

The Canons of Dort
PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Teaching for Peace Church
Oct. 19, 2008

PURPOSE – To teach the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and how to respond to it with joy, confidence, trust and zeal!

I. INTRODUCTION

Let's open our Bibles to JOHN 6:35

1. Tonight we finish our series on the Canons of Dort – otherwise known as the “5 points of Calvinism” (Not that Calvinism has only 5 points. Its theology speaks to ALL of life. The teaching of the Canons has to do with personal salvation.)

The 5 points are known by the acronym T.U.L.I.P.

= Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited (Definite) Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and tonight ... the PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

2. Reflected in these words of Jesus ... *READ JOHN 6:35-40*

(i) In each of these sermons on the 5 points of Calvinism, I have been careful to say that the 5 points are only DERIVATIONS of ONE POINT – Namely, GOD SAVES SINNERS.

Verse 36 – *All the Father gives me WILL COME TO ME! – and whoever comes I will never drive away*

– God saves sinners ... not our choice / our church, not our faith / family ... God saves sinners.

(ii) And tonight we celebrate that He saves them TO THE VERY END:

Verse 39 – *This is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day!*

- A. Hallelujah! As Rick Stallinga said last week, we humans can start a lot of projects and not complete them. But God's not like that
If starting salvation was up to us, salvation's completion would be in doubt.

B. But – Philippians 1:6 – Paul could pray WITH JOY for the Philippian Christian’s partnership in the gospel because ... *He who began a good work in you will carry it on to COMPLETION until the day of Christ Jesus!*

(iii) Adrian Dieleman puts it this way:

“You drive your car over the Golden Gate Bridge with perfect faith that it will hold you and that you will arrive safely on the other side.

With just as good a faith you may drive onto some wooden bridge over a country stream, but if the boards are decayed you will fall into the stream.

It is not your sincerity of your faith that keeps you safe. It is the object of your faith that makes the difference. What makes the difference is the BRIDGE.”

- Our security in salvation is not our faith ... our security is God Himself – the OBJECT of our faith ... He who began a good work in you, HE will bring it to completion!

II. ARMINIAN REJECTIONS

Let’s turn in the back of our hymnals to page 945 – and look at the GIST of the Arminian teaching that the Synod of Dort (1618) had to deal with.

I want to read REJECTIONS 2 & 3

1. READ REJECTION 2

- Again, the bottom line in salvation is man’s choice / man’s will

This view was not NEW to Arminius or his followers ... *Read Response*

2. READ REJECTION 3

- So faith is entered into ... but can then be forfeited ...

Read Response

Clearly the teaching of Scripture is that those who believe and are truly saved CANNOT lose their salvation. They WILL persevere in faith.

III. CANON TEACHING

Let's turn back to page 943 to read how the Canon puts this:

1. READ ARTICLE 3

- Because of the "remnants of sin" we can't rely on our faith to persevere!

2. READ ARTICLE 8 (p. 944) – Wow! – Here are the reasons we can be confident in our salvation:

- God's plans can't change
- God's promises can't fail
- His calling can't be revoked
- Christ's merit & interceding cannot fail
- The sealing of the Spirit can't be wiped out!

We are saved by the Father, Son & Holy Spirit – who ensure our salvation!

3. READ ARTICLE 9

- Because God promises perseverance, the believer will gain assurance of faith

1 Jn. 5:13 – *These things are written that you who believe in the name of the Son of God may KNOW you have eternal life.*

IV. ISSUES

1. What do we say, then, about those who fall away?

You know such folk – they've been baptized, made confession of faith, they were once active in church ... now they're NOWHERE with God!!

- (i) The first response, obviously, is to say that PROBABLY they're not truly Christian to begin with.

As I grew up hearing in sermons, "*Just cause you're standing in a barn, doesn't mean you're a cow!*"

Many people in the church AREN'T Christians.

Yes, they know their doctrines & participate in programs. But they haven't personally met God – not in a saving way.

They don't LOVE Him, their heart's passion is not to LIVE for Him.
 They can't speak of His presence transforming their life.
 They're not growing in repentance – seeing sin's depths in greater measure.

A. Turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 6.

- This passage WARNS of a serious danger that faces these people who have "TASTED" grace – but not been CHANGED by it.

Read Hebrews 6:1-12

This is a controversial passage. Are those described saved? If they were, did they lose their salvation? But how could that be since elsewhere the Bible clearly teaches that God preserves those who are Christians.

A. One response is to say that this is a WARNING.

Verse 9 – those addressed are Christians – just being called forward!

B. The other response is that this does not describe those who truly are Christians:

Verse 8 – their life only produced thorns & thistles

They were greatly involved in church! They "shared in the Holy Spirit". They tasted the goodness of God ... but it never bore godly fruit in them.

... and in the long run, their hearts are hardened. They're worse off than before!

They crucify the Son of God all over again – IGNOMY

2. So of those who fall away, most likely they were never saved to begin. Another possibility is that they are TRULY SAVED – in which case they WILL RETURN to God in repentance.

A. The Canons address this in ARTICLES 6 & 7 – **READ**

This may be a death-bed repentance. We don't know. But we do know that those who are truly saved will repent.

- The seed planted in them is IMPERISHABLE. It will sprout & produce such fruit!

Therefore the fruit of their life will reveal a saved person.

3. A second issue related to this doctrine of perseverance:

If “once saved, always saved” – hey! – let’s relax – not take this salvation seriously. It’s God’s work to see me through. I CAN CRUISE!

(i) ARTICLE 12 addresses this – **READ**

- When we grasp that salvation is God’s work and truly TRUST that – it becomes in us a source of humility & endurance & prayer & steadfastness ... an “incentive” to thanksgiving and good works!
- In other words, true faith will manifest itself in obedience & perseverance!

I have a friend back in Ontario who once went with me to a worship service. They had an altar call. He went forward – made peace with God.

But that’s been it! He figures it’s now a done deal!

His life hasn’t manifested an ongoing passion for knowing God & living in His will. There’s no “perseverance”.

I do not have confidence in his salvation.

THE ELECT PERSEVERE ... THE PERSEVERING ARE THE ELECT!

V. CONCLUSION

Let’s turn to one more passage in our Bibles related to concludes: **2 Peter 1:3-11**

1. One last PRACTICAL QUESTION: How do I know if I’m one of the elect of God?

READ 2 Peter 1:3-11

v. 3 – our knowledge of Him – is the power of salvation – He’s our confidence

v. 4 – in God’s goodness, he’s given us PROMISES – that we know he’ll keep – leading us to “partake in the divine nature”.

v. 5 – FOR THIS VERY REASON ... ADD ...

Verse 8 – For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure ... Verse 10 – They make your calling & election sure ... Leading to a RICH WELCOME into the eternal kingdom

The elect persevere (adding to faith – goodness / knowledge / self-control / perseverance / godliness / brotherly kindness / love); the persevering are the elect

So ... *How do I know if I'm one of the elect?*

One way – if the passion of our life is PERSEVERANCE – adding goodness / knowledge / self control / love – then we know we're elect.

The elect PERSEVERE

We live for the glory of God in those ways.

Is that the witness of your life?

Do you know the Holy Spirit within bearing that fruit?

2. Beyond that you may still be wondering – RIGHT NOW! – “Am I saved?”

If unsure, your need is not to try to scrutinize the eternal purpose of God.

Your need is to run to Jesus.

... Like the Philippian jailor in Acts 16. He asked: “What must I do to be saved?”

Paul & Silas responded: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ ... and you shall be saved!

That is God's promise. Believe it today, in trust & thanks!

AMEN!