

Canons of Dort–3&4HoD: Articles 12-13 – The Wonder of Conversion

Beloved in the Lord: The writer of the Canons couldn't help but stop and wonder at the wonder of salvation!

They saw hopelessly depraved sinners (who did not know nor wanted to know God), unconditionally elected by a holy God, given a Savior, pulled to God, and then saved for eternity. Why would the writers not stop and praise God? They had to. This is what we will examine today. You will see the miracle of conversion under two headings:

Conversion is a Supernatural Work Conversion is an Incomprehensible Work

Our goals are: That you will see your conversion was totally outside of your abilities or desire, that you will rejoice in your conversion, and that you will then labor for the conversion of others.

Conversion is a Supernatural Work

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.

1. Conversion is wonderfully supernatural.

a. Conversion is a kind of resurrection. Any resurrection is a supernatural act. The dead is raised to life.

John 5: 25 "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.

There are many non-believers raised to life every single day!

b. Conversion is a kind of re-creation. Creation was a supernatural act, and so is re-creation. Who can imagine what it was like for there to be nothing and then there was everything? Creation happened "out of nothing," at least not anything from man! Man

wasn't there! But God made him! **No one resisted God in creation and not one can resist God in regeneration, leading to conversion.**

Ephesians 2: 10 For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus** for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

c. This does not mean all conversions happen in a dramatic way. “Drama” is not the aspect of resurrection or creation that is being compared to conversion. Rather, **God was comparing the wonder of resurrection and the wonder of creation. God was showing the passivity (not drama) of man in his resurrection and creation.**

If a man could resist conversion, he would have. But he can't! Thank God man can't resist God. God calls man supernaturally, as he called Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus heard and responded.

2. The trouble comes when those who do have a more notable conversion, maybe saved later in life, think that that is the only way one is saved.

This is particularly common among Pentecostals and other Arminians. They think those who were raised in the faith and quietly embrace Christ (without the drama) as a result of being taught from their youth, are somehow lesser Christians or are not Christians at all!

But don't feel pressured to come up with a date and time of your conversion. If you know one, fine. If you don't, that's okay too. Don't feel guilty if you did not have a dramatic conversion experience.

I came to realization of my sin one day while standing under a tree waiting for my friends. I realized I was not living a good life and needed to look to the Lord. There were no outward tears. I didn't raise my hand or walk down an aisle. Life slowly began to change.

Those who teach that you must have a dramatic conversion story ignore the whole tenor of Scripture. Most people come to **believe through a long process of time...in a gradual way...just like a pregnancy.** The difference here is **that it is a dramatic internal work – not necessarily outward tears.** Some people quietly come to Christ.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus, the one whom the Lord was addressing, had to come to terms that to be saved there was nothing he could do, but to receive what God offered. **He was passive.** He had no part in his birth.

While Nicodemus DID NOT HAVE TO DO ANYTHING to be saved, he had to KNOW he was born again! How would he know it? He would **know it in his heart and**

he would show it by his fruits. A tree is declared good by its fruits. If there were not fruits, it wouldn't matter how green the tree looked, would it?

So if you trust in Jesus Christ, if you feel shame when you sin...if you feel the urge to **confess your sins through Jesus Christ...**if you want to **talk to God...**if you want to **listen to God...**if you **want to be with God's people** to worship him...then that is evidence of conversion.

3. This supernatural work is “most powerful, most pleasing, marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible,” whether it is done at one time or over a long period of time.

God shatters man's pride and makes him aware of his wretchedness!

4. Once this supernatural action takes place, the sinner is unfailingly and effectively reborn, never to die again.

5. Arminians reject the fact that their wills need to be reborn.

They believe their wills are intact and they can choose and come to God without his help. In fact, they believe their repentance saves them. But **they only repent because they have been given new life first!** (Repentance is a gift of God!) This error caused **significant weakening of the church** in Scotland.

(One interesting to note: **Because Arminians think they have a sound will, they emphasize the persuasiveness of the preacher** – with much yelling, screaming, crying, and lots of great stories! They believe the preacher can move man's will!) How sad! How unfair to the preacher!

Arminians forget Jesus was the best preacher of all and most who heard him rejected him!

Because the Arminians hold to this erroneous view, they effectively rob God of praise for this supernatural work. The Arminian is a thief because he steals from God. His theft may not be intentional, but it is still theft.

6. Your response:

a. As a Christian, knowing your conversion was so supernatural, you have all the more grounds to be impressed, and therefore more grounds for praising God. You were wretches with no will to do good. Then you were saved - in a most incredible way. **No one gets depressed knowing that he was rescued from a most hopeless condition and then established as a royal priest.** A normal man would be full of joy and would praise his rescuer – and offer his rescuer his life! At the very **least** he would want to serve his rescuer!

b. Help the Arminian see that he is robbing God of the praise that belongs to him when he argues that he does not need God's help to choose God!

c. Because conversion is a supernatural work of God, you know the world doesn't need

morals...it needs a resurrection in the soul. Help him see the light.

d. Because conversion is a supernatural work of God, you know the world does not need perfect laws of the land to be saved...the world needs the perfect work of Jesus for sinners. Jesus' work on the cross is the answer the world truly needs. Help them see the light.

Conversion is an Incomprehensible Work

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.

1. Conversion happens in such a way that you cannot fully understand it - just like creation was incomprehensible, and just like you cannot fully comprehend resurrection.

The Spirit of God, like the winds of creation, blows wherever he wills. You know you are converted because the Bible says so and God's Holy Spirit works in you to believe it.

For example, I, who am technologically deficient, might ask you how my computer runs and you might know and explain it to me. I likely won't understand your explanations. Because I know you and I trust you based on my past experiences with you, I would believe what you say. Similarly, trust God's Word and work in you!

2. Arminians argue, that since God must pull man to himself, men must then come kicking and screaming to God.

(In their minds they have to make human sense of everything or it is not true!) But we don't believe and the Bible doesn't teach that man comes kicking and screaming against God's will. Conversion does not happen against the will of the Christian. God works in man's heart in such a way man desires to come. Look at what the Lord taught. The one whom God chose and works in, will willingly come!

John 6:37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

3. Your response:

a. Rest in contentment even though conversion is incomprehensible to you.

You must rest in contentment that as a sinner, the Savior loved you and died for you.

You must rest in contentment that you will be with him in glory on the last day.

You must rest in contentment that he will give you everything you need to wait for that time.

Isaiah 55:9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰ "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, 11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish

what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. 12 "For you shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills Shall break forth into singing before you, And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Notice how Isaiah does not attempt to explain the unexplainable; he simply wants you to accept it, enjoy it, and respond to it.

b. Your response: You must love and serve God for converting you in this incomprehensible way.

Conclusion:

You were converted by the work of God alone. He pulled you to himself by his Holy Spirit. He worked through his Holy Spirit through his Word to create faith. Through faith you received what Christ did. This work of conversion was a supernatural work and beyond comprehension! It was done apart from any human intervention.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Thank God you have experienced this most powerful, most pleasing, marvelous, and inexpressible conversion through Jesus Christ. It is not important to know the date and time of your rebirth, but you need to know that you **ARE** reborn. God gave you a gift that you could never get by yourself, a gift that was most critical to your eternity, and it was a gift you did not even know you needed.

2. Since you are born again, rejoice! Yes, yell it out to the world: **“I’m saved, and I know that I am.”** Come up with the finest praises of God. Sing the Words he has provided in the Psalms. Sing with sweetness. Focus on the words of praise. Teach your children about the wonder of salvation so they too will praise the Lord.

3. Because you know that rebirth is true, necessary, gives praise to God, and give joy to man, yell out this message to the world.

Finally, if you are not a Christian, be clear about this: No Christ, no conversion. But if you say today: “Lord, I want you to work supernaturally in me and give me a new heart, and new record, and a new life because Jesus took the punishment for me,” he will give you everything you need and more.