The practical impact of the Canons

The Issue at Hand  3
Unspeakable Consolation  4
Election: The Fountain of Every Saving Good  6
The Effectual Atonement of Christ  7
Secret Recesses of the Heart  9
Perseverance of Saints  11
Attaining to the Resurrection of the Dead  13
Devotional  15
Church News  22
Synod of Dordt Part 8:
Prince Maurice Takes Action  23

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I remember as a child hearing about the Canons of Dordt. Being a child and not knowing what the word “canon” meant, I often imagined cannons as you would find on a ship or a fort. I knew that the Canons of Dordt couldn’t be referring to actual cannons, but that image always stuck in my mind. I smile now when I think of my thought process as a young child; however, the more I think about it, maybe I wasn’t completely wrong. The production of the Canons of Dordt by the Great Synod was truly a cannon shot that resounded throughout the church-world. You might say a cannon shot has an unmistakable sound. When you hear it, you know what it is. The Canons of Dordt are the same. They are a document that is a clear statement of the truth of God’s sovereignty in salvation as it is found in scripture. The delegates of the Synod of Dordt, by creating this document, clearly and unmistakably said “This is what scripture says! This is what we believe!”

Do you believe the Canons of Dordt to be a faithful representation of the truth of scripture? Does your walk in life align with this confession? You might think these are silly questions. Your answer to these questions might be: “Of course I do, I am a member of a conservative, Reformed church.” That is good and how it ought to be, but the sad reality is that some reformed churches have forsaken the truths outlined in the Canons of Dordt, if not officially, then through ignoring them. “Shame on them,” you (and I) say. Yes, it is to their detriment that they have tossed aside such a beautiful proclamation of the truth that salvation is of God alone.

But have we also tossed aside the Canons of Dordt?

The Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) has a new book on the Canons of Dordt by Rev. McGeown titled Grace and Assurance: The Message of The Canons of Dordt (see advertisement at the back of this issue). As anyone who has read Called to Watch for Christ’s Return by Rev. McGeown will know, this new work promises to be an excellent volume. What a worthy addition this book would be to your library to stand next to Voice of Our Fathers, the commentary by Homer Hoeksema!

If you do not own Voice of Our Fathers, you should. The RFPA is offering this tremendous work to Beacon Lights subscribers at a 40% discount for a limited time. If you are already a book club member, this is an additional 40% off the already reduced price. Parents and grandparents, what this means is you have the ability to purchase copies of this book for each of your children and grandchildren, at a steeply discounted rate. And for those who are not book club members, it is time to join, and this is the nudging that you needed. I thank the RFPA for this generous offer for subscribers of Beacon Lights.
God did not choose you as his child because of anything in you. In eternity, long before the first clock ever sounded, he did not look into the future to see what your response would be when you opened Snapchat, clicked on the three dots in the bottom right corner, and browsed through the Discover section. He was not waiting with bated breath to see if you would actually click on that link and plunge yourself into sexual filth.

Neither did God look deep into time and determine you were worthy of everlasting life because you deleted the app in a fit of righteous anger at having fallen into that temptation again.

Not only do you know that your election was due to “mere grace” and proceeds from “God’s eternal decree,” but you give thanks for that truth every day. You understand that out of all the people “equally involved in ruin” you were chosen by God in Christ and that you were by nature “neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in one common misery.” This is an intensely humbling and life-altering truth. Studying this truth causes you to delete Snapchat (which is to say, to flee fornication), to decline the offer of beer or drugs, and to fight the temptation of sexual impurity, not to earn or merit, but as “grateful returns of ardent love to Him, who first manifested so great love towards [you].”

Neither were you chosen to belong to God in time and eternity because God simply turned a blind eye to your sin, whereas when your unbelieving co-worker commits the same sin, God brings down his hammer of judgment. You should ask yourself, what makes you to differ from your co-worker? From an outward appearance, there is not much difference. You wear similar clothes, you face a lot of the same struggles with employment and school, and you can talk about the weather, politics, and sports with no problem. And yet, there is a chasm between you that only the God of heaven and earth can bridge. God’s justice demands that sin be punished, and he will have his justice satisfied. This satisfaction took place not because of your tears of repentance, or your faithful church attendance, but because of the “death of the Son of God,” the “only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin.” What a humbling thought that you belong to the company of the elect, due “solely to the grace of God, given [you] in Christ from everlasting, and not to any merit of [your] own.”

This should give us pause when we catch a hint of pride in our voices when we talk to, or about that co-worker. The reaction of the child of God who knows, truly knows the truth of election is to cry out, “Why me, Lord, why me?” As sons and daughters of Adam we know that we too “derived corruption” from our parents and brought on ourselves “blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment.” Would we trumpet that fact that we think we are different by nature, or perhaps were more open to the gospel of grace than our unbelieving neighbor or co-worker? Not only this, but if this great salvation were somehow offered to you as you were in Adam, you would have, in your “bondage” rejected it immediately. How can
someone who is “dead in sin” accept anything? The knowledge that we were “neither able nor willing to return to God” is almost crippling. How this should shape our interactions with others, in the church and without! How can we be proud when “faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God… because He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also.” Small wonder that armed with this knowledge you find in your soul that “a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign.” This shows itself (as faith always does) by putting away the drugs, alcohol, sexual immorality, Netflix binge-watching, and the time-wasting behavior on your phone that you engaged in for so long. You are thankful to God and determined to show it.

But then the invite came. When you heard the parents were going to be gone for a long weekend, and when the message finally came, and the date was set, it was inevitable. You knew you shouldn’t go, but you went anyway.

Not only was there going to be alcohol, but you knew she was going to be present as well. And after a few drinks the inhibitions would be gone, along with the clothes.

You didn’t count on the drugs, especially those drugs, but when that invitation came, you were ready to take the next step. Just another way to get a rush, is how you looked at it.

The problem is the next morning. It always comes. Bringing with it a sense of horror that wells up in your heart. “What have I done?” The doubts come raging in, the sense of hopelessness. You have lied to your parents, sinned against your God, and driven away your friends. You are alone, so terribly alone.

The “daily sins of infirmity” and the effects of “indwelling sin” come crashing down on you like a tidal wave. There have been consequences, and not just from your parents. It’s the “deadly guilt” that you cannot shake. Your conscience tells you, “Now, you’ve gone too far. Your parents are sick of you, your God is disgusted by you, and the friends that you laughed so hard with the night before, are gone. End it. Even that is better than this kind of life.”

Have you forgotten? God is “rich in mercy!” He did not choose you because he saw anything in you that he liked. He didn’t condition his love on your obedience. He demands obedience, but God is not helplessly watching while you make a mess of things, wondering what he is going to do now. He will not allow you to plunge yourself “into everlasting destruction.”

You have tried the way of sin and found it wanting. The manic laughter and flashing lights of the alcohol infused party have brought you misery, time and time again. The devil is a damnable liar, and he has you convinced that although it didn’t work out this time, next week’s party will bring you joy!

I know you don’t feel it. You don’t feel loved by God at all. “How could he love me?” You don’t blame it on God, because you know you have only yourself to blame. You were not “constant in watching and prayer.” Again, you have forgotten that God is the “Father of all consolation” and will not allow you to be “tempted above that [you] are able.”

You have been “drawn into great and heinous sins by Satan, the world, and the flesh” but that is not the end of the story. You will repent of those sins, and in the way of “watching and prayer” you will resist the temptations that you know are coming. You will have a “renewed confidence of persevering” and this will make you “much more careful and solicitous to continue in the ways of the Lord” because the thought of God withholding his countenance from you is “more bitter than death.” You will decline the invitation to the party. You will put your phone away and pick up a good book. You will date in a way that brings glory to God. You will crush your devilish pride by studying the truths of unconditional election, limited atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. The reason is not your own strength of will or a powerful support system. “But God is faithful, who, having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end.” What peace, tranquility, and contentment this brings to the child of God! Truly, this is “unspeakable consolation.”

It is here that the heart of the child of God takes the doctrine found in the Canons of Dort and turns it into a doxology of praise to God, exclaiming; “Now to the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be honor and glory forever. AMEN.”
ELECTION: THE FOUNTAIN OF EVERY SAVING GOOD

The synod of Dordt met during 1618–19 to settle the controversy about the doctrines of grace that had erupted around the person and teaching of the pestilential James Arminius. As a minister he underhandedly spread his lies from 1590 until his death in 1609. He made predestination the particular object of his attacks. The hope of many that his death would end the controversy did not happen. By devious methods Arminius had succeeded in infecting a large following of ministers and former students with his heresy. From him the false doctrine gained the name Arminianism.

The Arminians’ hatred of predestination knew no bounds, but they reserved their most vile attacks for the doctrine of reprobation. The conclusion to the Canons of Dordt gives examples of the Arminians’ slanders: “Predestination...leads off the minds of men from all piety and religion...is an opiate administered by the flesh and the devil, [is] the stronghold of Satan...[and] makes God the author of sin, unjust, tyrannical, hypocritical...it renders men carnally secure” and lets them “live as they please.” With these and many other evil accusations the Arminians vilified the Reformed doctrine of predestination.

The Arminians’ heretical doctrine of predestination had three pillars: First, God’s universal love for and desire that all men be saved. Second, out of his universal love God offers salvation to all men in the preaching. Third, sinful man has a free will—the ability to choose or not to choose God’s offer of salvation.

The result of these three positions was a doctrine of predestination based on foreseen faith. God chose faith in Jesus Christ as the condition man must fulfill to be saved, and God elected those whom he saw “would believe...and persevere in faith and in the obedience of faith” unto the end (1, error 1). The Arminians also taught “that...faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, godliness, and perseverance are not fruits of...election...but are conditions...required beforehand...by those who will be fully elected, and are causes without which...election to glory does not occur” (1, error 5). Thus Arminian election is God’s choice of conditions that man must fulfill and God’s choice of those whom he saw would fulfill those conditions. Election, therefore, depends on man. God’s choice is based on man’s choice. Man’s choice determines who will be saved.

The first head of the Canons set down the Reformed truth about predestination, which refers to God’s decree, eternally determining the final destinies of all men. Predestination has two parts, election and reprobation. Together they make up the Reformed confession of sovereign, double predestination.

Article 7 gives the Reformed truth about election: Election is God’s “sovereign,” “unchangeable,” and eternal “purpose,” or will. Election is based on God’s decision alone, not on any worth or worthiness in those chosen. Election is God’s choice of certain individuals—God chooses persons not conditions. Election is gracious, undeserved, and unmerited by those chosen. Election is eternal, “before the foundation of the world.” Election is unto salvation, which includes all the blessings of salvation, especially faith. Election is “in Christ,” the mediator and head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation.

The other side of predestination is reprobation, which is God’s eternal rejection of some: “Not all, but some only are elected while others are passed by.” These “God...decree to leave in the common misery into which they...willfully plunged themselves...leaving them...to follow their own ways,” and at last to be condemned and punished forever, “not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins.” The synod warned that this decree “by no means makes God the author of sin...but declares him to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous judge and avenger thereof” (1.15). In reprobation God passes men by with “the grace of election” and appoints them to damnation. Reprobation is not the cause of sin in the same way that election is the cause of faith. Man sins of himself. God does not reprobate man because of his sin, but out of his sovereign will.

Of special importance over against the Arminian corruption of the truth is the Canon’s teaching that election is the cause of faith. Faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation. Where does faith come from? “That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not...proceeds from God’s eternal decree,” according to which “he graciously softens the hearts of the elect...and inclines them to believe”
Rev. Martyn McGeown

THE EFFECTUAL ATONEMENT OF CHRIST

Many people believe that the difference between Arminianism and the Reformed faith with respect to the cross of Christ is simple—the Arminians teach that Jesus Christ died for all men without exception (universal atonement), while the Reformed faith teaches that Jesus Christ died only for some, that is, only for the elect (limited atonement).

However, that is not a correct explanation of the difference.

Arminianism is not so much an error about the number of people for whom Christ died—it is actually an error about the very nature of the cross of Christ. The issues at stake are these: “What was God’s purpose in the death of his Son? What did Jesus Christ accomplish by his death? What benefits were purchased by Jesus Christ in his death?”

Briefly, the Arminians taught the following, which can be discovered in the “Errors and Rejections” section of Head 2 of the Canons of Dordt. First, God ordained the death of Christ “without a certain and definite decree to save any” (Error and Rejection 1). Second, the purpose of the death of Christ was to “acquire for the Father the mere right to establish with man such a covenant as He might and “is still to be published” in the preaching “for the glory of God,” and the “enlivening and comforting of his people” (1.14). The doctrine does not make men careless and profane, but “the sense and certainty of this election” gives the children of God reason for humility, praise, and “rendering grateful returns of ardent love,” to God (1.13). It also comforts the elect in the unchangeableness of God’s love for them and the certainty of their salvation, because his election cannot be “interrupted nor changed, recalled or annulled” (1.11).

The Canons include an appropriate warning. “To those who murmur at the free grace of election and just severity of reprobation, we answer...Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? (Rom. 9:20) and quote the language of our Savior: Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? (Matt. 20:15)” (1.18).

Head one on predestination ends the only way a believer can when he contemplates “these mysteries” regarding God’s awesome decree—with a doxology! “With holy adoration...we exclaim...O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen (Rom. 11:33–36).”

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please, whether of grace or of works” (Error and Rejection 2). Third, Christ “merited for the Father only the authority or the perfect will...to prescribe new conditions [of salvation] as He might desire” (Error and Rejection 3). Fourth, the cross enables the Father “having revoked the demand of perfect obedience of the law [to regard] faith itself and the obedience of faith, although imperfect, as the perfect obedience of the law and [to esteem it] worthy of the reward of eternal life through grace” (Error and Rejection 4). And fifth, God desires to apply “all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ,” but the obtaining of the “pardon of sin and eternal life” depends on the sinner’s “own free will, which joins itself to the grace that is offered” (Error and Rejection 6).

In other words, the death of Christ makes it possible for God to offer salvation to all men on whatever condition he might determine. It is possible that no one might meet the condition, and it is also possible that everyone might meet the condition. Nevertheless, the death of Christ itself by itself has accomplished nothing for any particular sinner.

Modern Arminians are less subtle than the first followers of Arminius. They simply teach that Christ died on the cross to make it possible for God to offer salvation to everyone on the condition of faith.

Nevertheless, the Bible does not teach that Christ by his death made salvation merely possible. Instead, the Bible teaches that Christ by his death has actually secured salvation for his people. The Bible teaches that Christ has actually saved and redeemed his people by his death. Either you believe (as the Arminian does) that Christ died for all men—but all men are not saved—so that the death of Christ is not effectual; or you believe (as the Reformed do) that Christ died for some men—and all of them are actually saved—so that the death of Christ is effectual.

In Head 2 the Reformed fathers began by explaining the necessity of the death of Christ in terms of the satisfaction of God’s justice (Articles 1–2). The Reformed fathers then explained why Christ’s sacrifice is of infinite value (it is the sacrifice of the Son of God who suffered under the wrath of God as the substitute and surety of his people [Articles 3–4]). Then the Reformed fathers explained the need for the preaching of the cross, which is the promissive proclamation of a particular promise (Articles 5–7); and they finished by explaining the purpose and efficacy of the death of Christ (Articles 8–9).

In Article 8, which is the centerpiece of Head 2, the synod explains the purpose of God in the death of Christ: God’s purpose is that “the quickening [or life-imparting] and saving efficacy” should extend to “all the elect.” Therefore, God “[bestows] upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation.” In addition, Christ “[effectually redeemed]...all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation.” By virtue of the death of Christ, God bestows upon them “all the [other] saving gifts of the Holy Spirit [which] he purchased for them [gifts such as regeneration, calling, faith, justification, sanctification, and glorification].” Moreover, by virtue of the same precious death of Christ God “[purges] them from all sin,” and “[brings] them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory” (Article 8). In Article 9 the synod underlines the efficacy of Christ’s death: “This purpose...has been powerfully accomplished, and will henceforward still continue to be accomplished” (Article 9).

What is the Arminian concept of the death of Christ in comparison to this? Christ has merited salvation for no one. Christ has merited saving faith for no one. Christ has merely accomplished the possibility of salvation for all men, if they believe. Then whole sections of Scripture would have to be rewritten: “Christ has made our redemption from the curse of the law possible, if we accept it” (compare Gal. 3:13); “in whom we have the possibility of redemption, if we accept it” (compare Eph. 1:7); “by whose stripes our healing has been made possible, if we accept it” (compare 1 Pet. 2:24).

There really are two ways to “limit” the atonement: either you follow the biblical and Reformed faith and recognize that by God’s purpose and design the atonement is limited to the elect (particular redemption), or you embrace Arminianism and change the very meaning of the atonement, so that it becomes an atonement that does not really atone.

We thank God that four hundred years ago God through the work of the Synod of Dordt preserved the truth of the effectual atonement of Christ: “There never [shall be] wanting a church composed of believers, the foundation of which is laid in the blood of Christ, which [shall] steadfastly love and faithfully serve Him as their Savior, who as a bridegroom for his bride, laid down His life for them upon the cross, and which [shall] celebrate His praises here and through all eternity” (Article 9).

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SECRET RECESSES OF THE HEART

The Canons of Dordt are often considered heavy stuff. Pretty doctrinal. Not easy to understand. Good for ministers and the more mature members of the church. But some think it to be out of reach for the common pew-sitter—and especially for young people.

It is true that the Canons of Dordt are doctrine, that is, teachings. The Canons set forth the answer of the Reformed fathers to the error of the Arminians concerning God’s work of saving his chosen sinners. It is true that there are places in the Canons where the presentation and argumentation might require some deeper thinking. However, for the most part, the teaching of the Canons is understood without a lot of difficulties.

It is true that among the authors of the Canons of Dordt were men of great intellect. They obviously worked hard to be very clear and precise in their answers to the crafty arguments of the Arminians. This they did with their feet on the ground. They never forgot the responsibility to write in such a way that the normal member of the pew could understand. (This is true in spite of the practice of that day to write in very long sentences.) This they accomplished by being biblical. The Canons are full of phrases from the Bible. And this enabled them to communicate truth reflecting scripture’s simplicity and practicality.

I have been assigned the task of presenting the practical application of the third and fourth heads of the Canons. This section of the Canons treats scripture’s teaching of man’s corruption and God’s manner of saving his chosen sinners. There is so much that I would like to say about this. I really think that I could write quite a few *Beacon Lights* articles on this subject. But to keep things simple I’d like to focus on what I believe to be the most practical article of Canons 3–4. It is Article 15. In a very clear and powerful way, this article best presents the practical implications of the teachings of God’s sovereign work of saving his people.

It does this in three ways.

First, there is the simple statement with which the article begins: “God is under no obligation to confer this grace upon any.”

Second, in the middle of the article, it states that anyone who receives God’s grace “owes eternal gratitude to God, and gives Him thanks forever.”

Third, the article concludes by describing the proper perspective anyone who receives God’s undeserved grace should have to others. “With respect to those who make an external profession of faith, and live regular lives [show amendment of life], we are bound, after the example of the apostle, to judge and speak of them in the most favorable manner. For the secret recesses of the heart are unknown to us. And as to others, who have not yet been called, it is our duty to pray for them to God, who calls the things that are not, as if they were. But we are in no wise to conduct ourselves towards them with haughtiness, as if we had made ourselves to differ.”

Let us look at each of these three parts.

“God is under no obligation to confer this grace upon any.”

There is the thinking that God ought to save all men. Or there is the thinking that man has the right to be saved. However, man (Adam) consciously and purposefully refused to give loving obedience to God. In committing such a grievous sin against God, Adam forfeited for himself and all of his descendants all the excellent gifts with which he was created. As a result, he and all his children are spiritually blind, perverse in judgment, wicked, rebellious, and horribly stubborn in heart and will, and most impure in his affections. Every human being is conceived in sin. We are by nature children of wrath. We are incapable of doing any saving good. We are constantly prone to do evil because we are spiritually dead in sin. We are slaves to sin.

With regard to such sinners, God is not obliged to save. Rather he is obliged, in his righteous justice, to punish every human being.

That any human is saved is solely because of God’s grace. Grace is a love undeserved and unmerited. Everyone who receives grace is undeserving of it. And everyone who receives God’s love is to live his own life aware that he does not deserve in any sense to receive God’s favor. It is grace—undeserved love. God is under no obligation to confer grace on any human.

This clearly implies that man does not and cannot merit any favor with God. If the works of man
merited with God, then God would be obliged to man. This is what Romans 4:4 means, “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.” Salvation is not by works. It is by grace alone without works.

This first practical application of the truth of divine, gracious salvation is intimately connected with the second practical application found in Article 15. “He therefore who becomes the subject of this grace, owes eternal gratitude to God, and gives Him thanks forever.”

That anyone is saved is to be wholly ascribed to God! The salvation of spiritually dead sinners has to be a divine work. Sinners who are graciously saved owe God an eternal debt of gratitude!

The knowledge of gracious election affords to the children of God reason for daily humility before God and for rendering grateful returns of ardent love to him who first manifested so great a love towards them. Every recipient of grace is moved to thankfulness. This is also the thought of the third part of the Heidelberg Catechism. The ones God is pleased to save are obliged in gratitude to live a life of thankfulness. The gratitude of one saved by grace is seen in loving obedience to God’s commandments and in sincere prayer.

The third practical part of Article 15 is at the end of the article. “With respect to those who make an external profession of faith, and live regular lives, we are bound, after the example of the apostle, to judge and speak of them in the most favorable manner. For the secret recesses of the heart are unknown to us. And as to others, who have not yet been called, we may not stand aloof from them. Every recipient of grace is moved to thankfulness. The gratitude of one saved by grace is seen in loving obedience to God’s commandments and in sincere prayer.

The first two practical applications of the truth of divine, gracious, particular salvation found in Article 15 lead to the third practical application of this truth. Everyone who is powerfully and irresistibly saved by grace alone walks humbly with his God and with his neighbor. As our love for God cannot be separated from our love of the neighbor (the second and great commandment is like to the first), so our walk with God in humble gratitude cannot be separated from our humble walk with those humans God puts in our path.

It is very interesting to see how our fathers would have the humble, saved believer look at his neighbors, namely, as either those who make an external profession of faith (with a corresponding walk of life) or those who have not yet been called. Very interesting indeed! The neighbor is not to be viewed as unregenerated, for the secret recesses of the heart are unknown to us. Correspondingly, the neighbor is not to be viewed as reprobate, for the knowledge of whom God elected and whom he reprobated is part of the secret things which belong to Jehovah our God (Deut. 29:29). Instead, our fathers, following the example of the apostle, would have us view our neighbors as either to be spoken of in the most favorable manner or as the objects of our prayers.

With regard to those who make no profession of faith, our Reformed fathers declare that we are to pray for them. We may not stand aloof from them, criticizing and condemning. We may never give the impression to our non-professing neighbor that we would never do what they are doing. Instead, one way in which the command to love our neighbor is to be expressed is that those saved by grace will be praying for their ungodly neighbors. Notice that the wording of this article is almost like a warning: we are in no wise to conduct ourselves towards them with haughtiness, as if we had made ourselves to differ. We did not save ourselves. Nor do we keep ourselves saved. It is all divine, sovereign grace—the undeserved and unmerited love of God.

And because they know that the grace which saved them and which keeps them saved is that powerful grace of the Almighty Creator, they pray to him for their neighbor. He created the physical creation by calling it into existence. He spoke, and it was done. He called everything into existence as if it already existed.

As he did and does in the physical creation, so God performs his spiritual work of re-creating. He calls spiritual life into existence and keeps it in existence. He alone calls the things that are not as if they were!

Notice that the powerful reason for this most practical application of the doctrines of grace by the recipients of grace is humility. Humility is seeing oneself as unworthy of God’s favor or of any good gift from him. Humility is the very opposite of pride, of haughtiness. Humility knows that he has done absolutely nothing to earn God’s favor and be saved, and he never forgets it. In every relationship and every situation, humility characterizes the child of God.

The Canons of Dordt do present the beautiful doctrinal teachings of scripture. But they also powerfully present the practical implications of such beautiful doctrine.

Get to know the Canons better and better. The better you know them, the more you will appreciate
not only the truth of scripture contained in them but also the practical implications of these scriptural truths.

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Prof. David J. Engelsma

PERSEVERANCE OF SAINTS

The young reader of this article is encouraged to read first the 5th head of doctrine of the Canons of Dordt and to have it before him as he reads the article.

Introduction
Can one who has been saved go lost?
It often seems as though those who are saved for a while lose their salvation and perish in unbelief and wickedness of life.

Very likely, every young person who is reading this issue of Beacon Lights knows another young person who was baptized, grew up in a Christian home, made public confession of faith, and attended church faithfully for years, but who later left the church, renounced Christ and the Christian faith, and now lives a wicked life, without repentance. It seems as though one who once was saved has lost his or her salvation. In the language of 1 John 2:19, there are always those who “went out from us.”

It is not only a young person who struggles with the seeming falling away unto damnation of those who once were saved. It was a hard struggle of faith for me, though a minister, to hear once of the suicide of a very dear friend, for years a confessing, Protestant Reformed Christian, and often an elder in the church.

These and other similar experiences in the church raise the question, “Can a saved child of God lose his salvation, and perish?”

Our own experience of our own spiritual weakness makes the question of perseverance a personal struggle. Such is the power of our temptations to sin and such is our own strong inclination to yield to the temptation, or, if we have yielded, the strong inclination to continue in the sin, that we wonder about ourselves, whom we know to have been saved, “Is it possible that I myself might fall away from Christ, abide in this falling away, and so perish finally in hell, forever separated from Jesus Christ?”

In confessing perseverance, in the 5th and last “head,” or chapter, the Canons of Dordt recognizes the temptation to doubt the perseverance of saints. “Error 7” of the rejection of errors section of Head 5 of the Canons refers to the parable of the sower, in Matthew 13, which teaches that there is a similarity between those who “believe for a time” and “true believers.” Canons, 5.8 acknowledges that so sinful and weak are true believers that “with regard to themselves” it “would undoubtedly happen” that they would backslide “and perish.”

What Perseverance is
This same article—Canons, 5.8—confesses that “it is utterly impossible” that saved children of God lose their salvation and perish in sin and damnation.

Head 5 of the Canons confesses “the perseverance of saints.” This is the heading of the last section of the Canons. This confession is a fundamental aspect of the Reformed faith. It is also the great comfort of the Reformed believer, young as well as old.

The gospel-truth of the perseverance of saints is that every one whom God saves by regenerating him and giving him faith in Jesus will continue in this salvation to the very end of life, so that he is saved forever. This activity of persevering is a struggle for the Christian. It is not easy. One “perseveres” against hardships and opposition. Continuing in faith and obedience and, thus, in salvation is not like “falling off a log.” In fact, so difficult is the struggle to continue in faith and in the Christian life that 1 Peter 4:18 declares that the “righteous [are] scarcely...saved.” They are saved, every one, but as it seems to us ourselves “scarcely.” We barely make it to the end. So difficult is persevering in the way of salvation for the righteous in this life!

The sole reason why all the righteous, that is, those who believe in Jesus with true faith, are saved is that God preserves them. The perseverance of saints is also the preservation of saints. Saints persevere because God preserves them. Having begun the work of salvation in them by his Holy Spirit, he preserves in them this salvation against all temptations from without and against all the power of sin.
Perseverance is like a little boy struggling to climb Long's Peak in Colorado. The mountain is steep, and the pathway to the top is dangerous. But the lad keeps on going, up and up, until he comes safely, if exhausted, to the top. He perseveres. But the reason he perseveres is that his strong father has his arms around the boy, propelling him by the power of the father and guiding him on the narrow path so that he never falls over the precipices. The child perseveres because his father preserves.

The Canons speaks of our “perseverance in the faith” (Art. 9). We victoriously continue to believe. The Canons also speak of God’s preservation of us, and attributes our persevering to God’s preservation: “God…powerfully preserves them [all those who are ‘converted’—DJE] therein [in ‘a state of grace’—DJE], even to the end” (Art. 3).

Our perseverance is the great benefit of God’s election of us, of Christ’s death for us, and of the Holy Spirit’s saving work within us. That is, this last grand, Reformed doctrine of salvation depends upon the preceding doctrines in the Canons. That perseverance is due to all the other gracious works of God confessed by the Canons is the confession of the Canons in Article 8: “...since his counsel [of election—DJE] cannot be changed,” etc.

But perseverance is the glorious purpose and goal of the other works of God in salvation. Without perseverance as their end, the other works of salvation would be illusory, senseless, and useless. What good is election, atonement, and the regenerating work of the Spirit if those elected, atoned for, and born again perish in hell? The purpose of God in electing, atoning, and regenerating is that the elect be saved in this life and everlastingly. Since God is not a God of nonsense and failure, every one whom he elects, redeems, and regenerates he also preserves unto everlasting life.

What Perseverance is Not

Perseverance is not that the saved child of God is perfectly delivered from sin in this life. On the contrary, every saved child of God retains a depraved nature and commits many sins. Perseverance is that sin does not govern the life of the child of God. Perseverance is that when he does sin, he repents (see Articles 1–3).

Perseverance is not that the saved child of God cannot fall into gross sin, sometimes very deeply. The life of David and the life of Peter prove otherwise. The Canons refers to “the lamentable fall of David, Peter, and other saints” (Art. 4). But perseverance is that even then the child of God does not lose the grace of his new birth and the indwelling Holy Spirit. And perseverance is that this sinning child of God will repent, and be forgiven (Art. 7).

But neither is perseverance simply the truth that all the elect will finally be saved. The 5th of the great doctrines of the Reformed faith in the Canons is not “the perseverance of the elect,” but the perseverance “of saints,” that is, holy ones. It is the continuing in the spiritual condition of believing and of living a holy life on the part of those in whom God has begun the work of salvation.

Persevering, therefore, is certainly not, as the enemies like to present it, that one will be saved regardless how he lives, as though one can live wickedly, continue in this wickedness without repentance and conversion, and still expect to go to heaven (see the “Conclusion” of the Canons: “...that it renders men carnally secure, since they are persuaded by it that nothing can hinder the salvation of the elect, let them live as they please...”). On the contrary, perseverance is that one continues in faith and holiness of life, to the very end.

The False Doctrine Opposed

In its confession of perseverance, the Canons contends with the false doctrine that teaches that one may enjoy the beginning of God’s work of salvation, but lose this salvation and perish forever in hell. One may be saved today, but go lost tomorrow and forever. The reason for this God-dishonoring and terrifying doctrine is that it makes perseverance the work of the sinner himself. It is a human perseverance without divine preservation. God does not preserve the saved sinner; he must preserve himself. In fact, this heresy teaches that the perseverance of saints is “a condition of the new covenant” (error and rejection 1).

At the time that the Canons was adopted by the universal synod of the Reformed churches, those who taught this conditional, losable salvation were a definite party in the churches who were known as Arminians. Today, a majority of professing Christians in all the world believe and teach the heresy that the Canons condemns in the 5th head.

Today also many Reformed churches, despite their confession as Reformed churches, teach conditional perseverance. Like the old Arminians at Dordt, they teach that perseverance is “a condition of the new covenant,” so that many who are regenerated and believing saints can and do lose their salvation and perish forever. Among these unfaithful churches and theologians, who rebel against the 5th head of
doctrine of the Canons, and thus against the gospel of grace, are all those who teach what they call the “federal [covenant] vision.” Just as did the old Arminians, these heretics teach that perseverance is not a gracious work of God, but a “condition of the new covenant.” According to them, many baptized children of believers are born again and receive the beginnings of the new life of Christ, but refuse to persevere, with the result that they lose their salvation and are damned. The 5th head of doctrine of the Canons condemns their false doctrine and warns the Reformed churches against their heresy.

**Biblical Basis**

The biblical basis of the doctrine of perseverance is abundant and clear. Most of the passages to which the Canons explicitly refers are in the rejection of errors section at the end of the 5th head. More than a dozen passages, many of them long, are quoted. The young person reading this article is urged to read the biblical passages in this section of the Canons. One of these passages is Romans 8:39: “No creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

**Assurance of Persevering**

Perseverance is a truth of the greatest comfort to the believer. Who can sufficiently praise, or be thankful for, one’s being certain, beyond any shadow of doubt, that he will continue in the salvation God has begun in him, so as certainly to be saved eternally in the new world that is coming?

Who can do justice to the horror of the terror of living in fear that one may fall away from Christ to the devil so that his eternal future will be the damnation of hell?

Not only does God preserve his elect, saved, believing children, but also he gives them assurance of his preservation of them. He does not merely assure them that all saints are preserved. Of what good is this, if one does not know the preservation of himself personally? He assures them that they themselves, as saints, will persevere.

The Canons teaches this personal assurance of perseverance: “Of this preservation of the elect to salvation, and of their perseverance in the faith, true believers for themselves may and do obtain assurance…” (Art. 9). Not as though believers never “struggle with various carnal doubts” (Art. 11), which doubts are always “carnal,” that is, wicked, and from which doubts they are always delivered: “the Holy Spirit again inspires them with the comfortable assurance of persevering” (Art. 11).

This assurance does not come from “any peculiar revelation...independent of the Word of God but springs from faith in God’s promises...in His Word” (Art. 10). The faith by which we are saved is assurance of continuing and everlasting salvation. It is assurance, not by receiving mysterious signs and having mystical experiences (the Canons’ “peculiar revelation”), but by resting on the promises of the word of God.

As the Canons states, this assurance is “solid comfort” in life and in death. Without this assurance, which is only a reality in the gospel confessed by the Canons of Dordt, we would be “of all men most miserable” (Art. 10).

One who is saved cannot go lost! Those who “went out from us,” according to 1 John 2:19, “were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

I who am saved by faith am assured that I cannot go lost! “Not in consequence of [my] own merits or strength, but of God’s free mercy” (Art. 8).

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**CHRISTIAN LIVING** Prof. Douglas Kuiper

**ATTAINING TO THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD**

Christ’s resurrection was a momentous event. It means that Christians have a savior who is alive today. Islam follows the teachings of a dead prophet, Judaism speaks of the future coming of a Messiah, but Christians worship a living, ever-present savior, who continues his work of salvation for us and in us.
Christ’s resurrection also reminds us that we find life’s true meaning in him—in who he is, in what he did, and in who we are in relation to him. So, what is your primary hope for the future? And how does that hope affect your life today?

The apostle Paul answered this question for himself. His primary hope was to attain the resurrection of the dead (Phil. 3:11, 21). This hope affected his life: his goal was to know Christ more deeply, to know the power of Christ’s resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings. In this way, he could be sure he would attain to the resurrection of the dead.

Paul’s hope was that in the last day Christ would raise his dead body. Of course, Christ will raise the dead body of every human—some to honor, and some to dishonor (John 5:29). Paul was not merely waiting for this event but desired that his body be raised unto honor and glory, resembling Christ’s glorious body (v. 21). He awaited the day when Christ will cause his decomposed body to exist again and will renew that body, so that sin’s effects are completely removed.

Every child of God must make Paul’s hope their own. This hope leads us to confess that Christ will return—a confession that distinguishes Christian young people from unbelieving young people. Christ is coming again? He will raise my dead body? I will live in heaven forever? Unbelievers scoff at these ideas. Christians believe them and find them to be their hope.

To have this hope is, in a certain sense, to be dissatisfied with our present life. Note that I did not say “discontent;” by God’s grace, we are content with our persons, gifts, circumstances, and positions in life. But we realize that this life will never provide the deepest joys that we will have in heaven, and we long to be there!

Is this your ultimate hope? With this ultimate hope, a Christian young person still makes plans to marry, go to college, or get a job in a certain field; but after we attain those earthly goals, we still have a higher hope yet! Or, if we never attain our earthly goals, we still have the hope that our bodies will be raised! In distinction from all earthly hopes, this hope is certain, being based on the work of Christ in his death and resurrection.

The certainty of this hope follows from our knowledge of the power of Christ’s resurrection. For Jesus arose: “the third day he rose again from the dead!” Christ’s resurrection was God’s word saying that Christ’s work on the cross was finished and complete. Also, Christ arose in order to continue his mediatorial work. Because we continue to sin, we need a mediator through whom we can ask God’s forgiveness, and who can assure us that forgiveness and all the blessings of salvation are ours. Because Islam and Judaism do not view their savior as a covenant mediator, they need not speak of a living savior. But if the Christian faith is true, our Mediator must live to continue his work!

Paul’s point is not to defend the fact of Christ’s resurrection, but to emphasize its power for us. Christ arose as our Head, representing us. God declared him righteous as our substitute. Christ earned righteousness for me and arose to bestow all spiritual blessings on me. That is the power of his resurrection.

Already now we experience this power in our souls. By regeneration, our souls have been raised to a new, heavenly life. Young people, confess this: “I am righteous before God in Christ now, and I have the power to live a godly life now.”

The certainty of this hope also follows from knowing the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. Paul moves backward from speaking of Christ’s resurrection to speaking of his sufferings. He who arose for us also suffered for us!

Because we cannot bear God’s wrath, and because we need add nothing to Christ’s atoning sufferings, the term “fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10) does not refer to these. Rather, it refers to the benefits of his death for me. Christ so really represented me, that when he died on the cross, my sins were borne, my old man was crucified with him (Rom. 6:6, Gal. 2:20), and the corruption of my nature was destroyed in principle.

If Christ already took away our sins and has begun to work in us his benefits by regenerating us, he will certainly finish that work by raising our dead bodies (Phil. 3:11)! The apostle lived his hope; we must also. His hope led him to reject all confidence in himself that he might know Christ the more (Phil. 3:4–9). As a Pharisee, Paul had been taught to trust in his position, his works, his zeal. He learned to renounce this trust, even esteeming his works “but dung.” (Phil. 3:8) in order to see that his salvation is in Christ alone. Have you a gift of which you are proud? Does some circumstance make you prominent? None of this will help us attain the resurrection of the dead. We must renounce ourselves, our works, and our gifts, and make our relationship with God in Christ the most important in our life. Our desire to attain the resurrection will show itself in our desire to grow in faith, in knowing the Scriptures, in using the means of grace, and in our fellowship with godly
**Devotional** Ben Laning

**THE DAILY PRESS**

“press toward the mark…”
*(Philippians 3:14)*

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### September 8 Read Jonah 2

Jonah had fallen deeply into sin by rejecting the command God gave him to preach at Nineveh, but in this chapter we see his spiritual strength. Even as he was in the fish’s belly, Jonah praised God with the words of the Psalms. He begins verse 2 similarly to how David begins Psalm 120, where he says, “In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me.” David used the phrase “all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me” in Psalm 42:7, which Jonah quoted at the end of verse 3. Similarities can be seen in Psalm 5:8 and 69:2 to verses 4 and 5 of the chapter. In Psalm 142:4 David says, “refuge failed me,” which is parallel to “my soul fainted” in verse 7. Jonah says that “They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy” in verse 8, which is the flipside of “I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy” in Psalm 31:7. Jonah ends his prayer in thankfulness and praise, very like Psalm 50:14, which reads, “Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High.” *Sing or pray Psalter #138.*

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### September 9 Read Jonah 3

Kids, can you imagine that your sibling does something really mean to you? Then, when your parents find out what he did, they hardly discipline him! How does that make you feel? Angry? Frustrated? You wanted your sibling to be punished for the wrong he did you, right?

Well, that’s just how Jonah felt. After his initial rejection of the command, Jonah went willingly to preach in Nineveh, but he went there with the understanding that the city would be destroyed. Jonah’s own people didn’t listen to him, so of course these wicked Ninevites wouldn’t. However, much to Jonah’s surprise the Ninevites listen to him and show signs of repentance. This makes Jonah angry with God. Why was he doing this? These people deserve to die for all the wickedness they’d committed in the world. Jonah begins to feel that he knows how to do God’s work better than God does. By nature, we are all prone to foolish pride and must fight against this temptation ourselves. *Sing or pray Psalter #139.*

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### September 10 Read Jonah 4

Jonah is very angry with God here. We begin with Jonah asking God to take his life, to which God replies, “Doest thou well to be angry?” Jonah responds by giving God the silent treatment and making a booth to sit in and pout while he dares God not to destroy the city. After God raises and
kills the gourd that provided shade, Jonah is boiling. When he again says he wants to die, God repeats his question back. This time Jonah responds, “I do well to be angry, even unto death.”

How often do we tend to think we are justified in our anger? After all, how can you not be angry against someone who has mistreated you? However, that’s exactly what the Bible teaches. It’s true there is a time for righteous anger, but usually our anger is anything but righteous. We think we’ve earned the right to be angry with this or that person because of their actions. We want to see them pay, as discussed yesterday. We, like Jonah, need to put off this sinful anger and embrace the truth that God is in complete control and will work all things for our good. Sing or pray Psalter #145.

**September 11** Read 2 Kings 15

After Israel and Judah split, the ten tribes immediately began to spiral downward, but Judah continued to worship God for a short time. This chapter provides a contrast between the two sides. The first king mentioned is Azariah, king of Judah. He reigned for a long time and obeyed God’s commandments, although he failed to remove the high places and died of leprosy because of his sin. Around the same time, we are told that Zachariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea all reigned in Israel. Did you happen to notice what the “How To” book on becoming a king of Israel looks like? It’s a pretty quick read: “Kill the current king.” Nearly every one of these guys became ruler by murdering the guy before them. Interestingly it’s Menahem, the guy who ripped up pregnant women like the Ammonites were judged for, that dies peacefully. The chapter ends by going back to Judah and the reign of Jotham, who again did what was right with the exception of the high places. By this time Israel had fallen so far that they were even seeking to destroy their brethren in Judah. Sing or pray Psalter #156.

**September 12** Read 2 Chronicles 26

I’ve talked before about how the same thing in the Bible can picture opposing ideas. I was struck by that again as I read this chapter about Uzziah being smitten with leprosy. Why do you think God made leprosy, a disease mentioned often in the Bible, to be white? According to biblestudy.org, white is the most frequently mentioned color in the Bible. It typically symbolizes righteousness, purity, wisdom, holiness, and joy. In Revelation 19 we read of Christ himself riding a white horse. Interestingly, though, we also read of another white horse in Revelation 6:2, which reads, “And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.” Biblestudy.org says that this horse actually “represents the ability of Satan to deceive and seem like he represents God,” as supported by the fact that he needs to be given the crown and fight for control. Could this have any connection with the reason for leprosy being white, a color typically used to symbolize good? Sing or pray Psalter #144.

**September 13** Read Isaiah 1

In John Calvin’s preface to this book, he says that the law is divided into three parts: the doctrine of life, threatenings and promises, and the covenant of grace. He explains that the Old Testament prophets explained these different aspects of the law better, especially the parts that had been misunderstood. For example, they explained that outward adherence wasn’t enough; one had to obey from the heart.

Calvin brings out the fact that Isaiah’s dad was Amoz, a brother of Azariah, king of Judah, yet Isaiah was treated like the lowest of the low. In this, he is a picture of Christ, the king of kings, who was rejected in the city of his birth. As Jesus himself said in Luke 4:24, “No prophet is accepted in his own country.” Still, Isaiah continued to prophesy for at least 64 years, which is a great lesson for us to trust in God and persevere even in the face of extreme hardship. Sing or pray Psalter #142.

**September 14** Read Isaiah 2

We had a sermon this morning on the command not to murder. Our pastor used a story from his days as an emergency medical technician (EMT) to illustrate the extreme prevalence of murder today. He said they arrived on the scene of a stabbing. The victim, although bleeding profusely, refused treatment, because he was only concerned about finding and murdering the one who had injured him. As the EMTs tried to coax the man to let them help him a large crowd began to gather. Then, a police car came speeding to the scene. The policeman jumped out and foolishly used a racial slur as he demanded to know what was going on. This riled the entire crowd up, and they began to close in on the officer, one even leveling a gun at him. The horrible scene was only brought back under control when cop cars started pouring in from all directions.

As Calvin puts it, “Nothing is more desirable...
than peace; but while all imagine that they desire it, every one disturbs it by the madness of his lusts.” As Isaiah 2:4 brings out, true peace is only attainable when we get to our heavenly home. Sing or pray Psalter #150.

Isaiah 3:16 talks about how Judah had become like a foolish woman, who danced around haughtily in her flashy attire, giving seductive glances as she went. As judgment, her beauty is taken away, and she is made a disgrace in verse 17. As we often read in the Bible, women are commanded to pursue inner beauty, and not to be consumed with their outward appearance. 1 Timothy 2:9–10 makes this clear by stating, “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.” Of course, this doesn’t only apply to the women in the church. Being concerned with outward appearance can be broadened to loving the things of this world, something which we all struggle with. Just as this was happening in and to Judah during the time of Isaiah, so the church today is constantly being tempted to seek an earthly kingdom. God has given man so many abilities today that sometimes we can fall asleep spiritually and forget that this is not our home. Sing or pray Psalter #161.

There is a stark contrast between the first verse of this chapter and the ones that follow. The chapter begins by continuing the previous chapter’s revelation of God’s judgment on the foolish women of Judah. However, things quickly turn around in verse 2. Here Isaiah begins talking about the blessings on the remnant and the coming of Christ. The vineyard was destroyed, but a fruitful branch remains. That fruitful branch, which is Christ, will “be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel” (Isa. 4:2). This remnant that “escaped” destruction is said, in verse 5, to be led by a “cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night.” These visible manifestations of God’s presence were the way in which he led his people through the wilderness, which was a picture of how we are perfectly led through every step of our lives. Sing or pray Psalter #160.

My study Bible summarizes Isaiah 5: 8–30 as the “six woes on the worldly hedonists.” These woes are said to be “selfishness, hedonism, self-sufficiency, perverted thinking, arrogance, and a perverted legal system.” These six woes are even more prevalent today than they were then. They keep man from accomplishing his goal of making this world a better place. There is much talk about stewardship and caring for the environment, but that continually falls by the wayside as everyone seeks his own benefit. Hedonism refers to the constant pursuit of pleasure, which companies prey on in their advertising. With all the technology of the day, man thinks himself self-sufficient and in control of his own destiny. Perverted thinking is seen everywhere, from applauding outright murder to instituting marriage between two people of the same sex. Arrogance manifests itself in the belittling and hateful comments everywhere on the internet and in social media. It’s evident that our legal system is perverted when one can be on death row for most of his life, and many are not put to death for murdering others. As we see these woes around us, may it cause us to set our eyes more on Christ, our Deliverer. Sing or pray Psalter #162.

Verses 9 and 10 of this chapter are interesting. God tells Isaiah to “Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.” This wording makes it sound like God is trying to deceive the people and keep them from believing, but we must remember to interpret scripture with scripture. Throughout the previous chapters, God has made it known that the blame for this blindness lies with the people. In chapter 3 we read of the foolish women who rejected spiritual things and lived for the pleasures of this word, and in chapter 5 we heard about the six woes being committed by the people of Judah. One thing we can learn from these verses, though, is that the preaching is never wasted. The gospel is a two-edged sword, so even if no one believes the word that’s preached, the cause of the gospel to harden some has been accomplished. Sing or pray Psalter #201.

In verse 17, Isaiah begins speaking to Ahaz of God’s
judgment that’s going to come upon the false church. Judah has started to place their trust in wicked nations, so God is going to give even the weak countries the power to destroy them. These “flies” and “bees” will “shave” Judah, indicating their disgrace. Land that used to be fertile will now be nothing more than thorns and thistles.

Bleak though this sounds, at first glance the situation appears to change in verse 22. Here we read that there will be an abundance of milk, butter, and honey. Is this now a blessing? My study Bible says the point here is just that there will be so few people left that those who remain will have plenty. This is consistent with the passage, for it goes on to talk about bows and arrows being needed for defense and killing food. Matthew Henry summarizes the passage by reminding us that the earth changes quickly, but our heavenly home does not. *Sing or pray Psalter #158.*

### September 20 Read Isaiah 8

Isaiah 8:17 reads, “And I will wait upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.” There are two things I’d like to mention here. First, notice the strong faith that’s required to wait here. Isaiah continues waiting even though God is hiding his face. Our sinful nature tells us that we only need to fulfill our duties if others are watching. We only need to act kindly to someone if they act kindly to us. We only need to respect those in authority if they show care for us. We only need to wait on God if he’s responding to us the way we want. In contrast, true faith is shown in waiting perseverance, even when God hides his face. Secondly, the waiting requires action. We don’t just sit back and let what happens happen. We have a responsibility to work, to “look for him,” as the verse says. It is when we look for him daily that God gives us the grace to continue that waiting. *Sing or pray Psalter #164.*

### September 21 Read Amos 1

The book begins, “The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.” Amos was from Judah, but God called him to preach to Israel. My study Bible says that Tekoa was known for its rich pastureland, so Amos probably left a lucrative business in answering this call. We read that he prophesied during the days of Uzziah and Jeroboam II, whose reign saw much prosperity. In fact, Israel became so large during the days in which Jeroboam II was the king that it even rivaled the kingdom during the days of Solomon. This prosperity gave the Israelites false confidence that God was with them, which Amos addresses directly throughout the book. Finally, we read that this was two years before the earthquake. We don’t know much about this earthquake, but we also read of it in Zechariah 14:5, so it must have been a major event. *Sing or pray Psalter #168.*

### September 22 Read Amos 2

A phrase often seen throughout the first two chapters of this book is, “Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof.” The verse or verses that follow usually indicate one or two sins committed by these people, so what are these four transgressions spoken of? A couple of commentaries I looked at seemed to agree that this is more a figure of speech than an exact list of sins committed. Three represents a full array of sins, and four indicates that the wickedness is overflowing and the time for judgment has come.

Although most of the places have one or two sins mentioned, Israel actually has seven. First, they sold their brethren into slavery. Second, they take advantage of the poor. Third, they reject the meek and are proud. Fourth, adultery is become commonplace. Fifth, they gather around altars and drink wine in the worship of their idols. Sixth and seventh, they blatantly disobeyed God’s commandments by giving Nazarites wine and silencing the prophets. Because of all these sins the cup of Israel’s iniquity was overflowing and they were ripe for judgment. *Sing or pray Psalter #166.*

### September 23 Read Amos 3

In verse 14 we read that God will cut off the horns of the altar, which were made of acacia wood covered in brass (Ex. 27:2), as part of Israel’s judgment. They were often touched with sacrificial blood, as seen in Exodus 29:12 and Leviticus 4:30, as a sign of the salvation and safety we have in Christ. Therefore, the horns on the altar of burnt offering were seen as a place of refuge. We see this in 1 Kings 1:50, where Adonijah grabbed hold of the altar’s horns as he pleaded for his life. Solomon agreed not to kill him if he showed himself to be righteous. In the next chapter Joab, who had sided with Adonijah, tried the same thing, but Solomon commanded he
be killed there anyway. Joab deserved no mercy, for he had murdered multiple people and needed to be put to death. Now Israel found themselves in the same predicament as Joab, without the possibility of escape from judgment. Sing or pray Psalter #165.

**September 24** Read Amos 4

The second part of this chapter talks about all the ways God afflicted Israel in their sin, yet they still refused to repent. First, he sent great drought. Then, he sent diseases and pests that killed their crops. Third, Israel’s mighty army had been destroyed in battle. Some of their houses were even burnt to the ground, yet they still continued in their sin.

This spiritual blindness reminded me of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, recounted in Luke 16. At the end of this story, the rich man asks God to send Lazarus to warn his family, so they don’t end up in hell as he did. God responds that they have Moses and the prophets to warn them, but the rich man insists they will only listen if someone is sent from the dead. The chapter ends with God saying, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” Sing or pray Psalter #300.

**September 25** Read Amos 5

Amos 5:18 reads, “Woe unto you that desire the day of the L ord! to what end is it for you? the day of the L ord is darkness, and not light.” Aren’t we supposed to desire that day? Why does this verse call it darkness? The answer is that this is directed at the wicked in Israel who were ripe for judgment. They were foolish to think that the day of the Lord would be good for them. They were not God’s children, so all it meant for them was the beginning of everlasting fire and torment. Israel didn’t understand this, and neither did the Pharisees in Jesus’ day. They thought heaven was a lock-in for them because Abraham was their father and they obeyed all these special rules they made for themselves. We can think this way sometimes too. We think that since we have grown up in a good church and attended faithfully, we are assured a place in heaven. However, the Bible clearly states that only those who obey from the heart by God’s grace will enter those pearly gates. As Romans 9:6 states, “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.” Sing or pray Psalter #279.

**September 26** Read Amos 6

I believe I’ve brought this out before, but isn’t it stunning to see the world’s reaction to horrific events, such as school shootings and other terrorist attacks? Suddenly huge masses of people are gathering together for prayer. Some who only go to church on Christmas and Easter are now addressing God as a good friend.

In the last part of Amos 6:10 we read that in the day of judgment an uncle will say to his nephew, “Hold thy tongue: for we may not make mention of the name of the L ord.” They won’t be able to call on God for help, because he’s the one sending the judgment.

Just as those who haven’t been given faith today are unworthy to make mention of God’s name, so it will be at the end of time. In Matthew 7:21–23, Jesus says that in the last day the wicked will cry to God asking him to remember all the good works they did, but he will respond, “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” Sing or pray Psalter #297.

**September 27** Read Amos 7

There’s an interesting exchange in this chapter between Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, and Amos. Amaziah doesn’t like the word that Amos has been bringing, so he tattles to Jeroboam and tells Amos to return to Judah. His reasoning for this is found in verse 13, where he says, “But prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king’s chapel, and it is the king’s court.” This is significant because Amaziah is clearly stating Israel has rejected God as their king. He has no place there because the king they have chosen is earthly. Amos’s response in verse 17 is biting. “Therefore thus saith the Lord; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.” What’s the judgment for rejecting God? His wife would become a whore, his children would be slaughtered, his possessions would be stripped from him, and he would die in a wasteland. Our God is holy, and as the holy one, he demands worship. Sing or pray Psalter #302.

**September 28** Read Amos 8

In chapter 7 Amos saw a plumbline and in Amos 8:2 he saw a basket of summer fruit. In both visions, God says of Israel, “I will not again pass by them any more.” What’s the connection between this plumbline and basket of fruit? According to my study Bible, some think this word “plumbline,”
which is rare in Hebrew, actually refers to tin to symbolize the military strength that would defeat Israel. However, the word probably refers to a lead weight at the end of a line to measure straightness. Israel would be found crooked, fail the test, and be judged. The vision of the summer fruit also has to do with their impending judgment. Just as a basket of summer fruit becomes ripe and ready to eat, so Israel was ripe and ready for judgment. God will not pass by them anymore because he has forsaken the people that forsook him. Without God, they are like Samson without his amazing strength, and they will be quickly consumed by their enemies. Sing or pray Psalter #308.

Most of this book is very negative, but Amos does end on a positive note. This really begins in verse 11, but something else should be noted from verses 8–10. Here we see that one of the purposes of judgment is to identify the remnant. As we already discussed, the same event that means destruction for the wicked is a blessing on the righteous. These difficult times are used by God to try the saints and strengthen them more to put their trust in him.

In verse 12 we read, “That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this.” This verse speaks about the glorious church gathered from all nations. Wicked Balaam was also used by God in Numbers 24:18 to prophesy of Edom, as the representative of the Gentile world, being included in the New Testament church. The apostle James also quotes this section in support of his argument that the gospel was now to the Gentiles, to us. Sing or pray Psalter #307.

Verse 2 reads, “And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah did: howbeit he entered not into the temple of the Lord. And the people did yet corruptly.” Jotham was a good king like his father, but he didn’t fall into the same grievous sin his father did. In 2 Chronicles 26, we are told that Uzziah became proud and went into the temple to burn incense, even though he knew that was only for the priests to do. Those there implored the king to leave, but he only responded with anger, and God struck him with leprosy in the forehead before their eyes.

The last part of this verse tells a sad truth. Judah was beginning to slide into apostasy. Here they still had a God-fearing king, but the people didn’t follow his example. It’s a very difficult trial when children in the church go wayward, despite sound instruction. In such trials we’re comforted by Jesus’ words: “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Matt. 12:50). Sing or pray Psalter #275.

In verse 20 of this chapter, we read that those who are ripe for judgment “shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm.” The next verse continues that Ephraim and Manasseh do this to one another, and both turn against Judah. This is the sad state of affairs for those who are ripe for judgment. They self-destruct by fighting amongst themselves and eating their own arm. We need to hear this word as we live in the final days. As hatred for the truth abounds around us, it’s more important than ever that we are united. The devil is always striving to cause division in our midst, so he can tear apart the bond of friendship we have in Christ Jesus. An army that’s split up is much easier to defeat than an army that bands together. We should be mindful of this in the disagreements that arise in the church and deal with one another in love, lest we aid the devil in his cause. Sing or pray Psalter #265.

God tells us in this chapter how he has given Sennacherib king of Assyria the power to destroy Israel for their wicked ways. Sennacherib’s own words are included in verses 8–11. He starts off by saying, “Are not my princes altogether kings?” According to Matthew Henry, this could mean that those under him were once kings of other nations, that his subjects lived like kings, or that his princes had been made kings of nations which he conquered. He continues his boasting by talking about the cities he has defeated, although it was actually his predecessor that destroyed Samaria, as Henry points out.

Many interpret the last few verses of the chapter to be a reversal. Where the topic had been Assyria’s destruction of Israel, now it talks about God’s judgment on Assyria. John Calvin, however, disagreed. He believed that these verses are still referring to the judgment on Israel. In support, he points to the mention of Lebanon in the concluding verse and the fact that the next chapter begins with the branch that comes out of that destruction. Sing or pray Psalter #361.
October 3  Read Isaiah 11

In chapter 9 we talked about the sad division that existed within the church as their judgment began to unfold. Instead of joining together to fight the forces of evil they destroyed each other, as Israel’s enemies did in 2 Chronicles 20. This division is contrasted with the beautiful unity displayed in this chapter. In verses 6–8 we read that there will be peace between the wolf and lamb, the leopard and the kid, the lion and the calf, the bear and the cow, and the snake and the child.

This last one is especially interesting because the snake was cursed at the fall. I believe it’s commonly taught that the snake is the one creature that won’t exist in heaven. Isaiah 65:25 seems to support this when it says, “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent’s meat.” If that’s true, though, why do you think Isaiah 11 mentions peace between the snake and the child as an example of heavenly glory? Is there a distinction to be made between the snake before the fall and the one that exists today?

Sing or pray Psalter #371.

October 4  Read Isaiah 12

My study Bible asks, “What motives does this chapter give believers to stir a desire to praise God and declare his great works to others?” There are a couple of great motives for this already in the first verse. We read here that God’s anger has been turned away and he comforts us. Experiencing God’s wrath is a terrible thing. Jesus experienced this infinitely more than any of us as he hung on the cross for our sakes, and in the depths of that anger he cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” The wicked will also experience the full force of this wrath at the end of time and will ask the mountains to fall on them because of it, as we read in Revelation 6:16. However, the wonderful thing for us is that, instead of this perfect anger, we experience comfort. God comforts us in every situation of life so that we can say with Paul in Philippians 4:11, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” Following this verse, there are other motives for praise mentioned in the chapter. Which ones do you see? Sing or pray Psalter #347.

October 5  Read Micah 1

According to my study Bible Micah’s name means, “Who is like Jehovah?” He was alive during the same time as Isaiah and appears to have written the book himself. The prophecies of Amos, which we just considered, and Micah are very similar, because many of the same sins needed to be addressed. Both prophets needed to address the love of money, which had become exalted above truth. The rich were taking advantage of the poor and living very immorally. In other words, the situation for Amos and Micah is very like the one in which we find ourselves today. The theme of the book is said to be, “Penalty of judgment and promise of restoration.” The theme of Amos was similar again, but the restoration not as pronounced. One key difference between the two, however, is that Amos’ message was to Israel, while Micah was sent to preach in Judah. Whereas Amos spoke of judgment that came almost immediately, the judgment Micah spoke of in Judah was more delayed. Sing or pray Psalter #216.

October 6  Read Micah 2

Remember the story of Naboth and Ahab in 1 Kings 21? Ahab sat in his summer palace and looked out over Naboth’s vineyard. It was a beautiful place, and Ahab decided he wanted it. When he proposed purchasing it, however, Naboth said he couldn’t sell his inheritance. This surprised and frustrated Ahab, and he returned to his palace to sulk. When Jezebel heard about this, she rebuked Ahab for forgetting who he was and said she’d get the vineyard for him. She hired men to lie about Naboth, which ultimately led to his execution, after which Ahab took the land for himself. At the time it would have seemed Ahab had won, but we know he was judged for it later.

I thought of this story when I read Micah 2:2 about the rich stealing the fields and houses of the poor. Ahab was judged for this sin more than a hundred years before, and now it had become something that Judah would be judged for in the future. Stealing one’s property is bad enough, but what made this especially grievous is that these homes and fields that were being stolen were a picture of their place in heaven. Sing or pray Psalter #219.

October 7  Read Micah 3

Verse 11 talks about how the priests and prophets had become mercenaries who worked simply to make themselves rich. This idea brought two things to mind. The first is the story of Balaam who was hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse Israel. Balaam was a very wicked man who loved riches, but lustful though he was he could only speak the words that God put in his mouth. The result was a beautiful
prophecy of the coming Messiah in Numbers 24. The second thing that came to mind is how this verse applies to the Roman Catholic Church. As we learned in Ancient World History, during the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church was more powerful than the kings were. They had blasphemously used God’s name to gain for themselves huge amounts of land and wealth. They, like the wicked prophets and priests of Micah’s day, still claimed God was with them and would protect them. Micah speaks out against that foolish thinking. God blesses those who seek him by faith, not those who put down roots in this earth. *Sing or pray Psalter #245.*

**Church News** Melinda Bleyenberg

**BAPTISMS**

“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Mark 10:14

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

Remy Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Caleb & Deanna Spriensma—Byron Center, MI
Paige Allison, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Josh & Karla Lennon—Byron Center, MI
Levi Todd, son of Mr. & Mrs. Bob & Katie Birkett—Crete, IL
Elliot Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Todd & Joy Zandstra—Crete, IL
Zachary Douglas, son of Rev. & Mrs. Matt & Kelsey DeBoer—Edgerton, MN
Gavin Reid, son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Hannah VanDyke—Georgetown, MI
Crew Benjamin, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle & Kelsey Glass—Georgetown, MI
Courtney Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. John & Anna Heyboer—Grace, MI
Boone Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Cory & Rachel Van Overloop—Grace, MI
Makenna Nikole, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jared & Lydia Bosveld—Hope, MI
Emma Catherine, daughter or Mr. & Mrs. George & Cathy Kamps—Hudsonville, MI
Olive Beverley, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dan & Jori Kuiper—Hudsonville, MI
Hope Addison, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Kelly Butler—Hudsonville, MI
Emily Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Fred & Becky Johnston—Spokane, WA
Haven Rae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Josh & Elizabeth Lucas—Sioux Falls, SD
Fern, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric & Annie Pastoor—Southeast, MI
Anthony Walter, son of Mr. & Mrs. Alex & Katrina Kaiser—Southeast, MI

**CONFESSIONS OF FAITH**

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 10:32

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

Olivia Engen, Megan Hunderman—Byron Center, MI
Cobie Lenting, Michala Lubbers—Crete, IL
Annika Brands, Megan Gunnink, Colin VerHey—Edgerton, MN
Daren Moelker, Tyler Vanden Top—Grace, MI
Juanita DeBoer, Riley Moore—Lynden, WA

**MARRIAGES**

“For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14

Mr. Brandon Kuiper and Miss Alaina Ondersma—Byron Center, MI
Mr. Jason Koole and Miss Bethany Dykstra—Byron Center, MI
Mr. Andrew Lenting and Miss Ashley Brummel—Crete, IL
Mr. Eric VanDrunen and Miss Hannah VanMaanen—Crete, IL
Mr. Jordan Van Oostenbrugge and Miss Mary Bogardus—Grace, MI
Mr. Matthew Duncan and Miss Brenda VanBaren—Grace, MI
Mr. Stephen Boonstra and Miss Alexis Poortinga—Loveland, CO
Mr. Scott Brands and Miss Carly Regnerus—Randolph, WI
Mr. Sean Cleary and Miss Kaitlyn VanBaren—Southwest, MI
SYNOD OF DORDT PART 8: PRINCE MAURICE TAKES ACTION

By 1617–18, the theological and political situation in the Netherlands had become tense. The truce would end in only three more years. What would happen when the war with Spain resumed, and the Netherlands was divided between Remonstrants and Gomarists? At the moment, the Netherlands was on the brink of a civil war between Prince Maurice, with the Gomarists, and Johan van Oldenbarnevelt and the Remonstrants.

In August 1618, Prince Maurice took action. He sent in the army to disband van Oldenbarnevelt’s militias and had van Oldenbarnevelt and other leaders arrested for treason. Johan van Oldenbarnevelt would be executed for treason in 1619. Prince Maurice replaced Remonstrant leaders with Gomarist leaders. And Prince Maurice called for a national synod to settle the theological questions once and for all.

We can’t know Prince Maurice’s heart if he did all of this only for political reasons or also for spiritual reasons. But we can be thankful God used him to bring about the Synod of Dordt. If van Oldenbarnevelt had succeeded in overthrowing Prince Maurice, Arminianism would’ve been the national view of the Netherlands and very likely the Synod of Dordt would not have happened.

The Remonstrants were seen as being soft toward Spain, and Prince Maurice feared they would give in to Spain once the truce ended in 1621. Prince Maurice and his late father Prince William of Orange had fought for complete freedom from Spain. That freedom couldn’t be risked now.

Little Lights Let It Shine!
Tricia Mingerink

Johan van Oldenbarnevelt

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
Grace and Assurance
The Message of the Canons of Dordt

In 1618-19 the great Synod of Dordt met to counter the Arminian error that was threatening the peace and welfare of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. The fruit of their deliberations was the Canons of Dordt, a creed which has defined the Calvinist, Reformed faith for centuries.

This accessible commentary on the Canons leads readers through the comforting message of the creed: being wholly saved by God’s grace—not one’s own merit—comes with the steadfast assurance of eternal and unchangeable election.

by Martyn McGeown

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