

## Important Lessons about God and Humanity from the Church's History 1: Arminianism and Calvinism on Predestination

### Introduction: Why this series?

### Biblical Texts to Consider

John 10:25-26; Acts 13:48; Rom 9:6-24; Eph 1:3-14

### Historical Background

Augustine (354-430) and Pelagius

John Calvin (1509-64)

“We call predestination God’s eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death” (*Institutes* 3.21.5)

Jacob Arminius (1559-1609)

1584-86: studied at Geneva

1588: started preaching in Amsterdam

1591: controversy began when he was preaching through Romans 7 (who is the “I”?)

1593: on Romans 9 (who are Jacob and Esau?)

1603: professor at Leiden

1608: presented his *Declaration of Sentiments* (finally said his argument was against all Calvinists, not just the supralapsarians)

1609: died

Some things he said:

The following proposition contains the sum of God’s purpose in election: “As many as believe in Christ, them has God determined from eternity immutably to save.” (*Analysis of Romans* 9)

Responding to William Perkins’s statement that “Election does not pertain to believers, but faith rather pertains to the elect, or is from the gift of Election,” Arminius wrote, “Election is made in Christ. But no one is in Christ, except he is a believer. Therefore no one is elected in Christ, unless he is a believer.” (*Response to William Perkins*)

Up to the Synod of Dort

1610: 46 Arminians present the *Remonstrance* (the “Five Arminian Articles”)

Note: these are origin of the “Five Points of Calvinism”

1611: the Calvinists present their *Counter-Remonstrance*

1615: riots in Amsterdam between Calvinists and Arminians

1618: Arminians clarify their views in the “*Opinions*” of the *Remonstrants*

13 Nov. 1618 - 9 May 1619: Synod of Dort

## The Arminians' View of Predestination

### *Remonstrance, Article 1 (1610)*

“God, by an eternal, unchangeable purpose in his Jesus Christ, his Son, before the foundation of the world, hath determined, out of the fallen, sinful race of men, to save in Christ, for Christ’s sake, and through Christ, those who, through the grace of the Holy Ghost, shall believe on this his Son Jesus, and shall persevere in this faith and obedience of faith, through this grace, even to the end.”

### *“Opinions” of the Remonstrants, Article 1 on Predestination (1618)*

1. God never decreed to elect any man to eternal life, or to reprobate him from it, by his mere will and pleasure, *without any regard to his foreseen obedience or disobedience*, in order to demonstrate the glory of his mercy and justice, or of his power or absolute dominion.

3. ... The reason why some men are efficaciously called, justified, persevere in faith, and are glorified, is not because they are absolutely elected to life eternal: nor is the reason why others are deserted and left in the fall, have not Christ bestowed upon them, or, farther, why they are inefficaciously called, are hardened and damned, because these men are absolutely reprobated from eternal life.

5. God has ordained that Christ shall be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world; and, in virtue of this decree, he has determined to justify and *save those who believe in him*, and to administer to men the means which are necessary and sufficient for faith, in such a manner as he knows to be befitting his wisdom and justice. But he has not in any wise determined, in virtue of an absolute decree, to give Christ as a Mediator for the elect only, and to endow them alone with faith through an effectual call, to justify them, to preserve them in the faith, and to glorify them.

6. Neither is any man by some absolute antecedent decree rejected from life eternal, nor from means sufficient to attain it: so that the merits of Christ, calling, and all the gifts of the Spirit, are capable of profiting all men for their salvation, and are in reality profitable to all men, *unless* by an abuse of these blessings they pervert them to their own destruction. But no man whatever is destined to unbelief, impiety, or the commission of sin, as the means and causes of his damnation.

7. The election of particular persons is absolute, from consideration of their faith in Jesus Christ and their perseverance, but not without consideration of their faith and of their perseverance in true faith as a prerequisite condition in electing them.

8. Reprobation from eternal life is made according to the consideration of preceding unbelief and perseverance in the same, but not without consideration of preceding unbelief or perseverance in it.

## The Calvinist Response: The Canons of Dort on Predestination (1618-19)

### Article 1: **Because of all persons' sin, God would have been just to punish them all**

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

**Article 2: But out of his love God sent Christ so that all who believe in him will be saved**

*But this is how God showed his love: he sent his only begotten Son into the world, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (1 John 4:9; John 3:16).*

**Article 3: God mercifully sends messengers who call sinners to faith and repentance**

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

**Article 4: Those who do not believe are under God’s wrath; those who embrace Christ have eternal life**

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

**Article 5: The cause of unbelief is in persons, not God; faith in Christ is a gift from God**

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

**Article 6: God’s eternal decree is the cause of election and reprobation, whereby he softens the hearts of the elect and brings them to faith but leaves the non-elect in their wickedness and the judgment to come; this is a cause of consolation to Christians**

*The fact that some receive from God the gift of faith within time, and that others do not, stems from his eternal decree. For “all his works are known to God from eternity” (Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:11). In accordance with this decree God graciously softens the hearts, however hard, of the elect and inclines them to believe, but by a just judgment God leaves in their wickedness and hardness of heart those who have not been chosen. And in this especially is disclosed to us God’s act—unfathomable, and as merciful as it is just—of distinguishing between people equally lost. This is the well-known decree of election and reprobation revealed in God’s Word. The wicked, impure, and unstable distort this decree to their own ruin, but it provides holy and godly souls with comfort beyond words.*

**Article 7: The elect are no better than others, but God effectually chose them, and all the fruits of salvation flow out of this**

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

*And so God decreed to give to Christ those chosen for salvation, and to call and draw them effectively into Christ’s fellowship through the Word and Spirit. In other words, God decreed to grant them true faith in Christ, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of the Son, to glorify them.*

*God did all this in order to demonstrate his mercy, to the praise of the riches of God’s glorious grace. As Scripture says, “God chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, so that we should be holy and blameless before him with love; he predestined us whom he adopted as his children through Jesus Christ, in himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, by which he freely made us pleasing to himself in his*

beloved” (Eph. 1:4-6). And elsewhere, “Those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30).

**Article 8: The decree of election encompasses saints throughout history**

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

**Article 9: Election is not based on foreseen faith or works; rather, persons are chosen to faith and the obedience of faith and holiness**

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

**Article 10: God’s good pleasure – not his foreseeing any good human qualities – is the sole cause of this gracious election**

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

**Article 11: God – and hence his electing – is all-wise, immutable, and powerful**

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

**Article 12: The elect will come to assurance, not by questioning God’s eternal decree, but by seeing the fruits of grace in their lives**

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

**Article 13: Certainty of election leads to humility, praise and love for God, not licentious living**

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

**Article 14: Since the doctrine of election is clearly taught in the Bible, it is to be taught and preached now – but with pastoral wisdom**

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

**Article 15: The decree of reprobation does not make God the author of sin but shows him to be a just judge**

*Moreover, Holy Scripture most especially highlights this eternal and undeserved grace of our election and brings it out more clearly for us, in that it further bears witness that not all people have been chosen but that some have not been chosen or have been passed by in God's eternal election—those, that is, concerning whom God, on the basis of his entirely free, most just, irreproachable, and unchangeable good pleasure, made the following decree: to leave them in the common misery into which, by their own fault, they have plunged themselves; not to grant them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but finally to condemn and eternally punish those who have been left in their own ways and under God's just judgment, not only for their unbelief but also for all their other sins, in order to display his justice. And this is the decree of reprobation, which does not at all make God the author of sin (a blasphemous thought!) but rather its fearful, irreproachable, just judge and avenger.*

**Article 16: Reprobation should not terrify those unconverted who are using the means of grace or Christians lacking assurance, but it should terrify those who have rejected Christ**

*Those who do not yet actively experience within themselves a living faith in Christ or an assured confidence of heart, peace of conscience, a zeal for childlike obedience, and a glorying in God through Christ, but who nevertheless use the means by which God has promised to work these things in us—such people ought not to be alarmed at the mention of reprobation, nor to count themselves among the reprobate; rather they ought to continue diligently in the use of the means, to desire fervently a time of more abundant grace, and to wait for it in reverence and humility. On the other hand, those who seriously desire to turn to God, to be pleasing to God alone, and to be delivered from the body of death, but are not yet able to make such progress along the way of godliness and faith as they would like—such people ought much less to stand in fear of the teaching concerning reprobation, since our merciful God has promised not to snuff out a smoldering wick or break a bruised reed. However, those who have forgotten God and their Savior Jesus Christ and have abandoned themselves wholly to the cares of the world and the pleasures of the flesh—such people have every reason to stand in fear of this teaching, as long as they do not seriously turn to God.*

**Article 17: Children of Christians are elect because of the covenant of grace**

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

**Article 18: The Bible leaves us no room to question God's right to elect or reprobate; rather, it leads us to worship Almighty God**

*To those who complain about this grace of an undeserved election and about the severity of a just reprobation, we reply with the words of the apostle, "Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" (Rom. 9:20), and with the words of our Savior, "Have I no right to do what I want with my own?" (Matt. 20:15). We, however, with reverent adoration of these secret things, cry out with the apostle: "Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways beyond tracing out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who has first given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36).*