brazen talk about it but are unwilling to walk in the ways of the chosen.

Commentary

A believer's lack of confidence or assurance of salvation may be the evidence of sinful neglect. (1 John 4:18). The apostle denies that any man has learned Christ who has not learned to put off *The old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on Christ* (Eph. 4:22).

Article 14: Teaching Election Properly

Just as, by God's wise plan, this teaching concerning divine election has been proclaimed through the prophets, Christ himself, and the apostles, in Old and New Testament times, and has subsequently been committed to writing in the Holy Scriptures, so also today in God's church, for which it was specifically intended, this teaching must be set forth - with a spirit of discretion, in a godly and holy manner, at the appropriate time and place, without inquisitive searching into the ways of the Most High. This must be done for the glory of God's most holy name, and for the lively comfort of his people.

Commentary

“Election!—What a blessed word! What a glorious doctrine! Who does not rejoice to know that he has been chosen to some great blessing? Election is unto salvation—the greatest of all blessings. And strange to say, this is a neglected truth even by many who profess to believe it, and others have a feeling of repulsion at the very mention of this Bible-revealed, God honoring, and man humbling truth” (C.D. Cole, *The Bible Doctrine of Election*). Speaking to his generation in the 19th century, the great English preacher Charles Spurgeon said, “There seems to be an inveterate prejudice in the human mind again this doctrine, and although most other doctrines will be received by professing Christians, some with caution, others with pleasure, yet this one seems to be the most frequently disregarded and discarded.” Today, the doctrines of grace are even more universally opposed even within the professing Church. In light of this, what must be done? The scriptural answer is for Christians to simply declare afresh the whole gospel to the whole world (1 Cor. 15:1; 1 John 1:3). Faith must not be lost in the power of the Word, to be used effectively by the Spirit to save souls and confound the foolish (Heb. 4:12; 1 Cor. 2:3).

Article 15: Reprobation

Moreover, Holy Scripture most especially highlights this eternal and undeserved grace of our election and brings it out more clearly for us, in that it further bears witness that not all people have been chosen but that some have not been chosen or have been passed by in God's eternal election - those, that is, concerning whom God, on the basis of his entirely free, most just, irreproachable, and unchangeable good pleasure, made the following decision:

- to leave them in the common misery into which, by their own fault, they have plunged themselves;
- not to grant them saving faith and the grace of conversion;
- but finally to condemn and eternally punish them (having been left in their own ways and under his just judgment), not only for their unbelief but also for all their other sins, in order to display his justice.

And this is the decision of reprobation, which does not at all make God the author of sin (a blasphemous thought!) but rather its fearful, irreproachable, just judge and avenger.

Commentary

Christ did not lay down His life to atone for all sins of all mankind in all the ages, nor for an indefinite number of sinners. His sacrifice was indeed sufficient to save the whole world, had it been the design of redemption. But in the purpose of God and in the work of Christ, it was decreed that He should make atonement for those who were elected in Him to everlasting life as the heirs of salvation. These only Christ represented in the definite act of redemption, and these only shall be saved (John 10:14-15, 25-30; Acts 20:28; Rev. 5:9; John 17:9-10). "Had God decreed to save all men, and had prepared saving grace for all men, then all men would be saved; what should hinder?" (John Gill, *The Cause of God in Truth*)

Article 16: Responses to the Teaching of Reprobation

Those who do not yet actively experience within themselves a living faith in Christ or an assured confidence of heart, peace of conscience, a zeal for childlike obedience, and a glorying in God through Christ, but who nevertheless use the means by which God has promised to work these things in us - such people ought not to be alarmed at the mention of reprobation, nor to count themselves among the reprobate; rather they ought to continue diligently in the use of the means, to desire fervently a time of more abundant grace, and to wait for it in reverence and humility.

On the other hand, those who seriously desire to turn to God, to be pleasing to him alone, and to be delivered from the body of death, but are not yet able to make such progress along the way of godliness and faith as they would like - such people ought much less to stand in fear of the teaching concerning reprobation, since our merciful God has promised that he will not snuff out a smoldering wick and that he will not break a bruised reed.

However, those who have forgotten God and their Savior Jesus Christ and have abandoned themselves wholly to the cares of the world and the pleasures of the flesh - such people have every reason to stand in fear of this teaching, as long as they do not seriously turn to God.

Commentary

The mercy of God is such that He is not willing that any of His own should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). Those who are desirous of salvation need not despair, not one sheep will be lost (John 17:12). And while no one should ever place hope or confidence in a works salvation (Eph. 2:8,9), good works as a sign of salvation are not to be neglected (James 2:17).

Article 17: The Salvation of the Infants of Believers

Since we must make judgments about God's will from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but by virtue of the gracious covenant in which they together with their parents are included, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in infancy.

Commentary

It is enough to say with regard to the state of salvation of infants that the God of the universe will do right by them. The comfort of the heart in the hour of tragedy is in the goodness and mercy of God. *Jesus said Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 19:14).

Article 18: The Proper Attitude toward Election and Reprobation

To those who complain about this grace of an undeserved election and about the severity of a just reprobation, we reply with the words of the apostle, *Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?* (Rom. 9:20), and with the words of our Savior, *Have I no right to do what I want with my own?* (Matt. 20:15).

We, however, with reverent adoration of these secret things, cry out with the apostle: *Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways beyond tracing out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who has first given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen* (Rom. 11:33-36).

Commentary

Part of a proper understanding of the doctrine of reprobation lies in understanding just whom is being offended by sin. It is none other than the Most Holy One (Hab. 1:12). The greater the dignity, the greater the magnitude of the offense. When the citizen of a country is assaulted that is a terrible injustice. But when the assault is upon the leader of the land—such as a king or queen or president—the offense is all the more grievous. So it is with the God of the universe. The severity of reprobation is in proportion to the majesty of His personage.

Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

Who teach that the will of God to save those who would believe and persevere in faith and in the obedience of faith is the whole and entire decision of election to salvation, and that nothing else concerning this decision has been revealed in God's Word.

For they deceive the simple and plainly contradict Holy Scripture in its testimony that God does not only wish to save those who would believe, but that he has also from eternity chosen certain particular people to whom, rather than to others, he would within time grant faith in Christ and perseverance. As Scripture says, *I have revealed your name to those whom you gave me (John 17:6). Likewise, All who were appointed for eternal life believed (Acts 13:48), and He chose us before the foundation of the world so that we should be holy...* (Eph. 1:4).

Commentary

Far beyond revealing a general **intent** to save those who would believe in Christ and persevere in the faith, the Bible teaches a particular and **definite** election of individuals to salvation. *And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; 9:11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) 9:12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. 9:13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated* (Rom. 9:10-13). The apostle proceeds, to mention the case of Jacob and Esau, who not only had the same father, but the same mother, Isaac's lawful wife; these were conceived at once, were in the womb together, were twins; and if any had the preference, Esau by birth had it, being born first; and yet a difference was made between these two by God himself; who said to the mother of them, *The elder shall serve the younger*; which is interpreted of God's loving the one, and hating the other; and this was notified to her, in consequence of an eternal purpose, *before the children were born*, and when they had *done neither good nor evil*; so that it could not be said, that Jacob was loved for his good works, nor Esau hated for his evil ones; wherefore the **purpose of God**, respecting the *election of Jacob*, fully appears to depend *not of works*, but of the grace of him that *calleth*. From all this we conclude, that the predestination of men, either to life or death, is personal: that the objects of either branch of predestination are alike, or are considered in the same situation or condition, whether, in the pure, or corrupt mass, or in both; that God was not influenced or moved, in the election of the one, by their good works, or in the rejection of the other, by their bad ones; that God's decree of election stands firm and immovable, not upon the feet of works, but of the grace of God; and, that love and hatred are the real springs and source of predestination in its respective branches" (John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*)

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that God's election to eternal life is of many kinds: one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and the latter in turn incomplete, revocable, non-peremptory (or conditional), or else complete, irrevocable, and peremptory (or absolute).

Likewise, [the Synod rejects the errors of those] who teach that there is one election to faith and another to salvation, so that there can be an election to justifying faith apart from a peremptory [or absolute] election to salvation.

For this is an invention of the human brain, devised apart from the Scriptures, which distorts the teaching concerning election and breaks up this golden chain of salvation: *Those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified* (Rom. 8:30).

Commentary

The attempt to make dramatic distinctions in Scripture where none are warranted is the constant danger of certain schools of theology. It is a great sin to wrongly divide the word of truth (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). Either God gives men eternal life or He does not. Either saving faith is absolute or it is not.

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that God's good pleasure and purpose, which Scripture mentions in its teaching of election, does not involve God's choosing certain particular people rather than others, but involves God's choosing, out of all possible conditions (including the works of the law) or out of the whole order of things, the intrinsically unworthy act of faith, as well as the imperfect obedience of faith, to be a condition of salvation; and it involves his graciously wishing to count this as perfect obedience and to look upon it as worthy of the reward of eternal life.

For by this pernicious error the good pleasure of God and the merit of Christ are robbed of their effectiveness and people are drawn away, by unprofitable inquiries, from the truth of undeserved justification and from the simplicity of the Scriptures. It also gives the lie to these words of the apostle: *God called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of works, but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time* (2 Tim. 1:9).

Commentary

It is true that God, in His infinite wisdom has chosen out of all possible conditions the best means of the salvation of sinners for He doeth all things well (Mark 7:37; Psalms 19:1-8). The best means of salvation is that the sovereign grace of salvation be freely bestowed upon particular individuals apart from human merit or condition lest God be robbed of His absolute glory. God will not give His honor to another (Isa. 48:11). To those who believe in a “*graciously wishing*” God, there is but this to say: “*Your God is too small, your salvation too weak.*”

“How happy are we
 Our election who see,
 And can venture our souls on
 Thy gracious decree.
 From eternity loved,
 And lodged in His hand,
 whence we cannot be moved!”

Augustus Toplady

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that in election to faith a prerequisite condition is that man should rightly use the light of nature, be upright, unassuming, humble, and disposed to eternal life, as though election depended to some extent on these factors.

For this smacks of Pelagius and it clearly calls into question the words of the apostle: *We lived at one time in the passions of our flesh, following the will of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in transgressions, made us alive with Christ, by whose grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with him and seated us with him in heaven in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages we might show the surpassing riches of his grace, according to his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith (and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God) not by works, so that no one can boast* (Eph. 2:3-9).

Commentary

The desperate plight of the soul of the natural man is neither understood nor appreciated by those who believe that fallen man is disposed to seek after God, has any light of nature, or is intrinsically morally good. The Bible teaches that *there is none righteous, no not one* (Rom. 3:10), for the wicked *will not seek after God* (Psa. 10:4). The heart of man is darkened (Rom. 1:21) so that there *is none good* (Matt. 19:17). It is apart from reason to suggest that one who is *“dead in trespasses and sin”* (Eph. 2:1) would be able to meet any condition for salvation or use that which is not in the soul, spiritual light, proper love for God, and an inclination to righteousness. The ability of the natural man to please God by these good works does not exist. Those who are in the flesh *cannot please God* (Rom. 8:8).

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that the incomplete and non-peremptory election of particular persons to salvation occurred on the basis of a foreseen faith, repentance, holiness, and godliness, which has just begun or continued for some time; but that complete and peremptory [a final] election occurred on the basis of a foreseen perseverance to the end in faith, repentance, holiness, and godliness. And that this is the gracious and evangelical worthiness, on account of which the one who is chosen is more worthy than the one who is

not chosen. And therefore that faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, godliness, and perseverance are not fruits or effects of an unchangeable election to glory, but indispensable conditions and causes, which are prerequisite in those who are to be chosen in the complete election, and which are foreseen as achieved in them.

This runs counter to the entire Scripture, which throughout impresses upon our ears and hearts these sayings among others: *Election is not by works, but by him who calls (Rom. 9:11-12); All who were appointed for eternal life believed (Acts 13:48); He chose us in himself so that we should be holy (Eph. 1:4); You did not choose me, but I chose you (John 15:16); If by grace, not by works (Rom. 11:6); In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son (1 John 4:10).*

Commentary

The fundamental flaw in the view that election is based upon foreseen faith is that it makes the ground of election to be something in the sinner rather than something in God. Ephesians 1:4-6 explains that election is not upon foreseen faith *but According to the good pleasure of His and To the praise of the glory of His grace.*

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that not every election to salvation is unchangeable, but that some of the chosen can perish and do in fact perish eternally, with no decision of God to prevent it.

By this gross error they make God changeable, destroy the comfort of the godly concerning the steadfastness of their election, and contradict the Holy Scriptures, which teach that the elect cannot be led astray (Matt. 24:24), that Christ does not lose those given to him by the Father (John 6:39), and that those whom God predestined, called, and justified, He also glorifies (Rom. 8:30).

Commentary

To deny that not every election is unto a final and certain salvation is to assault the very integrity of God who has sworn by an oath to save His people through the blood of His Son Jesus Christ. *For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. 17 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: 18 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: 19 Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; 20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 6:16-19)*

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that in this life there is no fruit, no awareness, and no assurance of one's unchangeable election to glory, except as conditional upon something changeable and contingent.

For not only is it absurd to speak of an uncertain assurance, but these things also militate against the experience of the saints, who with the apostle rejoice from an awareness of their election and sing the praises of this gift of God; who, as Christ urged, rejoice with his disciples that their names have been written in heaven (Luke 10:20); and finally who hold up against the flaming arrows of the devil's temptations the awareness of their election, with the question *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?* (Rom. 8:33).

Commentary

“If saving grace be of a permanent nature, and not subject to corruption, then the elect cannot fall from it totally and finally [and for this reason]. Saving grace is called a *seed* remaining in those that are born of God (1 John 3:9), and *incorruptible seed* (1 Peter 1:23). Grace never differs from itself, though a gracious man doth from himself. Saving grace cannot be lost, though as respects its acts and operations it may not always be in exercise; but degrees and measures of grace (formerly attained to) may be lost. *Thou has left thy first love* (Rev. 2:4), not the habit, neither wholly the exercise of love, but only that vigor and heat that once appeared.” (Christopher Ness, *Of Final Preservation*)

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that it was not on the basis of his just will alone that God decided to leave anyone in the fall of Adam and in the common state of sin and condemnation or to pass anyone by in the imparting of grace necessary for faith and conversion.

For these words stand fast: *He has mercy on whom he wishes, and he hardens whom he wishes* (Rom. 9:18). And also: *To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given* (Matt. 13:11). Likewise: *I give glory to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and have revealed them to little children; yes, Father, because that was your pleasure* (Matt. 11:25-26).

Commentary

If God, on the basis of His just will alone, did not decide to leave some in the fall of Adam and in the common state of sin and condemnation and to pass over individuals and not impart grace necessary for faith and conversion then who did? The evidence is clear that not all men come to faith. Not all men love God. Not all men die with the hope of heaven in their heart. How is that possible unless individuals are passed over to follow the natural inclinations of their thoughts and feelings? God is not unjust to pass over individuals who have violated His Law for He is under no moral or legal obligation to help anyone. That God does move to rescue some souls from eternal destruction is due to His great mercy. A governor who pardons some men does no legal

injustice by not pardoning all. Those who are not pardoned are in prison because they have been found guilty of a crime against the state. Surely God is to be allowed as much sovereignty as the governor of a state.

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that the cause for God's sending the gospel to one people rather than to another is not merely and solely God's good pleasure, but rather that one people is better and worthier than the other to whom the gospel is not communicated.

For Moses contradicts this when he addresses the people of Israel as follows: *Behold, to Jehovah your God belong the heavens and the highest heavens, the earth and whatever is in it. But Jehovah was inclined in his affection to love your ancestors alone, and chose out their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as at this day* (Deut. 10:14-15). And also Christ: *Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if those mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes* (Matt. 11:21).

Commentary

Acts 17:26 dispels the notion of racial superiority. The Bible teaches that God *hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation*. Over the centuries various cultures and races have viewed themselves as more worthy of Divine favor than others. It is righteousness which exalts a nation (Prov. 14:34; Psa. 33:12) not personal merit. The proper response of a people to special privileges is that of grace, not merit. Katharine Lee Bates recognized this concept when she wrote her wonderful song about America. Included in the verses are the following words.

*“America! America!
God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brother-hood
From sea to shining sea!*

*America! America!
God mend thy every flaw.
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law!”*

The Second Main Point of Doctrine is Christ's Death and Human Redemption through It

Article 1: The Punishment Which God's Justice Requires

God is not only supremely merciful, but also supremely just. His justice requires (as he has revealed himself in the Word) that the sins we have committed against his infinite majesty be punished with both temporal and eternal punishments, of soul as well as body. We cannot escape these punishments unless satisfaction is given to God's justice.

Commentary

Because God is just He must condemn all sin in all men (Rom. 11:32; Gal. 3:22). Because God is merciful He has found a way whereby an outraged justice can be satisfied without being compromised and yet souls are saved. The Cross is the answer to the Divine dilemma. Salvation is not only a matter of justice being satisfied but of mercy being displayed. “Those who go to hell will have nobody to blame but themselves, while those who go to heaven will have nobody to praise but God.” (C.D. Cole, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*)

Article 2: The Satisfaction Made by Christ

Since, however, we ourselves cannot give this satisfaction or deliver ourselves from God's anger, God in his boundless mercy has given us as a guarantee his only begotten Son, who was made to be sin and a curse for us, in our place, on the cross, in order that he might give satisfaction for us.

Commentary

There was a law in Tokyo about 1900 that no foreigner could take up residence there unless he had a "substitute." There were natives who hired themselves out for this purpose. If the foreigner broke any law, the substitute suffered the penalty for it, even if the penalty was death. In a similar way, our standing before God and his law is only obtainable through the substitutionary work of His Son. And this substitutionary work is obtained without any fee—only faith in Him.

The Bible speaks of Jesus *whom God set forth to be a propitiation [satisfaction] ... in his blood...that He might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.* This passage shows “(1) that Christ’s death is a propitiatory sacrifice; (2) that its first and main effect is upon God; (3) that the particular attribute in God which demands the atonement is His justice, or holiness; (4) that the satisfaction of this holiness is the necessary condition of God’s justifying the believer.” (A.H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*)

Article 3: The Infinite Value of Christ's Death

This death of God's Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins; it is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world.

Commentary

The sufficiency of the death of Christ should never be made a matter for dispute. It is acknowledged that if God had decreed that all men in all of history were to be saved the work of Christ at Calvary is sufficient to save. It is the efficacy of the atonement that the Scriptures set forth as being limited in design. Not all shall come to faith but *All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and he that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out* (John 6:37). A choice has to be made “between an atonement of high efficiency, which is perfectly accomplished, and an atonement of wide extension, which is imperfectly accomplished. We cannot have both. If we had both we would have universal salvation.” (Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Faith*)

Article 4: Reasons for This Infinite Value

Therefore the reason that the person who suffered it is - as was necessary to be our Savior - not only a true and perfectly holy man, but also the only begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Another reason is that this death was accompanied by the experience of God's anger and curse, which we by our sins had fully deserved.

Commentary

The Moslem community is correct in charging the Christians with idolatry by the worshipping of Jesus—if, He is not very God of very God. But the faith of the Church is that Jesus is the Son of God, the second person of the Tri-unity, and is eternal, of one substance with the Father. Nevertheless, Jesus humbled Himself and took upon Himself all of man's nature with the entire essential properties and infirmities common to him with the exception of inherited sin. Being born of a virgin Christ was born outside the slave market of sin. The two natures of Christ, the divine and the human are perfect, distinct, and yet inseparably united in the one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 5:20; Phil. 2:6; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:14, 16-17).

Article 5: The Mandate to Proclaim the Gospel to All

Moreover, it is the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel.

Commentary

The only way to preach the gospel to every creature is to go to every creature. The greatest challenge to the church is to obey the known will of the Lord and share the gospel. But that is not easy for the vision of a lost and dying world has been lost. Bob Pierce offers a penetrating concern when he says, "My single greatest concern is the growing inertia I see, inertia born out of our luxury and materialism. People are fooling themselves when they say the job is done. The vast body of people in the world today have never been given enough information to know if they accept or reject Jesus. Most people think what the gospel needs is more clever, skilled people, when what it needs is more people who are willing to bleed, suffer, and die in a passion to see people come to Christ."

Article 6: Unbelief Man's Responsibility

However, that many who have been called through the gospel do not repent or believe in Christ but perish in unbelief is not because the sacrifice of Christ offered on the cross is deficient or insufficient, but because they themselves are at fault.

Commentary

“Fallen humankind is in one sense ignorant of God, since what people like to believe, and do in fact believe, about the objects of their worship falsifies and distorts the revelation of God they cannot escape. In another sense, however, all human beings remain aware of God, guiltily, with uncomfortable inklings of coming judgment that they wish they did not have. Only the gospel of Christ can speak peace to this distressful aspect of the human condition.” (J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*) Romans 1:20 declares me to be without excuse, *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:*

Article 7: Faith God's Gift

But all who genuinely believe and are delivered and saved by Christ's death from their sins and from destruction receive this favor solely from God's grace - which he owes to no one - given to them in Christ from eternity.

Commentary

“The spirit of grace is compared to a precious liquor that is infused, and the called and chosen of God are styled vessels of mercy. *‘I will pour upon the house of David the spirit of grace’ (Zech. 12:10); ‘the vessels of mercy prepared unto glory’ (Rom. 9:23).* Now a vessel is a passive receiver of liquor poured into it. *‘The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost’ (Rom. 5:5),* that is, poured out and infused into God’s vessels of mercy. The atmosphere is passive when it receives light, and Adam’s body was passive when God inspired it with life; though it was formed and organized, yet was it lifeless and breathless (Gen. 2:7). So the will of man (in respect of this first reception of grace) hath neither concurrence nor cooperation active; the Lord is alone in that work.” (Christopher Ness, *Of Free-will In the Fallen State and of Effectual Vocation or Conversion to God*)

Article 8: The Saving Effectiveness of Christ's Death

For it was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of his Son's costly death should work itself out in all his chosen ones, in order that he might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation.

In other words, it was God's will that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; that he should grant them faith (which, like the Holy Spirit's other saving gifts, he acquired for them by his death); that he should cleanse them by his blood from all their sins, both original and actual, whether committed before or after their coming to faith; that he should faithfully preserve them to the very end; and that he should finally present them to himself, a glorious people, without spot or wrinkle.

Commentary

The costly death of Christ is reflected not only by the tears in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:44) but the cries from the Cross itself (Matt. 27:46). The Christian can rejoice for, “Our Lord is entered into the heavens, to appear in the presence of God, with our names upon His shoulders, and upon His heart, for a memorial before the Lord; there is not the least of saints, but there His name is engraven.” (Richard Alleine, *Christ in the Covenant*)

*“He knew how wicked we had been,
He knew that God must punish sin,
So, for His People Jesus said,
He’d bear the punishment instead.”*

Article 9: The Fulfillment of God's Plan

This plan, arising out of God's eternal love for his chosen ones, from the beginning of the world to the present time has been powerfully carried out and will also be carried out in the future, the gates of hell seeking vainly to prevail against it. As a result the chosen are gathered into one, all in their own time, and there is always a church of believers founded on Christ's blood, a church which steadfastly loves, persistently worships, and - here and in all eternity - praises him as her Savior who laid down his life for her on the cross, as a bridegroom for his bride.

Commentary

Nothing reflects more powerfully the saving grace of God being applied in a definite act of redemption to a soul than a personal work of testimony. “When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths (the doctrine of election) in my own soul – when they were, as John Bunyan says, burnt into my heart as with a hot iron, and I can recollect how I felt that I had grown on a sudden from a babe into a man – that I had made progress in Scriptural knowledge, though having found, once for all, that clue to the truth of God.

One week-night, when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher's sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, ‘*How did you come to be a Christian?*’ I sought the Lord. ‘*But how did you come to seek the Lord?*’

The truth flashed across my mind in a moment – I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, How came I to read the Scriptures? I did read them but what led me to do so? Then, in moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession, ‘*I ascribe my change wholly to God*’” (Charles H. Spurgeon).

*“There’s not a particle of dust can fly,
A sparrow fall, a cloud obscure the sky,
A moth be crushed, a leaf fall from a tree,
But in submission to His wise decree”.*

Over the Royal Exchange in London there is a large grasshopper as the emblem. As a small boy the founder, Sir Thomas Gresham was placed out in a field to die. Another child passing by heard a grasshopper chirping, and searching for it, found the baby, which his mother nursed and brought up.

Rejection of the Errors

Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

Who teach that God the Father appointed his Son to death on the cross without a fixed and definite plan to save anyone by name, so that the necessity, usefulness, and worth of what Christ's death obtained could have stood intact and altogether perfect, complete and whole, even if the redemption that was obtained had never in actual fact been applied to any individual.

For this assertion is an insult to the wisdom of God the Father and to the merit of Jesus Christ, and it is contrary to Scripture. For the Savior speaks as follows: *I lay down my life for the sheep, and I know them* (John 10:15, 27). And Isaiah the prophet says concerning the Savior: *When he shall make himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, and the will of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand* (Isa. 53:10).

Finally, this undermines the article of the creed in which we confess what we believe concerning the Church.

Commentary

“It cannot be said too often that a false theology finds its source in inadequate views of depravity.” (J.M. Stiffer) The concept that God is a God of indefinite purpose or predetermined conclusion is unworthy of Him.

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that the purpose of Christ's death was not to establish in actual fact a new covenant of grace by his blood, but only to acquire for the Father the mere right to enter once more into a covenant with men, whether of grace or of works.

For this conflicts with Scripture, which teaches that Christ has become the guarantee and mediator of a better - that is, a new-covenant (Heb. 7:22; 9:15), and that a will is in force only when someone has died (Heb. 9:17).

Commentary

The office of being a mediator between God and man was a priestly duty. Christ fulfilled this office first by offering sacrifice, and secondly by making intercession. In both these respects Christ is a priestly mediator of a better, that is, a new covenant. "The Scriptures teach that Christ obeyed and suffered in our stead, to satisfy an immanent demand of the divine holiness, and thus remove an obstacle in the divine mind to the pardon and restoration of the guilty." (A.H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*)

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that Christ, by the satisfaction which he gave, did not certainly merit for anyone salvation itself and the faith by which this satisfaction of Christ is effectively applied to salvation, but only acquired for the Father the authority or plenary will to relate in a new way with men and to impose such new conditions as he chose, and that the satisfying of these conditions depends on the free choice of man; consequently, that it was possible that either all or none would fulfill them.

For they have too low an opinion of the death of Christ, do not at all acknowledge the foremost fruit or benefit which it brings forth, and summon back from hell the Pelagian error.

Commentary

The concept of an uncertain salvation for souls is something that is not compatible to the nature or essence of God. If the work of redemption is for all men than a very important question arises as John Owen noted. "Christ did not die for all the sins of all men; for if this were so, why are not all freed from the punishment of all their sins? You will say, 'Because of their unbelief, — they will not believe.' But this unbelief is a sin, and Christ was punished for it. Why then does this, more than other sins, hinder them from partaking of the fruits of His death?"

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that what is involved in the new covenant of grace which God the Father made with men through the intervening of Christ's death is not that we are justified before God and saved through faith, insofar as it accepts Christ's merit, but rather that God, having withdrawn his demand for perfect obedience to the law, counts faith itself, and the imperfect obedience of faith, as perfect obedience to the law, and graciously looks upon this as worthy of the reward of eternal life.

For they contradict Scripture: *They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ, whom God presented as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood* (Rom. 3:24-25). And along with the ungodly Socinus, they introduce a new and foreign justification of man before God, against the consensus of the whole church.

Commentary

It is impossible for God to be less than God. It is impossible for God to change the justice of an outraged holiness. Therefore, the penalty of death that was imposed upon Adam in the Garden must be honored or God would be a liar. Moreover, God has never withdrawn His demand for perfect obedience to the Law. And so, in the fullness of time Christ. *That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:* (Eph. 1:10 cf. John 8:46)

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that all people have been received into the state of reconciliation and into the grace of the covenant, so that no one on account of original sin is liable to condemnation, or is to be condemned, but that all are free from the guilt of this sin.

For this opinion conflicts with Scripture which asserts that we are by nature children of wrath.

Commentary

It would be nice if all sin in all men had been atoned for at Calvary. But the Bible asserts in many passages a special efficacy of the atonement, in the case of the elect. Ephesians 1:4 *chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be hold and without blemish before Him in love;* Ephesians 1:7 *In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.”;* John 17:24, *“Father, that which Thou hast given me, I desire that where I am, they also may be with me; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.*

Today, the force of the gospel of special electing love has been reduced by a general appeal that all men need to do for salvation is to ‘accept Christ.’ “The trouble is that the whole ‘accept Christ’ attitude is likely to be wrong. It shows Christ applying to us rather than us to him. It makes him stand hat-in-hand awaiting our verdict on him, instead of our kneeling with troubled hearts awaiting his verdict on us. It may even permit us to accept Christ by an impulse of mind or emotions, painlessly, at no loss to our ego and no inconvenience to our usual way of life.” (A. W. Tozer 1897-1963)

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who make use of the distinction between obtaining and applying in order to instill in the unwary and inexperienced the opinion that God, as far as he is concerned, wished to bestow equally upon all people the benefits which are gained by Christ's death; but that the distinction by which some rather than others come to share in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life depends on their own free choice (which applies itself to the grace offered indiscriminately) but does not depend on the unique gift of mercy which effectively works in them, so that they, rather than others, apply that grace to themselves.

For, while pretending to set forth this distinction in an acceptable sense, they attempt to give the people the deadly poison of Pelagianism.

Commentary

There are many choices that the Sovereign God has made on behalf of His creature. God has determined the time and place of birth, the level of intelligence, the hour of death as well as many other decisions. It is not likely that the ultimate decision of eternal life be left to a fallen creature enslaved to sin who has no power in the flesh to please God nor the inclination of heart to do so.

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that Christ neither could die, nor had to die, nor did die for those whom God so dearly loved and chose to eternal life, since such people do not need the death of Christ.

For they contradict the apostle, who says: *Christ loved me and gave himself up for me* (Gal. 2:20), and likewise: *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ who died, that is, for them* (Rom. 8:33-34). They also contradict the Savior, who asserts: *I lay down my life for the sheep* (John 10:15), and *My command is this: Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for his friends* (John 15:12-13).

Commentary

The love of God for the elect is not divorced from justice and righteousness being satisfied. It is wrong to emphasize one attribute of God [love] at the expense of other attributes. Jesus could die, and did die for those whom He loved. He had to die in order that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled (Matt. 3:15). Souls are only redeemed *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*: (Rom. 3:24)

The Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine

Human Corruption, Conversion to God, and the way it Occurs

Article 1: The Effect of the Fall on Human Nature

Man was originally created in the image of God and was furnished in his mind with a true and salutary knowledge of his Creator and things spiritual, in his will and heart with righteousness, and in all his emotions with purity; indeed, the whole man was holy.

However, rebelling against God at the devil's instigation and by his own free will, he deprived himself of these outstanding gifts. Rather, in their place he brought upon himself blindness, terrible darkness, futility, and distortion of judgment in his mind; perversity, defiance, and hardness in his heart and will; and finally impurity in all his emotions.

Commentary

The term “Fall” is a good term to express the movement of man from moral perfection to the depths of depravity. Of particular concern is the effect of the Fall upon the will. “The Fall implies: The loss of that original righteousness and perfection wherein man was created. If the other faculties of the soul became depraved, and were stripped of their primitive luster by the Fall, then must the will also be a sharer in that depravation.” “This king of the Isle of Man (the will), when he come first out of God’s mint, was a curious silver-piece, and shone most gloriously: but now, being fallen among thieves, is robbed of all, hath ashes for beauty, and is a tyrant upon a dunghill; yea, is free from righteousness, but a very slave to sin (Rom. 6:17-20).” (Christopher Ness, *Of Free-will in the Fallen State*)

Article 2: The Spread of Corruption

Man brought forth children of the same nature as himself after the fall. That is to say, being corrupt he brought forth-corrupt children. The corruption spread, by God's just judgment, from Adam to all his descendants - except for Christ alone - not by way of imitation (as in former times the Pelagians would have it) but by way of the propagation of his perverted nature.

Commentary

“Before the Fall, the will had liberty both to good or evil, to do or not to do; but since the Fall, the will is evil, only evil, and continually evil (Gen. 6:5). The whole heart now is evil extensively, only evil intensively, and continually evil protensively.” (Christopher Ness, *Of Free-will in the Fallen State*)

Article 3: Total Inability

Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform.

Commentary

The effect of the Fall was imputed or passed on to all of Adam’s posterity. Romans 5:12 explains. ***Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:*** “By imputation of sin we mean, not the arbitrary and mechanical charging to a man of that for which he is not naturally responsible, but the reckoning to a man of a guilt which is properly his own, whether by virtue of his individual acts, or by virtue of his connection with the race. By original sin we mean that participation in the common sin of the race with which God charges us, in virtue of our descent from Adam, its first father and head.” (A.H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*; Note: Neh. 1:6; Jer. 3:25; 14:20)

The extent of the Fall is manifested in how men treated Christ when they had the Son of God in their hands. They raged and imagined vain things. They nailed Him to the cross. *And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, 30 Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, Save thyself, and come down from the cross. 31 Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. 32 Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him* (Mark 15:29-32). Let the doctrine of the natural goodness of man be forever silenced.

Article 4: The Inadequacy of the Light of Nature

There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in man after the fall, by virtue of which he retains some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrates a certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. But this light of nature is far from enabling man to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to him - so far, in fact, that man does not use it rightly even in matters of nature and society. Instead, in various ways he completely distorts this light, whatever its precise character, and suppresses it in unrighteousness. In doing so he renders himself without excuse before God.

Commentary

While it is true that man is not as bad as he can be *extensively* at any given moment, it is also true that *intrinsically* man is as bad as he can be prior to salvation. Despite the Fall man knows that he should be good, love God, and honor Christ or else he would not be charged with suppressing the truth *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness* (Rom. 1:18).

Article 5: The Inadequacy of the Law

In this respect, what is true of the light of nature is true also of the Ten Commandments given by God through Moses specifically to the Jews. For man cannot obtain saving grace through the Decalogue, because, although it does expose the magnitude of his sin and increasingly convict him of his guilt, yet it does not offer a remedy or enable him to escape from his misery, and, indeed, weakened as it is by the flesh, leaves the offender under the curse.

Commentary

The Pharisees of old were a religious Jewish group in Palestine committed to keeping all 618 codexes of the Mosaic Law. While their zeal for God might be commendable, it was apart from spiritual knowledge for *those who are in the flesh cannot please God*. (Rom. 8:8) Moreover, the purpose of the Law was to condemn the soul, not to save it. The Law was a schoolmaster or guide to bring men to the true Master of the soul. *Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith* (Gal. 3:24).

Article 6: The Saving Power of the Gospel

What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law can do, God accomplishes by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word or the ministry of reconciliation. This is the gospel about the Messiah, through which it has pleased God to save believers, in both the Old and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God revealed this secret of his will to a small number; in the New Testament (now without any distinction between peoples) he discloses it to a large number. The reason for this difference must not be ascribed to the greater worth of one nation over another, or to a better use of the light of nature, but to the free good pleasure and undeserved love of God. Therefore, those who receive so much grace, beyond and in spite of all they deserve, ought to acknowledge it with humble and thankful hearts; on the other hand, with the apostle they ought to adore (but certainly not inquisitively search into) the severity and justice of God's judgments on the others, who do not receive this grace.

Commentary

When the gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone is embraced, there is not only great gratitude but great peace. A friend visited an elderly woman badly crippled by arthritis. When asked, "*Do you suffer much?*" she responded, "*Yes, but there is no nail here,*" and she pointed to her hand. "*He had the nails, I have the peace.*" She pointed to her head. "*There are no thorns here. He had the thorns, I have the peace.*" She touched her side. "*There is no spear here. He had the spear, I have the peace.*" That is what the atonement of Jesus Christ means for us—He gave of himself so that we might have the peace.

Article 8: The Serious Call of the Gospel

Nevertheless, all who are called through the gospel are called seriously. For seriously and most genuinely God makes known in his Word what is pleasing to him: that those who are called should come to him. Seriously he also promises rest for their souls and eternal life to all who come to him and believe.

Commentary

A serious offer of the gospel to all that come under its domain reflects the integrity of God. While God does not mock individuals He does hold each person accountable for every attitude and action. ***For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad*** (Luke 8:17).

Article 9: Human Responsibility for Rejecting the Gospel

The fact that many who are called through the ministry of the gospel do not come and are not brought to conversion must not be blamed on the gospel, nor on Christ, who is offered through the gospel, nor on God, who calls them through the gospel and even bestows various gifts on them, but on the people themselves who are called. Some in self-assurance do not even entertain the Word of life; others do entertain it but do not take it to heart, and for that reason, after the fleeting joy of a temporary faith, they relapse; others choke the seed of the Word with the thorns

of life's cares and with the pleasures of the world and bring forth no fruits. This our Savior teaches in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13).

Commentary

It is often argued that the doctrine of election encourages men to say, "If I am elect, I will be saved; if I am a non-elect I will be lost, therefore, it matters little how I believe or act." This not so clever line of reasoning is a human attempt to avoid personal responsibility for not doing something about a wicked heart. It is not the doctrine of election that makes men put off their spiritual obligations but a depraved heart. Augustus Toplady challenged the world to present a martyr from among those who deny the doctrine of election.

Article 10: Conversion as the Work of God

The fact that others who are called through the ministry of the gospel do come and are brought to conversion must not be credited to man, as though one distinguishes himself by free choice from others who are furnished with equal or sufficient grace for faith and conversion (as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains). No, it must be credited to God: just as from eternity He chose His own in Christ, so within time He effectively calls them, grants them faith and repentance, and, having rescued them from the dominion of darkness, brings them into the kingdom of his Son, in order that they may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called them out of darkness into this marvelous light, and may boast not in themselves, but in the Lord, as apostolic words frequently testify in Scripture.

Commentary

The constant temptation of man is to take credit in some way for salvation either through good works or a wise decision based upon an alleged free will. One irony in the debate over the sovereignty of God as advocated by Calvinist and the exaltation of human responsibility advocated by Arminianism is that those who oppose the doctrines of grace tend to pray and write poetry like a Calvinist. The story is told that a Methodist minister once went to hear a Presbyterian minister preach. After the sermon the Methodist said to the Presbyterian "That was a pretty good Arminian sermon you preached today." "Yes," replied the Presbyterian, "We Presbyterians are pretty good Arminians when we preach and you Methodists are pretty good Calvinist when you pray."

*"Long my imprisoned spirit lay
 Fast bound in sin and nature's night.
 Thine eye diffused a quickening ray:
 I woke—the dungeon flamed with light!
 My chains fell off,
 My heart was set free,
 I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
 Amazing love! How can it be?
 That Thou my God, shouldst die for me!"*

Charles Wesley

Article 11: The Holy Spirit's Work in Conversion

Moreover, when God carries out this good pleasure in his chosen ones, or works true conversion in them, he not only sees to it that the gospel is proclaimed to them outwardly, and enlightens their minds powerfully by the Holy Spirit so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but, by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, he also penetrates into the inmost being of man, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. He infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant; he activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds.

Commentary

Conversion is that voluntary change in the mind of the sinner, in which he turns from sin to Christ. The turning from sin is repentance while the turning to Christ is faith. “*Conversion is a deep work—a heart work. It goes throughout the man, throughout the mind, throughout the members, throughout the entire life.*” (Joseph Alleine, 1634-1668)

It is the Holy Spirit who converts the soul that is saved. John 3:8 speaks of those who are ***born of the Spirit***. Titus 3:5 teaches that the saved are renewed of the Holy Spirit. “In what way, or by what manner of working God changes a soul from evil to good-how he impregnates the barren rock with priceless gems and gold-is, to the human mind, an impenetrable mystery.” (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1772-1834) While the mystery is real, so is the Holy Spirit.

Article 12: Regeneration a Supernatural Work

And this is the regeneration, the new creation, the raising from the dead, and the making alive so clearly proclaimed in the Scriptures, which God works in us without our help. But this certainly does not happen only by outward teaching, by moral persuasion, or by such a way of working that, after God has done his work, it remains in man's power whether or not to be reborn or converted. Rather, it is an entirely supernatural work, one that is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing, a marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible work, which is not lesser than or inferior in power to that of creation or of raising the dead, as Scripture (inspired by the author of this work) teaches. As a result, all those in whose hearts God works in this marvelous way are certainly, unfailingly, and effectively reborn and do actually believe. And then the will, now renewed, is not only activated and motivated by God but in being activated by God is also itself active. For this reason, man himself, by that grace which he has received, is also rightly said to believe and to repent.

Commentary

Regeneration is that act of God by which the governing inclination of the soul is made holy and by which, according to the Word of Truth, the first holy exercise of this disposition is secured. Again, regeneration, or the new birth, is the divine activity within the act of sinner whereby new life is instilled so that at the moment of gospel hearing there is the ability to hear with

understanding, see with spiritual illumination, and respond from the heart with faith in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. One great evidence of a regenerated heart is a changed life.

Article 13: The Incomprehensible Way of Regeneration

In this life believers cannot fully understand the way this work occurs; meanwhile, they rest content with knowing and experiencing that by this grace of God they do believe with the heart and love their Savior.

Commentary

Regeneration, the divine side of salvation, and conversion, man's experience of salvation does not take part on the basis of human knowledge or full understanding. Nevertheless, the evidence of salvation is apparent.

In May 1855, an eighteen-year-old boy went to the deacons of a church in Boston. He had been raised in a Unitarian church, in almost total ignorance of the gospel, but when he had moved to Boston to make his fortune, he began to attend a Bible-preaching church. Then, in April of 1855, his Sunday school teacher had come into the store where he was working and simply and persuasively shared the gospel and urged the young man to trust in the Lord Jesus. He had, and now he was applying to join the church. One fact quickly became obvious. This young man was almost totally ignorant of biblical truth. One of the deacons asked him, "Son, what has Christ done for us all—for you—which entitles Him to our love?" His response was, "I don't know. I think Christ has done a great deal for us, but I don't think of anything in particular as I know of."

Hardly an impressive start. Years later his Sunday school teacher said of him: "I can truly say that I have seen few persons whose minds were spiritually darker than was his when he came into my Sunday school class. I think the committee of the church seldom met an applicant for membership who seemed more unlikely ever to become a Christian of clear and decided views of gospel truth, still less to fill any space of public or extended usefulness." Nothing happened very quickly to change their minds. The deacons decided to put him on a yearlong instruction program to teach him basic Christian truths. Perhaps they wanted to work on some of his other rough spots as well. Not only was he ignorant of spiritual truths, he was only barely literate, and his spoken grammar was atrocious. The year-long probation did not help very much. At his second interview, there was only a minimal improvement in the quality of his answers, but since it was obvious that he was a sincere and committed (if ignorant) Christian, they accepted him as a church member.

Over the next years, I am sure that many people looked at that young man and, convinced that God would never use a person like that, they wrote off Dwight L. Moody. But God did not. By God's infinite grace and persevering love, D. L. Moody was transformed into one of the most effective servants of God in church history, a man whose impact is still with us." (Gary Inrig, *Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*)

Article 14: The Way God Gives Faith

In this way, therefore, faith is a gift of God, not in the sense that it is offered by God for man to choose, but that it is in actual fact bestowed on man, breathed and infused into him. Nor is it a gift in the sense that God bestows only the potential to believe, but then awaits assent - the act of believing - from man's choice; rather, it is a gift in the sense that he who works both willing and acting and, indeed, works all things in all people produces in man both the will to believe and the belief itself.

Commentary

Saving faith is said to be the gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9) and therefore it is an effect and not the cause of election. "Since man's faith is foreseen only as the result of God's work of grace, election proceeds rather upon foreseen unbelief. Faith, as the effect of election, cannot at the same time be the cause of election" (A.H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*). There is something else. "No man ever believes with a true and saving faith unless God inclines his heart; and no man when God does incline his heart can refrain from believing." (Blaise Pascal, 1623-1662)

Article 15: Responses to God's Grace

God does not owe this grace to anyone. For what could God owe to one who has nothing to give that can be paid back? Indeed, what could God owe to one who has nothing of his own to give but sin and falsehood? Therefore the person who receives this grace owes and gives eternal thanks to God alone; the person who does not receive it either does not care at all about these spiritual things and is satisfied with himself in his condition, or else in self-assurance foolishly boasts about having something which he lacks. Furthermore, following the example of the apostles, we are to think and to speak in the most favorable way about those who outwardly profess their faith and better their lives, for the inner chambers of the heart are unknown to us. But for others who have not yet been called, we are to pray to the God who calls things that do not exist as though they did. In no way, however, are we to pride ourselves as better than they, as though we had distinguished ourselves from them.

Commentary

Every soul that is saved is saved on the principle of God's grace. "Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines Him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving. It is a self-existent principle inherent in the divine nature and appears to us as a self-caused propensity to pity the wretched, spare the guilty, welcome the outcast, and bring into favor those who were before under just disapprobation. Its use to us sinful men is to save us and make us sit together in heavenly places to demonstrate to the ages the exceeding riches of God's kindness to us in Christ Jesus." (A. W. Tozer, 1897-1963). Therefore, "A true Christian is a man who never for a moment forgets what God has done for him in Christ, and whose whole comportment and whole activity have their root in the sentiment of gratitude" (John Baillie, 1741-1806).

Article 16: Regeneration's Effect

However, just as by the fall man did not cease to be man, endowed with intellect and will, and just as sin, which has spread through the whole human race, did not abolish the nature of the human race but distorted and spiritually killed it, so also this divine grace of regeneration does not act in people as if they were blocks and stones; nor does it abolish the will and its properties or coerce a reluctant will by force, but spiritually revives, heals, reforms, and - in a manner at once pleasing and powerful - bends it back. As a result, a ready and sincere obedience of the Spirit now begins to prevail where before the rebellion and resistance of the flesh were completely dominant. It is in this that the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consists. Thus, if the marvelous Maker of every good thing were not dealing with us, man would have no hope of getting up from his fall by his free choice, by which he plunged himself into ruin when still standing upright.

Commentary

Much confusion and error has arisen over the order of a soul closing with Christ because regeneration, conversion (embracing repentance and faith), and justification are conceived as being chronological rather than understanding a logical order. The order is logical, not chronological. "As it is only 'in Christ' that man is *a new creature* (2 Cor. 5:17) or is *justified* (Acts 13:39, union with Christ logically precedes both regeneration and justification; and yet, chronologically, the moment of our union with Christ is also the moment when we are regenerated and justified." (A.H. Strong, Systematic Theology)

Article 17: God's Use of Means in Regeneration

Just as the almighty work of God by which he brings forth and sustains our natural life does not rule out but requires the use of means, by which God, according to his infinite wisdom and goodness, has wished to exercise his power, so also the aforementioned supernatural work of God by which he regenerates us in no way rules out or cancels the use of the gospel, which God in his great wisdom has appointed to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul. For this reason, the apostles and the teachers who followed them taught the people in a godly manner about this grace of God, to give him the glory and to humble all pride, and yet did not neglect meanwhile to keep the people, by means of the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and discipline. So even today it is out of the question that the teachers or those taught in the church should presume to test God by separating what he in his good pleasure has wished to be closely joined together. For grace is bestowed through admonitions, and the more readily we perform our duty, the more lustrous the benefit of God working in us usually is and the better his work advances. To him alone, both for the means and for their saving fruit and effectiveness, all glory is owed forever. Amen.

Commentary

How does God cause the elect to exercise faith? "The answer is: In regeneration the Holy Spirit subdues man's heart to Himself, and imparts to man a new nature, which loves righteousness and hates sin. He does not force man against his will, but makes him lovingly and spontaneously obedient to His will. When the Lord Jesus appeared to the hardened persecutor Saul as he was on

the road to Damascus, he immediately became obedient to the Lord's will. *Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of thy power*, said the Psalmist (110:3)." (Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Faith*). While God uses external means to draw souls towards the Savior such as preaching (Rom. 10:13,14) and personal witnessing (Matt. 28:19,20), in the end, *salvation is of the Lord* (Jonah 2:9). "Regeneration is monergistic: that is, entirely the work of God the Holy Spirit. It raises the elect among the spiritually dead to new life in Christ (Eph. 2:1-10). Regeneration is a transition from spiritual death to spiritual life, and conscious, intentional, active faith in Christ is its immediate fruit, not its immediate cause. Regeneration is the work of what Augustine called "prevenient" grace, the grace that precedes our outgoings of heart toward God." (J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*)

Rejection of the Errors

Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

Who teach that, properly speaking, it cannot be said that original sin in itself is enough to condemn the whole human race or to warrant temporal and eternal punishments.

For they contradict the apostle when he says: *Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death passed on to all men because all sinned* (Rom. 5:12); **also: *The guilt followed one sin and brought condemnation*** (Rom. 5:16); likewise: *The wages of sin is death* (Rom. 6:23).

Commentary

Psalm 51:5 *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

Original sin, meaning sin derived from our origin, is not a biblical phrase (Augustine coined it), but it is one that brings into fruitful focus the reality of sin in our spiritual system.

The assertion of original sin means not that sin belongs to human nature as God made it (God made mankind upright, Eccles. 7:29), nor that sin is involved in the processes of reproduction and birth (the uncleanness connected with menstruation, semen, and childbirth in Leviticus 12 and 15 was typical and ceremonial only, not moral and real), but that

- sinfulness marks everyone from birth, and is there in the form of a motivationally twisted heart, prior to any actual sins;
- this inner sinfulness is the root and source of all actual sins;
- it derives to us in a real though mysterious way from Adam, our first representative before God. The assertion of original sin makes the point that we are not sinners because we sin, but rather we sin because we are sinners, born with a nature enslaved to sin." (J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*)

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that the spiritual gifts or the good dispositions and virtues such as goodness, holiness, and righteousness could not have resided in man's will when he was first created, and therefore could not have been separated from the will at the fall.

For this conflicts with the apostle's description of the image of God in Ephesians 4:24, where he portrays the image in terms of righteousness and holiness, which definitely reside in the will.

Commentary

The essentials of man's original state may be summed up in the phrase *the image of God*. In the image of God man is said to have been created (Gen. 1:26, 27). This image consisted of natural likeness to God, or personality, and moral likeness to God, holiness. "It is of great importance to distinguish between clearly between the two elements embraced in this image of God, the natural and the moral. By virtue of the first, man possessed certain faculties (intellect, affection, will); by virtue of the second, he had right tendencies (bent, proclivity, and disposition). By virtue of the first, he was invested with certain powers; by virtue of the second, a certain direction, was imparted to these powers. As created in the natural image of God, man had a moral nature; as created in the moral image of God, man had a holy character. The first gave him natural ability; the second gave him moral ability." (A.H. Strong, Systematic Theology)

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that in spiritual death the spiritual gifts have not been separated from man's will, since the will in itself has never been corrupted but only hindered by the darkness of the mind and the unruliness of the emotions, and since the will is able to exercise its innate free capacity once these hindrances are removed, which is to say, it is able of itself to will or choose whatever good is set before it - or else not to will or choose it.

This is a novel idea and an error and has the effect of elevating the power of free choice, contrary to the words of Jeremiah the prophet: *The heart itself is deceitful above all things and wicked* (Jer. 17:9); and of the words of the apostle: *All of us also lived among them (the sons of disobedience) at one time in the passions of our flesh, following the will of our flesh and thoughts* (Eph. 2:3).

Commentary

To say that the will of man escaped the corruption of the Fall fails to comprehend the pervasiveness of the transgression. It was the will of Adam that committed the act of rebellion against reason and righteousness. True, the will was acted upon and influenced by the intellect and the emotions. But the final act of taking and eating the forbidden fruit is attributed to the will of man. The Law of God, a general expression of will enforced by power, was challenged and violated by the will of man who became a Law unto himself. In the act of rebellion man sinned in that he failed to conform to the moral Law of God both in his state (will), act, and disposition. The will of man is not merely hindered by the darkness of the mind and the unruliness of the emotions. It is an entity of corruption itself.

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that unregenerate man is not strictly or totally dead in his sins or deprived of all capacity for spiritual good but is able to hunger and thirst for righteousness or life and to offer the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit which is pleasing to God.

For these views are opposed to the plain testimonies of Scripture: *You were dead in your transgressions and sins* (Eph. 2:1, 5); *The imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil all the time* (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). Besides, to hunger and thirst for deliverance from misery and for life, and to offer God the sacrifice of a broken spirit is characteristic only of the regenerate and of those called blessed (Ps. 51:17; Matt. 5:6).

Commentary

The Bible teaches with sweeping statements that *there is none righteous* (Rom. 3:10). *The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.* (Psa. 10:4)

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that corrupt and natural man can make such good use of common grace (by which they mean the light of nature) or of the gifts remaining after the fall that he is able thereby gradually to obtain a greater grace - evangelical or saving grace - as well as salvation itself; and that in this way God, for his part, shows himself ready to reveal Christ to all people, since he provides to all, to a sufficient extent and in an effective manner, the means necessary for the revealing of Christ, for faith, and for repentance.

For Scripture, not to mention the experience of all ages, testifies that this is false: *He makes known his words to Jacob, his statutes and his laws to Israel; he has done this for no other nation, and they do not know his laws* (Ps. 147:19-20); *In the past God let all nations go their own way* (Acts 14:16); *They (Paul and his companions) were kept by the Holy Spirit from speaking God's word in Asia; and When they had come to Mysia, they tried to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit would not allow them to* (Acts 16:6-7).

Commentary

If common grace were sufficient to save a soul then there would be no need for Christ to have suffered and died. Common grace is set side by side with common law. Both unite to point a soul to the Savior. Romans 11:22 *Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God.*

In the Arminian system the order of salvation is faith—by an un-renewed, un-regenerated but convicted man; justification; regeneration, or a holy heart. God decrees not to originate faith, but to reward it. John Wesley made faith a work, and regarded election as God's ordaining those who, He foresees, will of their own personal account believe. This system of belief is challenged by the Augustinian order of regeneration, faith, and justification. Arminian converts are free to boast, "I gave my heart to the Lord" while more accurately it would be better to say, "The Holy

Spirit convicted me of sin and renewed my heart.” Salvation is of the Lord. Isaiah 55:13 *Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

Commenting on this verse Charles Spurgeon had this to say. “I passed by a plot of land which some landowner had been enclosing, as those rascals always will filch every morsel of green grass. But I noticed that the enclosures had only fenced it in, but had not dug it up, nor plowed it, nor planted it. And though they had cut down the gorse, it was coming up again. Of course it would, for it was still a meadow, and a bit of fence or rail could not alter it. The gorse would come peeping up, and before long the enclosure would be as wild as the heath outside.

But this is not God's way of working. When God encloses a heart that has laid open to sin, does he cut down the thorns and the briars and then plant fir trees? No--he changes the soil so that from the ground itself, from its own vitality, the fir tree and the myrtle spontaneously start up. This is a most wonderful result. If a man remains at heart the same godless man, you can mend his habits, make him go to church, clothe him, keep him away from alcohol, and teach him not to talk filthy, and then say, "He's now a respectable man." But if these outward respectability and rightness are only skin deep, you have done nothing. At least, what you have done is nothing to be proud of. But suppose this man can be so changed that just as freely as he was accustomed to curse he now delights to pray, and just as heartily as he hated religion he now finds pleasure in it, and just as earnestly as he sinned he now delights to be obedient to the Lord. This is a wonder, a miracle which man cannot accomplish, a marvel which only the grace of God can work and which gives God his highest glory.”

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that in the true conversion of man new qualities, dispositions, or gifts cannot be infused or poured into his will by God, and indeed that the faith [or believing] by which we first come to conversion and from which we receive the name "believers" is not a quality or gift infused by God, but only an act of man, and that it cannot be called a gift except in respect to the power of attaining faith.

For these views contradict the Holy Scriptures, which testify that God does infuse or pour into our hearts the new qualities of faith, obedience, and the experiencing of his love: *I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts* (Jer. 31:33); *I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring* (Isa. 44:3); *The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us* (Rom. 5:5). They also conflict with the continuous practice of the Church, which prays with the prophet: *Convert me, Lord, and I shall be converted* (Jer. 31:18).

Commentary

The tragedy of Arminianism is that it cannot distinguish the work of God from the work of man. As a result the glory which is rightly the Creator's is ascribed to the creature. Arminianism tends to boasting while the Scriptures make men utterly dependent upon God for every facet of conversion so that it might be said to the praise His glory that *salvation is of the Lord* (Jonah 2:9).

*“Keep silence all created things,
 And wait your Maker’s nod.
 My soul stands trembling, while she sings
 The honors of our God”.*

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that the grace by which we are converted to God is nothing but a gentle persuasion, or (as others explain it) that the way of God's acting in man's conversion that is most noble and suited to human nature is that which happens by persuasion, and that nothing prevents this grace of moral suasion even by itself from making natural men spiritual; indeed, that God does not produce the assent of the will except in this manner of moral suasion, and that the effectiveness of God's work by which it surpasses the work of Satan consists in the fact that God promises eternal benefits while Satan promises temporal ones.

For this teaching is entirely Pelagian and contrary to the whole of Scripture, which recognizes besides this persuasion also another, far more effective and divine way in which the Holy Spirit acts in man's conversion. As Ezekiel 36:26 puts it: ***I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; and I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh....***

Commentary

Far from being a gentle persuasion of the man to come to Christ, the Bible presents salvation in terms of omnipotent force being displayed. The same power that brought Christ back from the dead is the same sovereign energy that has to be used to convert a soul. Romans 8:11 ***But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.***

In the exercise of His sovereign power God does no violence to man by infusing His gifts of grace. “When we see a container wrenched open, the hinges torn away, or the clasp destroyed, we mark at once the hand of the Spoiler, but when we observe another container deftly opened with a master key, and the sparkling contents revealed, we note the hand of the Owner. Conversion is not, as some suppose, a violent opening of the heart by grace, in which will, reason, and judgment are all ignored or crushed. This is too barbarous a method for him who comes not as a plunderer to his prey, but as a possessor to his treasure. In conversion, the Lord who made the human heart deals with it according to its nature and constitution. His key insinuates itself into the wards; the will is not enslaved but enfranchised; the reason is not blinded but enlightened, and the whole man is made to act with a glorious liberty which it never knew till it fell under the restraints of grace (Eph. 1:3-9).” (Charles Haddon Spurgeon)

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that God in regenerating man does not bring to bear that power of his omnipotence whereby he may powerfully and unfailingly bend man's will to faith and conversion, but that even when God has accomplished all the works of grace which he uses for man's conversion, man nevertheless can, and in actual fact often does, so resist God and

the Spirit in their intent and will to regenerate him, that man completely thwarts his own rebirth; and, indeed, that it remains in his own power whether or not to be reborn.

For this does away with all effective functioning of God's grace in our conversion and subjects the activity of Almighty God to the will of man; it is contrary to the apostles, who teach that we believe by virtue of the effective working of God's mighty strength (Eph. 1:19), and that God fulfills the undeserved good will of his kindness and the work of faith in us with power (2 Thess. 1:11), and likewise that his divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3).

Commentary

To insist that man can thwart the will of the omnipotent Creator-God is to insist on too much ***For who hath resisted his will?*** (Rom. 9:19) In Ephesians 1:19,20 the apostle plainly intimates “that the work of grace upon the hearts of believers is to be ascribed not only to the power of God, but to the greatness, yea, the exceeding greatness of his power, and which is represented as equal to that which was put forth in raising Christ from the dead....If the work of faith and conversion is intended, men must be passive under the energetically influence of divine power effecting it, as the body of Christ was, when, by the same power, it was raised to life.” (John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*)

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that grace and free choice are concurrent partial causes which cooperate to initiate conversion, and that grace does not precede - in the order of causality - the effective influence of the will; that is to say, that God does not effectively help man's will to come to conversion before man's will itself motivates and determines itself.

For the early church already condemned this doctrine long ago in the Pelagians, on the basis of the words of the apostle: ***It does not depend on man's willing or running but on God's mercy*** (Rom. 9:16); also: ***Who makes you different from anyone else? and What do you have that you did not receive?*** (1 Cor. 4:7); likewise: ***It is God who works in you to will and act according to his good pleasure*** (Phil. 2:13).

Commentary

When man, like Cain, discovers that he cannot be saved apart from grace on his own merits, he still does not give up. The next ploy of the deceitful heart is to form a synergism between grace and works. But that too is doomed to failure for God will not share His glory with another. C. H. Spurgeon commented on this unholy effort to combine works and grace. “We have known men who believed Calvinistic doctrines, but who preached Calvinism in the morning and Arminianism in the evening, because they were afraid God’s gospel would not convert sinners, so they would manufacture one of their own. I hold that a man who does not believe his gospel to be able to save men’s souls, does not believe it at all. If God’s truths will not save men’s souls, men’s lies cannot; if God’s truth will not turn men to repentance, I am sure there is nothing in this world that can. When we believe the gospel to be powerful, then we shall see it is powerful.”

The Fifth Main Point of Doctrine

The Perseverance of the Saints

Article 1: The Regenerate Not Entirely Free from Sin

Those people whom God according to his purpose calls into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, he also sets free from the reign and slavery of sin, though in this life not entirely from the flesh and from the body of sin.

Commentary

In matchless sovereign grace, God sets His people free from the reign of sin as a ruling monarch. Rom 6:11-12. *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. 12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.*

Article 2: The Believer's Reaction to Sins of Weakness

Hence daily sins of weakness arise, and blemishes cling to even the best works of God's people, giving them continual cause to humble themselves before God, to flee for refuge to Christ crucified, to put the flesh to death more and more by the Spirit of supplication and by holy exercises of godliness, and to strain toward the goal of perfection, until they are freed from this body of death and reign with the Lamb of God in heaven.

Commentary

Though sin as a ruling monarch has been destroyed, sin as a remaining principle has not. In word, thought, and deed there is much to grieve the sensitive soul. Therefore, the professing believer must examine himself to see if he is within the sphere of true saving faith. "We need re-expression of the Christian gospel; but maybe even more than that, we need re-realization of the Christian gospel. The re-expression is not an end in itself; it is only the means towards an end, and the end is the awakened realization of what this gospel means. It is when we face ourselves and face Christ, that we are lost in wonder, love and praise. We need to rediscover the almost lost discipline of self-examination; and then a re-awakened sense of sin will beget a reawakened sense of wonder. Perhaps then God will no longer have to say, "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?" (Andrew Murray)

Article 3: God's Preservation of the Converted

Because of these remnants of sin dwelling in them and also because of the temptations of the world and Satan, those who have been converted could not remain standing in this grace if left to their own resources. But God is faithful, mercifully strengthening them in the grace once conferred on them and powerfully preserving them in it to the end.

Commentary

John Newton, one time a sea captain, told of an unusual dream he had. In his dream he was in the harbor of Naples when a very glorious person came on board the ship and gave him a precious and beautiful jewel. Thanking him, John took the treasure and thought that he could never be happier.

But soon another person came on board the vessel and began to mock him. The jewel was said to be no good and Newton believed that. Taking the jewel he flung it into the sea. Immediately, he was filled with horror. Suddenly, the sky grew dark and a nearby volcano began to erupt. *“Oh! What have I done?”* he cried.

Later, the first glorious person came to him again, and asked about the jewel he had given in grace. John Newton confessed that he had thrown it away. What would happen now? In his dream the glorious person slipped over the side of the ship, right beneath the water, and soon returned with the jewel.

“I reached out my hand for it,” John writes, *“but He refused. No,”* he said, *“the jewel is yours; it will always be yours; but I will keep it for now.”*

Article 4: The Danger of True Believers' Falling into Serious Sins

Although that power of God strengthening and preserving true believers in grace is more than a match for the flesh, yet those converted are not always so activated and motivated by God that in certain specific actions they cannot by their own fault depart from the leading of grace, be led astray by the desires of the flesh, and give in to them.

For this reason they must constantly watch and pray that they may not be led into temptations. When they fail to do this, not only can they be carried away by the flesh, the world, and Satan into sins, even serious and outrageous ones, but also by God's just permission they sometimes are so carried away - witness the sad cases, described in Scripture, of David, Peter, and other saints falling into sins.

Commentary

As the believer recognizes the imperfections in his own life and seeks grace, so he must give grace to others. In the act of showing mercy men become like the Master. *“It is only imperfection that complains of what is imperfect. The more perfect we are, the more gentle and quiet we become toward the defects of others.”* (François Fénelon, 1651-1715)

Article 5: The Effects of Such Serious Sins

By such monstrous sins, however, they greatly offend God, deserve the sentence of death, grieve the Holy Spirit, suspend the exercise of faith, severely wound the conscience, and sometimes lose the awareness of grace for a time - until, after they have returned to the way by genuine repentance, God's fatherly face again shines upon them.

Commentary

Sin is deceptive. The eternal delusion is that sin can be forsaken at any moment. That is not true. “Like the eagle that sat down on the frozen ground to feed upon its prey, and when it would have arisen, found its great wings so frozen to the ice that it could never rise again but perished beside its costly pleasure; like the ship that sailed so close to the current that it was not possible to stem the awful tide that drove it over the abyss—so Christian men and women are trifling with forbidden things until they have neither heart nor strength to rise to their heavenly calling.” (Unknown)

Article 6: God's Saving Intervention

For God, who is rich in mercy, according to his unchangeable purpose of election does not take his Holy Spirit from his own completely, even when they fall grievously. Neither does he let them fall down so far that they forfeit the grace of adoption and the state of justification, or commit the sin which leads to death (the sin against the Holy Spirit), and plunge themselves, entirely forsaken by him, into eternal ruin.

Commentary

On the night of His birth the angels told the shepherds that the Savior’s name would be called *Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins* (Matt. 1:21). “Therefore, before anyone should daringly attempt to write ‘failure’ upon the saving work of Jesus Christ, since He possesses all power in heaven and earth, they certainly should first be able to plainly tell wherein His weakness lies, and also what possesses more saving and heaven-purchasing power and virtue than His redeeming blood, since this blood possesses all the saving efficacy of divine appointment.” (W.S. Craig, *The Five Points*)

Article 7: Renewal to Repentance

For, in the first place, God preserves in those saints when they fall his imperishable seed from which they have been born again, lest it perish or be dislodged.

Secondly, by his Word and Spirit he certainly and effectively renews them to repentance so that they have a heartfelt and godly sorrow for the sins they have committed; seek and obtain, through faith and with a contrite heart, forgiveness in the blood of the Mediator; experience again the grace of a reconciled God; through faith adore his mercies; and from then on more eagerly work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

Commentary

Saving grace is called a *seed* remaining in those that are born of God (1 John 3:9), and *incorruptible seed* (1 Peter 1:23). Grace never differs from itself, though a gracious man doth from himself. Saving grace cannot be lost, though as respects its acts and operations it may not always be in exercise; but degrees and measures of grace (formerly attained to) may be lost. ‘Thou hast lost thy first love’ (Rev. 2:4), not the habit, neither wholly the exercise of love, but only that vigor and heat that once appeared.” (Christopher Ness, *Of Final Perseverance*)

*“Who shall the Lord’s elect condemn?
 ‘Tis God that justifies their soul
 And mercy, like a might stream,
 O’er all their sins, divinely rolls”.*

Isaac Watts

Article 8: The Certainty of This Preservation

So it is not by their own merits or strength but by God's undeserved mercy that they neither forfeit faith and grace totally nor remain in their downfalls to the end and are lost. With respect to themselves this not only easily could happen, but also undoubtedly would happen; but with respect to God it cannot possibly happen, since his plan cannot be changed, his promise cannot fail, the calling according to his purpose cannot be revoked, the merit of Christ as well as his interceding and preserving cannot be nullified, and the sealing of the Holy Spirit can neither be invalidated nor wiped out.

Commentary

Psa 18:46 ***The LORD liveth; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted.*** Reflecting over a life of ministry, Pastor John Kershaw said on April 30th, 1848, “These words have been a great comfort and support to my mind in trials and in bereavements. For whoever stands or fall in a profession of religion; whoever goes or comes, lives or dies, ‘The Lord liveth!’” With August Toplady the saints of God can sing,

*“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
 Let me hide myself in Thee!
 Let the water and the blood,
 From thy wounded side which flow’d
 Be of sin the double cure.
 Cleanse me from its guilt and pow’r.”*

Article 9: The Assurance of This Preservation

Concerning this preservation of those chosen to salvation and concerning the perseverance of true believers in faith, believers themselves can and do become assured in accordance with the measure of their faith, by which they firmly believe that they are and always will remain true and living members of the church, and that they have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Commentary

The Bible teaches that ***if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new*** (2 Cor. 5:17). The act of justification produces a natural work of sanctification.

Justification

- Is outside us
- Is perfect
- Marks us holy
- Is our state
- Saves from guilt

Sanctification

- is within us
- is not yet perfect
- makes us holy
- is our standing
- saves from sin's power

Jesus said in John 6:37, *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

“The doctrine of the saints’ final perseverance may be established on this text; for such who come to Christ in a spiritual manner, and are brought to believe in him truly, and really, he not only receives them kindly, but keeps and preserves them, and will not cast them out. The words are very strong and emphatically expressed in the original, *‘I will not, not,’* or *‘never, never,’* we render it *‘in no wise cast out without,’* or *‘cast out of doors’*. Christ will never cast them out of his affections, nor out of his arms, nor out of that family that is named of him, nor out of or from his church which is his body, and of which they are members, nor out of a state of justification and salvation; and therefore they shall never perish, but have everlasting life. (John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*)

Article 10: The Ground of This Assurance

Accordingly, this assurance does not derive from some private revelation beyond or outside the Word, but from faith in the promises of God which he has very plentifully revealed in his Word for our comfort, from the testimony of the Holy Spirit testifying with our spirit that we are God's children and heirs (Rom. 8:16-17), and finally from a serious and holy pursuit of a clear conscience and of good works. And if God's chosen ones in this world did not have this well-founded comfort that the victory will be theirs and this reliable guarantee of eternal glory, they would be of all people most miserable.

Commentary

The ground of the believer's assurance of salvation is the righteousness of Christ alone. “It is Christ's righteousness versus the believer's own righteousness. It is Christ's achievement versus the Christian's achievement. It is an imputed righteousness not an infused righteousness. It is a gift of God versus an accomplishment of man. These two righteousness' as different as righteousness'” could conceivably be.” (John H. Gerstner)

Article 11: Doubts Concerning This Assurance

Meanwhile, Scripture testifies that believers have to contend in this life with various doubts of the flesh and that under severe temptation they do not always experience this full assurance of faith and certainty of perseverance. But God, the Father of all comfort, does not let them be tempted beyond what they can bear, but with the temptation he also provides a way out (1 Cor. 10:13), and by the Holy Spirit revives in them the assurance of their perseverance.

Commentary

The best cure for lingering doubt about salvation is to forsake sin and live righteously.

*“Repentance is to leave
The sins we love before,
And show that we in earnest grieve
By doing them no more.”*

Article 12: This Assurance as an Incentive to Godliness

This assurance of perseverance, however, so far from making true believers proud and carnally self-assured, is rather the true root of humility, of childlike respect, of genuine godliness, of endurance in every conflict, of fervent prayers, of steadfastness in cross-bearing and in confessing the truth, and of well-founded joy in God. Reflecting on this benefit provides an incentive to a serious and continual practice of thanksgiving and good works, as is evident from the testimonies of Scripture and the examples of the saints.

Commentary

“Nowhere does Scripture inculcate or encourage a spirit of fatalistic indifference. The word to every believer is, *Press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (Phil. 3:14). This was the apostle’s aim, and it should be ours” (Arthur W. Pink).

Article 13: Assurance No Inducement to Carelessness

Neither does the renewed confidence of perseverance produce immorality or lack of concern for godliness in those put back on their feet after a fall, but it produces a much greater concern to observe carefully the ways of the Lord which he prepared in advance. They observe these ways in order that by walking in them they may maintain the assurance of their perseverance, lest, by their abuse of his fatherly goodness, the face of the gracious God (for the godly, looking upon his face is sweeter than life, but its withdrawal is more bitter than death) turn away from them again, with the result that they fall into greater anguish of spirit.

Article 14: God's Use of Means in Perseverance

And, just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the proclamation of the gospel, so he preserves, continues, and completes his work by the hearing and reading of the gospel, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises, and also by the use of the sacraments.

Commentary

*“Lord Jesus, make Thyself to me
A living, bright reality!
More present to faith’s vision keen
Than any outward object seen.,
More dearly, more intimately nigh
Than e’en the sweetest earthly tie”.*

Article 15: Contrasting Reactions to the Teaching of Perseverance

This teaching about the perseverance of true believers and saints, and about their assurance of it - a teaching which God has very richly revealed in his Word for the glory of his name and for the comfort of the godly and which he impresses on the hearts of believers - is something which the flesh does not understand, Satan hates, the world ridicules, the ignorant and the hypocrites abuse, and the spirits of error attack.

The bride of Christ, on the other hand, has always loved this teaching very tenderly and defended it steadfastly as a priceless treasure; and God, against whom no plan can avail and no strength can prevail, will ensure that she will continue to do this. To this God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen.

Commentary

*“Prepare me, gracious God
To stand before Thy face
In Christ’s obedience clothe,
And wash me in His blood;
So shall I lift my head with joy
Among the sons of God.”*

Rejection of the Errors Concerning the Teaching of the Perseverance of the Saints

Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

Who teach that the perseverance of true believers is not an effect of election or a gift of God produced by Christ's death, but a condition of the new covenant which man, before what they call his "peremptory" election and justification, must fulfill by his free will.

For Holy Scripture testifies that perseverance follows from election and is granted to the chosen by virtue of Christ's death, resurrection, and intercession: *The chosen obtained it; the others were hardened (Rom. 11:7); likewise, He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not, along with him, grant us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ Jesus who died - more than that, who was raised - who also sits at the right hand of God, and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* (Rom. 8:32-35).

Commentary

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that God does provide the believer with sufficient strength to persevere and is ready to preserve this strength in him if he performs his duty, but that even with all those things in place which are necessary to persevere in faith and which God is pleased to use to preserve faith, it still always depends on the choice of man's will whether or not he perseveres.

For this view is obviously Pelagian; and though it intends to make men free it makes them sacrilegious. It is against the enduring consensus of evangelical teaching which takes from man all cause for boasting and ascribes the praise for this benefit only to God's grace. It is also against the testimony of the apostle: *It is God who keeps us strong to the end, so that we will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Cor. 1:8).

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that those who truly believe and have been born again not only can forfeit justifying faith as well as grace and salvation totally and to the end, but also in actual fact do often forfeit them and are lost forever.

For this opinion nullifies the very grace of justification and regeneration as well as the continual preservation by Christ, contrary to the plain words of the apostle Paul: *If Christ died for us while we were still sinners, we will therefore much more be saved from God's wrath through him, since we have now been justified by his blood* (Rom. 5:8-9); and contrary to the apostle John: *No one who is born of God is intent on sin, because God's seed remains in him, nor can he sin, because he has been born of God* (1 John 3:9); also contrary to the words of Jesus Christ: *I give eternal life to my sheep, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand* (John 10: 28-29).

Commentary

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that those who truly believe and have been born again can commit the sin that leads to death (the sin against the Holy Spirit).

For the same apostle John, after making mention of those who commit the sin that leads to death and forbidding prayer for them (1 John 5: 16-17), immediately adds: *We know that anyone born of God does not commit sin (that is, that kind of sin), but the one who was born of God keeps himself safe, and the evil one does not touch him* (v. 18).

Commentary

The doctrines of grace have been rejected on the basis that such doctrine encourages sin. If God has demonstrated grace to the undeserving, then why should a sinner or an unconverted man not sin all the more and so bring greater glory to God. The biblical response to such thinking is found in the sixth and seventh chapters of Paul's epistle to the Romans "To speak of salvation in sin is as great an absurdity as to speak of life in death. Salvation is deliverance from sin. How then can men be delivered from sin in order that they may live in it? Or, as Paul expresses it "How shall we, who are dead in sin, live any longer therein?" (Charles Hodge, *Concerning God*)

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that apart from a special revelation no one can have the assurance of future perseverance in this life.

For by this teaching the well-founded consolation of true believers in this life is taken away and the doubting of the Romanists is reintroduced into the church. Holy Scripture, however, in many places derives the assurance not from a special and extraordinary revelation but from the marks peculiar to God's children and from God's completely reliable promises. So especially the apostle Paul: *Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Rom. 8:39); and John: *They who obey his commands remain in him and he in them. And this is how we know that he remains in us: by the Spirit he gave us* (1 John 3:24).

Commentary

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that the teaching of the assurance of perseverance and of salvation is by its very nature and character an opiate of the flesh and is harmful to godliness, good morals, prayer, and other holy exercises, but that, on the contrary, to have doubt about this is praiseworthy.

For these people show that they do not know the effective operation of God's grace and the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and they contradict the apostle John, who asserts the opposite in plain words: *Dear friends, now we are children of God, but what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he is made known, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure* (1 John 3:2-3). Moreover, they are refuted by the examples of the saints in both the Old and the New Testament, who though assured of their perseverance and salvation yet were constant in prayer and other exercises of godliness.

Commentary

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that the faith of those who believe only temporarily does not differ from justifying and saving faith except in duration alone.

For Christ himself in Matthew 13:20ff and Luke 8:13ff. clearly defines these further differences between temporary and true believers: he says that the former receive the seed on rocky ground, and the latter receive it in good ground, or a good heart; the former have no root, and the latter are firmly rooted; the former have no fruit, and the latter produce fruit in varying measure, with steadfastness, or perseverance.

Commentary

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that it is not absurd that a person, after losing his former regeneration, should once again, indeed quite often, be reborn.

For by this teaching they deny the imperishable nature of God's seed by which we are born again, contrary to the testimony of the apostle Peter: *Born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable* (1 Pet. 1:23).

Commentary

[The Synod rejects the errors of those]

Who teach that Christ nowhere prayed for an unfailling perseverance of believers in faith.

For they contradict Christ himself when he says: *I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith may not fail* (Luke 22:32); and John the gospel writer when he testifies in John 17 that it was not only for the apostles, but also for all those who were to believe by their message that Christ prayed: *Holy Father, preserve them in your name* (v. 11); and *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you preserve them from the evil one* (v. 15).

*Commentary**Conclusion***Rejection of False Accusations**

And so this is the clear, simple, and straightforward explanation of the orthodox teaching on the five articles in dispute in the Netherlands, as well as the rejection of the errors by which the Dutch churches have for some time been disturbed.

This explanation and rejection the Synod declares to be derived from God's Word and in agreement with the confessions of the Reformed churches. Hence it clearly appears that those of whom one could hardly expect it have shown no truth, equity, and charity at all in wishing to make the public believe:

- that the teaching of the Reformed churches on predestination and on the points associated with it by its very nature and tendency draws the minds of people away from all godliness and religion, is an opiate of the flesh and the devil, and is a stronghold of Satan where he lies in wait for all people, wounds most of them, and fatally pierces many of them with the arrows of both despair and self-assurance;
- that this teaching makes God the author of sin, unjust, a tyrant, and a hypocrite; and is nothing but a refurbished Stoicism, Manichaeism, Libertinism, and Mohammedanism;
- that this teaching makes people carnally self-assured, since it persuades them that nothing endangers the salvation of the chosen, no matter how they live, so that they may commit the most outrageous crimes with self-assurance; and that on the other hand nothing is of use to the reprobate for salvation even if they have truly performed all the works of the saints;
- that this teaching means that God predestined and created, by the bare and unqualified choice of his will, without the least regard or consideration of any sin, the greatest part of the world to eternal condemnation; that in the same manner in which election is the source and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and ungodliness; that many infant children of believers are snatched in their innocence from their mothers' breasts and cruelly cast into hell so that neither the blood of Christ nor their baptism nor the prayers of the church at their baptism can be of any use to them; and very many other slanderous accusations of this kind which the Reformed churches not only disavow but even denounce with their whole heart.

Therefore this Synod of Dort in the name of the Lord pleads with all who devoutly call on the name of our Savior Jesus Christ to form their judgment about the faith of the Reformed churches, not on the basis of false accusations gathered from here or there, or even on the basis of the personal statements of a number of ancient and modern authorities - statements which are also often either quoted out of context or misquoted and twisted to convey a different meaning - but on the basis of the churches' own official confessions and of the present explanation of the orthodox teaching which has been endorsed by the unanimous consent of the members of the whole Synod, one and all.

Moreover, the Synod earnestly warns the false accusers themselves to consider how heavy a judgment of God awaits those who give false testimony against so many churches and their confessions, trouble the consciences of the weak, and seek to prejudice the minds of many against the fellowship of true believers.

Finally, this Synod urges all fellow ministers in the gospel of Christ

- to deal with this teaching in a godly and reverent manner, in the academic institutions as well as in the churches;
- to do so, both in their speaking and writing, with a view to the glory of God's name, holiness of life, and the comfort of anxious souls;
- to think and also speak with Scripture according to the analogy of faith; and, finally,
- to refrain from all those ways of speaking which go beyond the bounds set for us by the genuine sense of the Holy Scriptures and which could give impertinent sophists a just occasion to scoff at the teaching of the Reformed churches or even to bring false accusations against it.

May God's Son Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of God and gives gifts to men, sanctify us in the truth, lead to the truth those who err, silence the mouths of those who lay false accusations against sound teaching, and equip faithful ministers of his Word with a spirit of wisdom and discretion, that all they say may be to the glory of God and the building up of their hearers. Amen.

Commentary

The doctrines of saving grace will be appreciated when understood in terms of sovereign grace freely bestowed by a sovereign God *In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:* (Eph 1:11). God is in control of His universe. “The calamities of earthquake, the devastation’s of storm, the destruction’s of war, and all the terrible catastrophes of plague, have only been co-workers with God—slaves compelled to tug the ‘galley of the divine purpose’ across the sea of time. From every evil, good has come; and the more the evil has accumulated, the more has God glorified Himself in bringing out at last His grand, His everlasting design. God has only one purpose, for all history is but one. There are many scenes, but it is one drama; there are many pages, but it is one book; there are many leaves, but it is one tree. There are many lord and many rulers yet is there but one empire, and God the only Potentate.” (Charles H. Spurgeon)

*“Divine Instructor! Gracious Lord!
Be Thou for ever near:
Teach me to love Thy sacred Word,
And find the Savior there.”*

Scriptures Used in the Canons of Dort

Genesis 6:5

Genesis 8:21

Deuteronomy 10:14

Deuteronomy 10:15

Psalms 51:17

Psalms 147:19

Psalms 147:20

Isaiah 44:3

Isaiah 53:10

Jeremiah 17:9

Jeremiah 31:18

Jeremiah 31:33

Ezekiel 1:19

Matthew 5:6

Matthew 11:21

Matthew 13

Matthew 13:20ff

Matthew 20:15

Matthew 24:24

Luke 8:13

Luke 10:20

Luke 22:32

John 3:16

John 6:39

John 10:12

John 10:13

John 10:15

John 10:27

John 10:28

John 10:29

John 15:16

John 17:6

Acts 13:48

Acts 15:18

Acts 16:6

Acts 16:7

Romans 3:19
Romans 3:23
Romans 3:24
Romans 3:25
Romans 5:5
Romans 5:8
Romans 5:9
Romans 5:12
Romans 5:16
Romans 6:23
Romans 8:16
Romans 8:17
Romans 8:30
Romans 8:32
Romans 8:33
Romans 8:34
Romans 8:35
Romans 8:39
Romans 9:11
Romans 9:12
Romans 9:13
Romans 9:16
Romans 9:18
Romans 9:20
Romans 10:14
Romans 10:15
Romans 11:6
Romans 11:7
Romans 11:33
Romans 11:34
Romans 11:35
Romans 11:36

1 Corinthians 1:8
1 Corinthians 4:7
1 Corinthians 10:13

Galatians 2:20

Ephesians 1:4
Ephesians 1:11
Ephesians 2:1
Ephesians 2:3
Ephesians 2:5
Ephesians 2:8
Ephesians 4:1-6
Ephesians 4:24

Philippians 1:29

Philippians 2:13

2 Thessalonians 1:11

2 Timothy 1:9

Hebrews 7:22

Hebrews 9:15

Hebrews 9:17

1 Peter 1:23

2 Peter 1:3

1 John 3:9

1 John 3:23

1 John 3:24

1 John 4:10

1 John 5:16

1 John 5:17

1 John 5:18

Appendices

Theological Terms used in the Canons of Dort

- **ADOPTION.** The apostle Paul used the term adoption to set forth a vital aspect of the salvation of every believer (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:15). According to law of Rome adoption was a legitimate means to designate an heir. A legal transfer was made from the authoritative structure of the natural father to that of the adoptive father. The Christian has a relationship with God whereby he is transferred out from under the authority of the Evil One and placed under the authority of the Another. The believer is made a son of God and an heir with Jesus Christ. As an adopted son there can be intimacy of soul (Gal. 4:6).
- **AGUSTINIANISM.** Augustine (AD 354-430) was the Bishop of Hippo, near Carthage in North Africa. Converted to Christ after a turbulent early life of intellectual searching and moral licentiousness Augustine became the champion of Christian orthodoxy. He defended the trinity against Arius and his followers (Arians), articulated the depravity of man, and set forth the doctrine of predestination. Salvation was taught to be by grace through faith alone. Conversion is the sovereign work of God based upon the grace of electing love. The proper order of salvation is regeneration by the Holy Ghost, followed by faith and justification. A supporter of monasticism, Augustine wrote the first western monastic rule for monks at Tagaste and Hippo. After the Visigoths destroyed Rome in 410, Bishop Augustine pursued the philosophical question of why Rome fell, and eventually wrote *The City of God*.
- **CONVERSION.** The term *conversion* reflects the response of an individual to the gospel. While *regeneration* is God's active work in the creation of a new nature in the life, conversion or a radical change is the result. Conversion affects the total personality of an individual, intellect, emotion, and will. When Saul of Tarsus met the glorified resurrected Master on the road to Damascus his intellectual view of Christ changed as he cried out Lord. His emotions changed as he asked what to do and then Paul arose to obey from the heart. The Sovereign subdued will (Acts 9:1-18).
- **DECALOGUE (Gk. deka, ten, logos, word).** The "*Ten Commandments*" written by the finger of God on stone were given by God to Moses at Mount Sinai (Ex. 31:18; 34:1; Ex. 20:2-17 cf. Deut. 5:6-21).

- **ELECTION.** The doctrine of election sets forth the belief that God in His inscrutable wisdom ordained before all worlds were formed a twofold decree, whereby He chose some for life everlasting (election), while condemning others to eternal death (reprobation). Many theologians maintain that God, by His sovereign will purposed positively on the decree of election, taking negative action with regard to the non-elect and angels by simply passing them by (preterition), leaving them to suffer the just and natural consequences of their sin. When a president is chosen, there is not another formal decision to not elect the other candidate. There is simply a passing by.
- **FREE WILL.** The will of man in the matter of salvation is one of great concern. Pelagius and Arminians endow man with freedom in alternate choices; Augustine and Calvinist view freedom of the will as the establishment of the soul in goodness through indwelling grace sovereignly imparted. The Scriptures set forth the truth that God's sufficiency is man's only hope for salvation and eternal life while all men are answerable to God for the life, words, and deeds that are lived, spoken, and performed.
- **FOREKNOWLEDGE.** The Bible teaches that God is aware of the actual and potential future (Acts 2:23; 26:5; Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:2,20; 2 Pet. 3:17). The word means "*foreordination*" (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:2) not simply the acquiring of facts for the purpose of making a decision. God does not come into knowledge. Those whom God foreknew (Rom. 8:29) he also loved and ordained to be conformed to the image of His Son.
- **GRACE.** The grace of God is the glorious manifestation of His goodness toward the undeserving. Grace is favor freely bestowed apart from merit. Grace is the basis of the salvation of every soul (Eph. 2:8-9). In salvation the hell bound and hell-deserving soul is saved, rescued from eternal judgment and given heaven. The Christian must never forget that he is saved, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and allowed to serve God—by His grace (Gen. 6:8, Eph. 2:28; cf. Psa. 139:1).
- **JUSTIFY.** In the act of justification the legal standing of a soul before God is changed so that it is *declared* righteous. When saving faith in God is expressed because of His gracious act of renewing the soul in regeneration, He imparts the righteousness and perfection of Another to our record. The believer shares the life of Jesus Christ the Righteous One. God, as the Law Giver and Moral Judge of the Universe is the source of justification, with the power to declare righteous whom He will, and man is the recipient, being declared righteous. The first recorded case of justification in the Bible is that of Abraham (Gen. 15:6) though anyone who comes to God and trusts or believes Christ for salvation will be justified (Rom. 3:28; cf. Eph. 3:2-8).
- **LIBERTINISM.** When used in an ethical context the reference is a derogatory term applied to those who act without moral restraint but give full expression to their natural impulses and appetites without regard for consequences. The term may also be directed toward irresponsible freethinkers that advocate a philosophy of hedonism.

- **MANICHEISM.** Mani (named Manes or Manichaeus in the West) was born in southern Babylonia (modern Iraq) in AD 216. His aristocratic mother and perhaps his father Patek were related to the Parthian royal family of the Arsacids. Brilliant of mind, a gifted writer and linguist, Mani set forth a rival philosophy to Christianity by recording the revelations he purported to received at ages twelve and twenty-four. Protected by the Persian emperor Shapur I, the cosmic dualism that Mani taught in Turkestan, India, and China, would eventually lead to his death in prison at the hands of the Magian in AD 276. He believed that he was the final prophet of God who had been sent to complete the work of all others including Christ.
- **MOHAMMEDIANISM.** Muhammad was born in Mecca in what is today western Saudi Arabia, in the 6th century AD. Believing himself to be a prophet of God, Muhammad taught submission to the will of God (*Islam*, from the Arabic word for *submission*). The sacred book of Islam is the *Koran (Qaraa, to read)*. The *Hadith*, a collection of traditions about Muhammad is also believed to be sacred. There are five basic obligations for a Muslim (*one who submits to the will of God*). The first is the *Shahadah*, or profession of faith in Allah. The second is prayer, five times a day while facing Mecca. The third is charity, or *zakat*. Fourth, all Muslims must fast during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan. Finally, all Muslims are to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime.
- **PELAGIUS.** Pelagianism is in Christian theology a rationalistic and naturalistic teaching that emphasizes human free will as the determining factor in human development. It minimizes or denies the need for divine grace and redemption. The brilliant and morally austere Roman-British monk Pelagius (c. 355-c. 425) crystallized the doctrine. Pelagius denied the existence of original sin and the need for infant baptism. It was his contention that the corruption of the human race was not inborn but was the result of bad example and habit. Humans can live a life of righteousness and thereby merit heaven by their own efforts. True saving grace, taught Pelagius, is found in the natural gifts displayed in humanity including free will, reason, and conscience. For Pelagius faith and dogma were overshadowed by the essence of religion which is believed moral action leads to perfectibility. Beginning in AD 412 Augustine challenged the Pelagian doctrine of human moral autonomy. As a result of his writings, Pelagius was accused of heresy but was acquitted at synods at Jerusalem and Diospolis. In 418, however, the Council at Carthage did condemn Pelagius and his followers.
- **PERSEVERENCE.** The security of the believer is grounded in the doctrine that God is able to complete the good work of eternal life that He has begun in every believer (Phil. 1:6). While God preserves His own, they in turn persevere in the faith by doing good work (John 10:28; 2 Cor. 6:17,18).
- **PREDESTINATE.** The word “*predestine*” literally means “*to mark off or choose before*”. God chooses those who will participate in His plan of redemption (Rom. 8:28ff).
- **RECONCILIATION.** Sin has brought a state of hostility between God and man so that man needs to be reconciled to God. The Cross removes the basis of hostility for the justice of God is satisfied by the work of redemption (2 Cor. 5:19; cf. Rom. 3:25).

- **REDEMPTION.** The word “*redeem*” means “*to purchase.*” When Christ died at Calvary, He paid the price that satisfied the demands of God for righteousness and holiness. The price of redemption was the blood (1 Pet. 1:18, 19). Those who have been “*sold under sin*” (Gal. 3:10; 2 Pet. 2:1), are no longer “for sale” (Gal. 3:13) for they belong to God (Gal. 4:5).
- **REGENERATION** is the work of God through the Holy Spirit whereby new life is instilled into the soul dead in trespasses and sin. To be regenerated is to be “*born again*” (John 3:3-7; 1 Pet. 1:23). The instrument which the Spirit uses is the Bible, which is likened to a hammer that destroys sin (Jer. 23:29), a mirror that reveals it (James 1:23), a sword that slays sin (Heb. 4:12), and a lamp that guides the believer (Psa. 119:105).
- **REPENTANCE.** True evangelical repentance is a deep, sincere, emotional heart felt turning away from sin to salvation and sanctification (Luke 15:7).
- **REPROBATION.** The Bible teaches that those who reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will suffer a just retributive justice ordained by God. (Luke 16:19-31 cf. Rev. 9:1).
- **SOCINUS.** Faustus Socinus (1539-1604) was an influential thinker among the humanist in Italy who denied the doctrine of the trinity. Forced to flee the Inquisition, the followers of Socinus fled to Poland where his views found wide acceptance in the Reformed Church of Poland (1565). He came to them in 1579 and assumed leadership of the Minor Reformed Church of Poland. The Socinians adhered to the Apostle’s Creed rather than the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. They maintained a high moral standard, lived simply, and encouraged pacifism while opposing serfdom. The movement spread quickly for two generations despite severe and violent opposition. Though the last Socinian church in history disbanded early in the 19th century, the spirit and doctrine of Socinus lived on in England and America. The views of Socinus were eventually transformed into Unitarianism.
- **STOICISM.** The Stoic school of philosophy was established at Athens about 300 BC by Zeno of Citium in Cyprus as a reaction to Epicureanism and its views of life and duty. The Stoics advocated that ultimate good and happiness does not lie in external objects of pleasure but in the state of the soul itself, in the wisdom and restraint which a person is delivered from the passions and desires that disturb daily living. Wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance are four cardinal virtues. Moreover, since all people are manifestations of one universal spirit, brotherly love should be expressed with a readiness to help one another. Rank and wealth are of no importance in the relational structure of society.
- **THE FALL.** The entrance of sin into the moral universe of God remains a great mystery. How man was able to fall from an exalted state of creation into the most heinous of sins cannot be explained. But that man did fall from grace is the clear teaching of the Word of God and is reflected by the present plight of man (Gen. 3:1-13).

- **TOTAL DEPRAVITY** refers to the state of man in the sight of God. The doctrine asserts that moral corruption extends to every facet of man's nature, his will, emotions, and intellect. There is nothing in man that can merit the merits of Christ or commend him to God for salvation. The natural nature of man is derived from fallen Adam (Gen. 6:5-7; Eph. 2:1-3).

Geographical Locations (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

- **BETHSAIDA**, which was later called Julias, was situated two miles north of the Sea of Galilee and east of the Jordan River. The name Julias was given to it by the tetrarch Philip (Luke 3:1), after Julia, the daughter of Caesar Augustus. In the wilderness near Bethsaida, Jesus fed the 5,000 and healed the multitudes (Luke 9:10-17). It was also in Bethsaida that the Lord restored sight to a blind man (Mark 8:22).
- **BITHYNIA** (bih THIN ih uh, meaning unknown)—a coastal province in northwestern Asia Minor. Bithynia was bounded on the north by the Black Sea, on the south and east by Phrygia and Galatia, and on the west by Mysia. While at Mysia, Paul and Silas decided to go into Bithynia "*but the Spirit did not permit them*" (Acts 16:7). Later, however, the gospel reached the province; and many of the citizens of Bithynia became Christians (1 Pet. 1:1-2). The experience of Paul and Silas illustrates that God's delays are not always denials.
- **KORAZIN (CHORAZIN, ko-ra'zin)**. This city, in the general vicinity of Bethsaida and Capernaum near the Sea of Galilee, was upbraided by Jesus and committed to destruction for its unbelief in the face of His mighty works (Matt. 11:21; Luke 10:13).
- **MYSIA** (MISS ee uh) (meaning unknown)—a province in northwestern Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Paul and Silas passed through Mysia on their way to Troas, one of its main cities, during Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 16:7-8). Three other cities of Mysia are mentioned in the New Testament: Assos (Acts 20:13), Adramyttium (Acts 27:2), and Pergamos (Rev. 1:11).
- **SIDON** [SIGH dun] (a fishery)—an ancient Phoenician city on the Mediterranean coast in northern Palestine. Sidon dominated the coastal plain in the area of the Lebanon Mountains. Built on a hill across several small islands, it was connected by bridges.
- **TYRE** [tire] (a rock)—an ancient seaport city of the Phoenicians situated north of Palestine. Tyre was the principal seaport of the Phoenician coast, about 25 miles south of Sidon and 35 miles north of Carmel. It consisted of two cities: a rocky coastal city on the mainland and a small island city. The Island City was just off the shore. The mainland city was on a coastal plain, a strip only 15 miles long and 2 miles wide.