

# THE CANONS OF DORT

Formally Titled  
The Decision of the Synod of Dort on the Five Main Points of Doctrine  
in Dispute in the Netherlands  
A New Translation for the Reformed Church in America

The First Main Point of Doctrine Divine Election and Reprobation

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

**Article 1:** God's Right to Condemn All People

Since all people have sinned in Adam and have come under the sentence of the curse and eternal death, God would have done no one an injustice if it had been the divine 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 may be held accountable to God,"<sup>1</sup> "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"<sup>2</sup> and "The wages of sin is death."<sup>3</sup>

**Article 2:** The Manifestation of God's Love

But this is how God showed love: "God gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."<sup>4</sup>

**Article 3:** The Preaching of the Gospel

In order that people may be brought to faith, God mercifully sends messengers of this very joyful news to those whom God desires and where God desires it. By this ministry people are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. For "how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?"<sup>5</sup>

**Article 4:** A Twofold Response to the Gospel

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 Sources of Unbelief and of Faith

The cause or blame for this unbelief, as well as for all other sins, is not at all in God, but in humanity. Faith in Jesus Christ, however, and salvation through him is a free gift of God. As Scripture says, "For by grace have you been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."<sup>6</sup> Likewise: "For God has graciously granted you the privilege . . . of believing in Christ . . ."<sup>7</sup>

## **Article 6: God's Eternal Decree**

The fact that some receive from God the gift of faith within time, and that others do not, stems from God's eternal decree. "Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago."<sup>8</sup> In accordance with this decree God graciously softens the hearts, however hard, of the chosen ones and inclines them to believe, but by 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 decision 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: Election**

Election is God's unchangeable purpose by which God did the following:

Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of God's 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 God 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, that is to grant them true faith, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of God's Son, to glorify them. God did all this in order to demonstrate God's 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, to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."<sup>9</sup> 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."<sup>10</sup>

## **Article 8: A Single Decree of Election**

This election is not of many kinds, but one and the same for all who are 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 God 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 Not Based on Foreseen Faith**

This same election took place, not on the basis of foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition, as though it were based on a prerequisite cause or condition in the person to be chosen, but rather for the purpose of faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, and so on.

Accordingly, election is the source of 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, "just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be (not because we were) holy and blameless before him in love."<sup>11</sup>

## **Article 10:** Election Based on God's Good Pleasure

But the cause of this undeserved election is exclusively the good pleasure of God. This does not involve God's choosing certain human qualities or actions from among all those possible as a condition of salvation, but rather involves God's adopting certain particular persons from among the common mass of sinners as God's own possession. As Scripture says, "Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might continue, not by works but by his call)\* she (Rebecca) was told, 'The elder shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.'"<sup>12</sup> Also, ". . . as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers."<sup>13</sup>

## **Article 11:** Election Unchangeable

Just as God is most wise, unchangeable, all-knowing, and almighty, so the election made by God 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 Assurance of Election

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—fruits 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:** The Fruit of This Assurance

In their awareness and assurance of this election, God's children daily find greater cause to humble themselves before God, to adore the fathomless depth of divine 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:** Teaching Election Properly

By God's wise plan, this teaching concerning divine election has been proclaimed through the prophets. It was proclaimed also through Christ and the Apostles. Subsequently the proclamation was 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:** Reprobation

Moreover, Holy Scripture most especially highlights this eternal and undeserved grace of our election and brings it out more clearly for us, in that it further bears witness that not all people have been chosen, but that some have not been chosen or have been passed by in God's eternal election—those, that is, concerning whom God, on the basis of God's 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 divine 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: Responses to the Teaching of Reprobation**

Those who do not yet actively experience within themselves a living faith in Christ or an assured confidence of heart, peace of conscience, a zeal for childlike obedience, and a glorying in God through Christ, but who nevertheless use the means by which God has promised to work these things in us—such people ought not to be alarmed at the mention of reprobation, nor to count themselves among the reprobate; rather they ought to continue diligently in the use of the means, to desire fervently a time of more abundant grace, and to wait for it in reverence and humility. On the other hand, those who seriously desire to turn to God, to be pleasing to 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 and that a bruised reed will not be broken. 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: The Salvation of the Infants of Believers**

Since we must make judgments about God's will from the 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 Proper Attitude toward Election and Reprobation**

To those who complain about this grace of an undeserved election and about the severity of a just reprobation, we reply with the words of the Apostle, "Who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God?"<sup>14</sup> and with the words of our Savior, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?"<sup>15</sup> We, however, with reverent adoration of these secret things, cry out with the Apostle: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen."<sup>16</sup>

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

#### **Article 1: The Punishment Which God's Justice Requires**

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

## **Article 2: The Satisfaction Made by Christ**

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

## **Article 3: The Infinite Value of Christ's Death**

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

## **Article 4: Reasons for This Infinite Value**

This death is of such great value and worth for the reason that the person who suffered it is, in order for Christ to be our Savior, not only a true and perfectly holy human, but also the only begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Another reason is that this death was accompanied by the experience of God's wrath and curse, which we by our sins had fully deserved.

## **Article 5: The Mandate to Proclaim the Gospel to All**

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

## **Article 6: Unbelief, a Human Responsibility**

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

## **Article 7: Faith, a Gift of God**

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

## **Article 8: The Saving Effectiveness of Christ's Death**

For it was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of the Son's costly death should work itself out in all his chosen ones, in order that he might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation. In other words, it was God's will that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which Christ confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; that God should grant them faith (which, like the Holy Spirit's other saving gifts, Christ acquired for them by his death). It was God's will that Christ should cleanse them by his blood from all their sins, both original and actual, whether committed before or after their coming to faith; that he should faithfully preserve them to the very end; and that he should finally present them to himself, a glorious people, without spot or wrinkle.

## **Article 9: The Fulfillment of God's Plan**

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

## **The Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine Human Corruption, Conversion to God, and the Way It Occurs**

### **Article 1: The Effect of the Fall on Human Nature**

Human beings were originally created in the image of God and were furnished in their mind with a true and sound knowledge of the Creator and things spiritual, in the human will and heart with righteousness, and in all the emotions with purity; indeed, the whole human being was holy. However, rebelling against God at the devil's instigation and by free will, they deprived themselves of these outstanding gifts. Rather, in their place the humans brought upon themselves blindness, terrible darkness, futility, and distortion of judgment in their mind; perversity, defiance, and hardness in the hearts and wills; and finally impurity in all the emotions.

### **Article 2: The Spread of Corruption**

Human beings brought forth children of the same nature as themselves after the fall. That is to say, being corrupt they brought forth corrupt children. The corruption spread, by God's just judgment, from Adam and Eve to all their descendants—except for Christ alone—not by way of imitation (as in former times the Pelagians would have it) but by way of the propagation of their perverted nature.

### **Article 3: Total Inability**

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

### **Article 4: The Inadequacy of the Light of Nature**

There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in people after the fall, by virtue of which they retain some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is decent and indecent, and demonstrate a certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. But this light of nature is far from enabling them to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to God—so far, in fact, that they do not use it rightly even in matters of nature and society. Instead, in various ways they completely distort this light, whatever its precise character, and suppress it in unrighteousness. In doing so they render themselves without excuse before God.

### **Article 5: The Inadequacy of the Law**

In this respect, what is true of the light of nature is true also of the Ten Commandments given by God through Moses specifically to the Jews. For humanity cannot obtain saving grace through the Decalogue, because, although it does expose the magnitude of human sin and increasingly convict

people of their guilt, yet it does not offer a remedy or enable people to escape from human misery, and, indeed, weakened as it is by the flesh, leaves the offender under the curse.

#### **Article 6: The Saving Power of the Gospel**

What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law can do, God accomplishes by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word or the ministry of reconciliation. This is the gospel about the Messiah, through which it has pleased God to save believers, in both the Old and the New Testaments.

#### **Article 7: God's Freedom in Revealing the Gospel**

In the Old Testament, God revealed this secret of the divine will to a small number; in the New Testament (now without any distinction between peoples) God discloses it to a large number. The reason for this difference must not be ascribed to the greater worth of one nation over another, or to a better use of the light of nature, but to the free good pleasure and undeserved love of God. Therefore, those who receive so much grace, beyond and in spite of all they deserve, ought to acknowledge it with humble and thankful hearts. On the other hand, with the Apostle they ought to adore (but certainly not inquisitively to search into) the severity and justice of God's judgments on the others, who do not receive this grace.

#### **Article 8: The Serious Call of the Gospel**

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

#### **Article 9: Human Responsibility for Rejecting the Gospel**

The fact that many who are called through the ministry of the gospel do not come and are not brought to conversion must not be blamed on the gospel, nor on Christ, who is offered through the gospel, nor on God, who calls them through the gospel and even bestows various gifts on them, but on the people themselves who are called. Some in self-assurance do not even entertain the Word of life; others do entertain it but do not take it to heart, and for that reason, after the fleeting joy of a temporary faith, they relapse; others choke the seed of the Word with the thorns of life's cares and with the pleasures of the world and bring forth no fruits. This our Savior teaches in the parable of the sower.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Article 10: Conversion as the Work of God**

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

#### **Article 11: The Holy Spirit's Work in Conversion**

Moreover, when God carries out this good pleasure in the elect, or works true conversion in them, God not only sees to it that the gospel is proclaimed to them outwardly, and enlightens their minds powerfully by the Holy Spirit so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God,

but, by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, God also penetrates into the inmost being of people, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. God infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant. God activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds.

#### **Article 12: Regeneration a Supernatural Work**

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

#### **Article 13: The Incomprehensible Way of Regeneration**

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

#### **Article 14: The Way God Gives Faith**

In this way, therefore, faith is a gift of God, not in the sense that it is offered by God for people to choose, but that it is in actual fact bestowed on them, breathed and infused into them. Nor does God bestow only the potential to believe and then await people's assent—the act of believing—by their own free choice. Rather, God, who works both willing and acting, indeed works all things in all people and produces in them both the will to believe and the belief itself.

#### **Article 15: Responses to God's Grace**

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

#### **Article 16: Regeneration's Effect**

However, just as by the fall humanity did not cease to be human, endowed with intellect and will, and just as sin, which has spread through the whole human race, did not abolish the nature of the human race but distorted and spiritually killed it, so also this divine grace of regeneration does not act in

people as if they were blocks and stones; nor does it abolish the will and its properties or coerce a reluctant will by force, but spiritually revives, heals, reforms, and—in a manner at once pleasing and powerful—bends it back. As a result, a ready and sincere obedience of the Spirit now begins to prevail, where before the rebellion and resistance of the flesh were completely dominant. In this consists the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will. Thus, if the marvelous Maker of every good thing were not dealing with us, humanity would have no hope of getting up from its fall by its free choice, by which it plunged itself into ruin when still standing upright.

#### **Article 17: God's Use of Means in Regeneration**

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

### **The Fifth Main Point of Doctrine The Perseverance of the Saints**

#### **Article 1: The Regenerate Not Entirely Free from Sin**

Those people whom God calls into fellowship with God's Son Jesus Christ our Lord according to the divine purpose and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, God also wholly sets free from the dominion and slavery of sin, though not wholly from the flesh and body of sin as long as they are in this life.

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

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

#### **Article 3: God's Preservation of the Converted**

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

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

The power of God strengthening and preserving true believers in grace is more than a match for the flesh. Yet those converted are not always so activated and motivated by God that in certain specific

actions they cannot by their own fault depart from the leading of grace, be led astray by the desires of the flesh, and give in to them. For this reason they must constantly watch and pray that they may not be led into temptations. When they fail to do this, not only is it possible for them to be carried away by the flesh, the world, and Satan into sins, even serious and outrageous ones, but also by God's just permission they sometimes are carried away—witness the sad cases, described in Scripture, of David, Peter, and other saints falling into sins.

#### **Article 5: The Effects of Such Serious Sins**

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

#### **Article 6: God's Saving Intervention**

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

#### **Article 7: Renewal to Repentance**

For, in the first place, God preserves in those saints when they fall the divine imperishable seed from which they have been born again, lest it perish or be dislodged. Secondly, by the Word and Spirit, God certainly and effectively renews them to repentance so that they have a heartfelt and godly sorrow for the sins they have committed. They seek and obtain, through faith and with a contrite heart, forgiveness in the blood of the Mediator. They experience again the grace of a reconciled God. Through faith they adore God's mercies, and from then on more eagerly they work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

#### **Article 8: The Certainty of This Preservation**

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

#### **Article 9: The Assurance of This Preservation**

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

#### **Article 10: The Ground of This Assurance**

Accordingly, this assurance does not derive from some private revelation beyond or outside the Word, but from faith in the promises of God which are very plentifully revealed in the Word for our comfort,

from the testimony of “that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,”<sup>18</sup> and finally from a serious and holy pursuit of a clear conscience and of good works. Moreover, if God’s chosen ones in this world did not have this well-founded comfort that the victory will be theirs and this reliable guarantee of eternal glory, they would be of all people most miserable.

#### **Article 11: Doubts Concerning This Assurance**

Meanwhile, Scripture testifies that believers have to contend in this life with various doubts of the flesh, and that under severe temptation they do not always experience this full assurance of faith and certainty of perseverance. But the Source of all comfort, “will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it,”<sup>19</sup> and by the Holy Spirit revives in them the assurance of their perseverance.

#### **Article 12: This Assurance as an Incentive to Godliness**

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

#### **Article 13: Assurance No Inducement to Carelessness**

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

#### **Article 14: God’s Use of Means in Perseverance**

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

#### **Article 15: Contrasting Reactions to the Teaching of Perseverance**

This teaching about the perseverance of true believers and saints, and about their assurance of it—a teaching which God has very richly revealed in the Word for the glory of God’s name and for the comfort of the godly and which the Almighty impresses on the hearts of believers—is something which the flesh does not understand, Satan hates, the world ridicules, the ignorant and the hypocrites abuse, and the spirits of error attack. The bride of Christ, on the other hand, has always loved this teaching very tenderly and defended it steadfastly as a priceless treasure; and God, against whom no plan can avail and no strength can prevail, will ensure that the church will continue to do this. To this God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen.

## **Conclusion**

### **Rejection of False Accusations**

And so this is the clear, simple, and straightforward explanation of the orthodox teaching on the five articles in dispute in the Netherlands [as well as the rejection of the errors]\*\* by which the Dutch churches have for some time been disturbed. This explanation [and rejection]\*\* the Synod declares to be derived from God's Word and in agreement with the confessions of the Reformed churches. Hence, it clearly appears that those who have brought the following charges have shown no truth, equity, and charity at all. They wish to make the public believe:

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

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

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

Finally, this Synod urges all fellow ministers in the gospel of Christ to deal with this teaching in a godly and reverent manner, in the academic institutions as well as in the churches; to do so, both in their speaking and writing, with a view to the glory of God's name, holiness of life, and the comfort of anxious souls; to think and also speak with Scripture according to the analogy of faith; and, finally, to refrain from all those ways of speaking which go beyond the bounds set for us by the genuine sense of

the Holy Scriptures and which could give impertinent sophists a just occasion to scoff at the teaching of the Reformed churches or even to bring false accusations against it.

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

#### **NOTES:**

\* Dort did not cite the material in parenthesis.

\*\* The "Rejection of Errors" sections of the Canons are omitted because they have been omitted in previous Reformed Church in America translations of the Canons. This accounts also for the bracketed words in the conclusion.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 3:19

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 3:23

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 6:23

<sup>4</sup> John 3:16

<sup>5</sup> Rom. 10:14-15

<sup>6</sup> Eph. 2:8

<sup>7</sup> Phil. 1:29

<sup>8</sup> Acts 15:17c-18; Eph. 1:11

<sup>9</sup> Eph. 1:4-6

<sup>10</sup> Rom. 8:30

<sup>11</sup> Eph. 1:4

<sup>12</sup> Rom. 9:11-13

<sup>13</sup> Acts 13:48

<sup>14</sup> Rom. 9:20

<sup>15</sup> Matt. 20:15

<sup>16</sup> Rom. 11:33-36

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 13

<sup>18</sup> Rom. 8:16-17

<sup>19</sup> 1 Cor. 10:13