

THE CANONS OF DORT

Irresistible Grace

Teaching for Peace Church

October 12, 2008

PURPOSE - To teach the irresistible nature of God's grace as we experience it in regeneration and the call to Christ – and respond to this grace by a passion for obedience.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," – and THERE WAS LIGHT!

God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.

1. Tonight we come to the 4th MAIN POINT in the teachings of the Canons of Dort (= a 17th document produced at a gathering of the church leaders in Dordrecht, Netherlands at which they had to define God's and mankind's roles & responsibilities in salvation.)

- Tonight we look at the point commonly known as IRRESISTIBLE GRACE.

5 points about salvation were discussed at that Synod. They are popularly known as the 5 points of Calvinism, remembered by the acronym T.U.L.I.P.

Total Depravity

Unconditional Election

Limited (Definite) Atonement

Irresistible Grace

Perseverance of the Saints

2. Irresistible Grace is nothing other than the WITNESS of the first verses of Scripture.

- Into the darkness, God spoke. God said, "Let there be light" ... AND THERE WAS LIGHT!

= It happened ... IRRESISTABLY

The earth – dark, formless & void – DID NOT RESIST, could not resist

God spoke & it happened.

- (i) I explained in an earlier sermon in this series that the 5 points of Calvinism are essentially ONE POINT – “GOD SAVES SINNERS”

The 5 points are delineations, out-workings, implications, applications of that one main point.

- A. God saves sinners. Faith doesn't save us. Our choice doesn't save us. Human will doesn't save us. Being born in a covenant family doesn't save us. The church doesn't save us. Baptism doesn't save us. GOD SAVES SINNERS.

John 1:13 – Christians are *“children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.”*

3. The point about TOTAL DEPRAVITY – focused on the effects of sin requiring God to be the one to save sinners.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION – further explains WHY God has not & CANNOT set up any conditions or expectations in order to save us.

LIMITED / DEFINITE ATONEMENT – focused on WHO God ultimately chooses to save

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE – begins to focus on HOW WE consciously EXPERIENCE salvation and God's role in that.

II. REJECTIONS

To begin tonight, let's turn in the back of our gray hymnals to p. 942.

I want to explain to you the teaching that the Synod had to address – and eventually declare as Biblically FALSE. It's known as Arminianism, named after Jacobus Arminius – a theological professor from the University of Leiden. He himself did not write these exact words, it was his followers who took his teachings and wrote them.

They're in the gray-shaded boxes:

1. READ REJECTION 7

- Key word is that God only “persuades” (not commands – like Gen. 1 / Ez. 37)
- And that He does not produce the assent of the will.

2. READ REJECTION 8

- Because He only persuades in the call of the gospel, God is not omnipotent to change the WILL of man to obey Him.

- Even when God uses ALL of his powers – “all his works of grace” – still man can RESIST Him.

3. READ REJECTION 9

- So salvation is taught as a CO-OPERATIVE endeavor.
- Yes, we recognize that man is operative & responsible in responding to the call of God ... but WHAT CAUSES this response? Is it first the work of God’s grace? Or is it the choice of man?

4. The Arminian teaching can be summarized this way (bulletin):

The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel’s invitation; He does all that he can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the Spirit’s call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man’s contribution) precedes and makes possible the new birth. Thus, man’s free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ’s saving work. The Holy Spirit can only draw to Christ those who allow Him to have His way with them. Until the sinner responds, the Spirit cannot give life. God’s grace, therefore, is not invincible; it can be, and often is, resisted and thwarted by man.

III. BIBLICAL TEACHING

But does this accord with Biblical teaching?

Ez. 36:26-27 – “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put y Spirit in you and MOVE YOU to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

1. Let’s open our Bibles to Romans 8:28 - READ Romans 8:28-32

This passage makes clear that salvation is God’s work. Verse 29 – “Those he predestined to receive salvation, he also CALLED; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

This refers to a CALL that IS NOT resisted – because the CALLED become the JUSTIFIED and the GLORIFIED.

= this is known as the INWARD call of the Spirit ... or EFFICACIOUS CALL that the elect receive.

– It’s a call, heard with the heart, moving a person to saving faith in Christ.

- (i) This is distinguished from the OUTWARD CALL, a call heard with the ear. It is the preaching of the gospel to all people
 - a. The inward, efficacious call is the hearing of that gospel with a heart that’s been miraculously opened by the Spirit TO RECEIVE IT.

2. God opens the heart.

Acts 16:14 – “One who heard was a woman named Lydia, form the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul.”

The opening of the heart – REGENERATION – LEADS to faith ... it’s not, as Arminianism claims, that our choice opens the heart.

3. So the Bible teaches that FAITH is a gift of God.

Eph. 2:8-9 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – not because of works, lest any man should boast.”

Phil. 1:29 – “For it has been GRANTED TO YOU that for the sake of Christ you should not only BELIEVE in Him, but also suffer for his sake.”

IV. CANON’S TEACHING

Now let’s turn to PAGE 938 in our gray hymnals to see how the Canons explain this.

We’ll cover Articles 8-11

1. READ ARTICLE 8

- This refers to the OUTWARD / EXTERNAL CALL of the gospel.

I.e. – Jesus (Mt. 11) - “Come to me all you who are weary & heavy laden ... and I will give you rest.” I proclaim it. You hear it. It’s serious.

Later, however, Jesus also said, “Only those that the Father gives me will come to me.” (Jn. 6) – they are those who’ve experienced the internal call ... irresistible grace.

2. READ ARTICLE 9

- This asserts that, even though only those who are born of the Spirit, will ANSWER the call and come to Christ, nevertheless ALL PEOPLE ARE RESPONSIBLE for how they respond to the call of Jesus.

The seed is the call of the gospel ... "Lord, let my heart be good soil ..."

3. READ ARTICLE 10

- This confirms that those who do respond are those to whom God has granted faith to believe. These are the "effectively called" (middle of paragraph), chosen from eternity.

4. ARTICLE 11 explains how they are given faith – READ THAT IS REGENERATION.

- (i) And this work is no better pictured than Ezekiel's vision. "Dem Bones, dem bones, dem dry bones" – are put together ... and then breathed into by the power of God's Spirit.

5. So here's how the Canon's teaching is SUMMARIZED on your outline:

"In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably (irresistibly) brings them to salvation. The internal call cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion."

V. CONCLUSION

To conclude, let's turn in our Bibles to Matthew 22.

1. I want to read this parable of Jesus for 2 REASONS:
 - To ILLUSTRATE the external and internal call of God
 - To think about how we RESPOND to this teaching.

READ MATTHEW 22:1-14

"For many are invited (called), but few are chosen"

That line can also be translated: *For many are the called, but few are the chosen.*

2. The more common translation illustrates the teaching of irresistible grace – God calls many, God chooses few.
 - It focuses on the AGENCY of salvation:
 - (i) There's an external call of the gospel / kingdom ... = feast
 - (ii) There's an internal call – that the chosen also receive – a hearing of the heart which leads to a life of faith & obedience.

3. The less common translation brings a much different sense to this line of Jesus: MANY ARE THE CALLED, FEW ARE THE CHOSEN.

Here it become a statement of OBSERVATION

It becomes a statement through which you look at yourself and say, "Who am I? Am I the chosen?"

- (i) Jesus is commenting that the CHOSEN are those who hear the call of the kingdom with joy.
 - Their hearts are not captured by business, the economy, property
- (ii) The chosen also are those PROPERLY DRESSED for the banquet – something we understand, in the light of all the NT, to represent the righteousness of Christ Jesus – our clothing – our covering, our righteousness.

ARE YOU ONE OF GOD'S CHOSEN?

4. The only way we know that is if that is our heart, our trust, our clothing, our passion.

There are times in Reformed Christianity when we miss this point.

Yes, we understand the doctrines of election & predestination. Somehow, however, they lead us to that state described as being the FROZEN CHOSEN.

Rather than firing our hearts with passion to pray and seek and rejoice in Christ, we become fatalistic and flat in our life with God.

5. May that never be!

The chosen are those who have heard the invitation of God's feast with their ears & HEART ... and have rejoiced in that call.

The chosen are those who love the holiness of Jesus as their security in life – their covering before God.

The chosen are those who see themselves as part of an ARMY - Ezekiel's army – put together & breathed into by God's Spirit.

= IRRESISTIBLE ... AMAZING ... GRACE !!!

Amen.