

Canons of Dort – Main Point 1: Article 7 Election

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

¹Before the foundation of the world, ²by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of His will, ³God 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. ⁴Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery. ⁵God 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.

⁶And so God declared 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.

⁷God 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).

¹Article 7 begins by pointing out that election took place in eternity past, **"Before the foundation of the world."** This is what Paul says in Ephesians 1:4-6, *"⁴ even as He chose us in Him **before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us[a] for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, ⁶ to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved."*

Let's consider his point carefully so that we remove all notions of election being based upon something God sees in us, whether it be presently or the idea of future works. This is not the case. While election takes place in eternity past, God's eternal decree happens outside of time and space. Redemptive history is therefore the outworking of God's eternal decree. This too can be seen in Ephesians 1:7-10 when Paul speaks of the work of Christ for us, and then in verses 11-14, when he speaks of Christ's work being applied to believers by the Holy Spirit.

"⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, ⁸ which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making

known[a] to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. ¹³ In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee[a] of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,[b] to the praise of His glory.”

²We are then called to see that our election is based upon **“by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of His will.”** In other words, the reason why God elects anyone to be saved, is because **He is good and merciful**, not because we are lovable or desirable. When Paul declares that we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), he certainly shows that no regard is had to our own worth. We were, in Christ, adopted into the heavenly inheritance because in ourselves we were incapable of making ourselves heirs of this promise. No merit and no works to receive such a reward. We see Paul encourage the Colossian church to give thanks that they had been made to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints.

Colossians 1:12-14, *“¹² giving thanks[d] to the Father, **who has qualified you[e]** to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* And again we should look to Paul’s words in Ephesians 1:4-5 where he says that God *“has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we might be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, **according to the good pleasure of His will...**”*

We sometimes tend to complicate many things within the realm of the Gospel. When many hear the term “election,” it elicits an array of thoughts and concepts that tend to miss the forest for the trees. Any who try to search into the depths of what is unknown miss a simple truth just as well as those who scoff at the legitimacy of this doctrine. In our minds, the word “election” should be synonymous with “rescue.” In order to understand the doctrine of election, it is imperative that we see it as a *divine rescue of sinners*.

³**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.** In election, God rescues a multitude so vast that they cannot be counted (Rev 7:9) from the guilt and consequences of their sin (Romans 5:12; 18-19). Our sinful nature is what causes our resistance to our Maker. Our sinful nature causes a refusal to come to God, unless we are first chosen by God, then called through the preaching of the Gospel, and given the gift of faith. God acts directly upon those whom he intends to save, so that they come to faith in Christ and receive the forgiveness of sins and a justifying righteousness.

After the fall into sin all men were by nature children of the devil. However, before mankind was made – before the world was made, God had determined by an unchangeable

purpose to save in Christ a definite number of people. Not all people, but only some would be saved. It was not a changeable number of people, nor were the names of those to be saved changeable; rather, God chose a definite number and was definite in His choice of who would be saved. Not only has God decreed from eternity whom He would save, but also that He would do so in Christ. Christ's task was to save those the Father gave to Him: the elect.

⁴Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery. Those who are chosen can count on that fact that God chose them to confound the wise! There is nothing to boast about if you are a believer. A similar theme is communicated to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 7:6-8, *"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."* God chose Israel for reasons known to Himself, and not because of any good works or great faith He foresaw in His chosen nation.

Whenever there is resistance to the doctrine of election, certain language is used to imply that God is taking something away from the sinner or that God is standing in the way of the sinner receiving grace. God is not taking anything away from sinful men, nor is He preventing sinners from coming to faith. For Romans 3:19 tells us that *"the whole world is liable to the condemnation of God."* Yet it is in God's unspeakable grace that He chooses to save some who would otherwise perish eternally. This is why we should always associate election with rescue.

⁵God 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. Election does not find its merit in electing itself. Over and over again in Ephesians do we see election language communicated next to the words "In Him," with "Him" meaning Christ. Imagine you had no children, and I said to you, "I will ensure that no harm ever comes to your firstborn child. Not a hair on their head will be damaged. They will never experience pain, loss, or any suffering." You would realize very quickly that this promise is indeed an empty promise. It doesn't matter that I chose your child before they were born and pledged my protection, the problem comes in the fact that I cannot deliver on that promise. I could not faithfully deliver the things that I promised. I am finite. I am weak. I cannot be all places at all times. I don't even have control over my own life. I am not sovereign, but rather, a dependent. One who is in need. Paul was not wasting words as He over and over again tied such promises to Christ. Christ is the mediator of the covenant of grace. This is why our election is inextricably tied to our faith in Christ. God elects us in Christ so that we will believe in Him who the Father sent to redeem us.

⁶And so God declared 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. This point is quite important for us to take note of because it means that God not only elects us in Christ, giving us to Christ [as Jesus declares in John's gospel, "*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out*" [John 6:37], but God works to ensure that His elect are called through the preaching of the Gospel, that they believe – are given the gift of faith – when the Gospel is preached to them, and that through the Holy Spirit all the benefits of Christ are now theirs as it is the Spirit's work to apply them.

Paul makes this truth clear to us in Romans 8:28-30, *"²⁸And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,[a] for those who are called according to His purpose. ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified."*

We must not forget that though there is much mystery in the doctrine of election, God does explain to us why He works in this way. **⁷God 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).

Again, as we consider the nature of the doctrine of election, we must look at it soberly and see it to be a gracious rescue. There is no reason to be given for grace, but grace. All praise, glory, and honor must go to God when a sinner is saved by God from God. In the fullness of the Gospel, we must see that there is no room for boasting other than that of Christ and Him crucified.