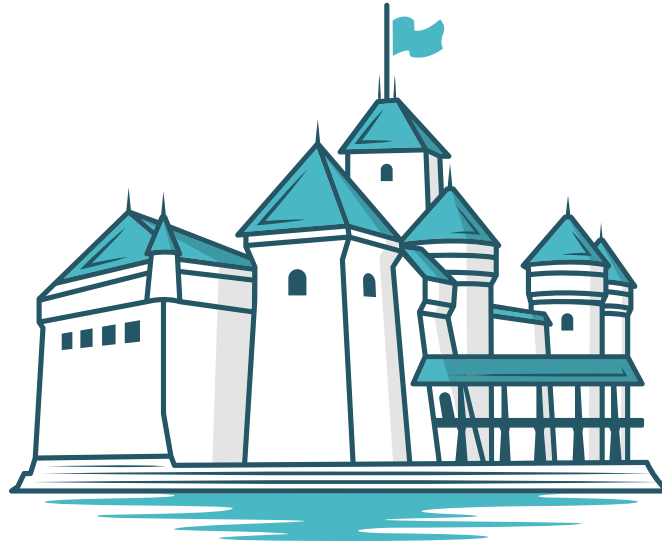




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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.
—Psalm 27:5*

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Introduction to the Canons



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And the LORD said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest. And be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto mount Sinai, and present thyself there to me in the top of the mount. And no man shall come up with thee, neither let any man be seen throughout all the mount; neither let the flocks nor herds feed before that mount. And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone...And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.

—Exodus 34:1–4, 28

The Law Was Given by Moses

The first tables of the law were broken because of the sin of the golden calf. Jehovah would write the ten commandments again, so he called Moses up into the mount. Everything about these tables of the law was to be the same as the first tables. They were to be two tables. They were to be stone tables. They were to be like unto the first. They were to be written by God. They were to have the very same words of the decalogue that were in the first tables. They were to be given at the end of Moses' forty days and forty nights of fasting in the mount. They were to be the same in every respect.

The same, that is, except for one important detail. These tables of stone were to be hewn by Moses. "Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first" (Ex. 34:1; Deut. 10:1). "And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first" (Ex. 34:4; Deut. 10:3). The first tables had been hewn by God. He had carried the tables with him to Sinai (Deut. 33:2). These tables were hewn by Moses' hands and carried up blank into the mountain. Moses' hands hewed the tables, and God's hand wrote the law.

What are we to make of this detail? It has been suggested that these tables were inferior to the first, being carved by human hands instead of God's. For the rest of Israel's life, these inferior tables, carrying God's holy law, would rebuke her for her sin. Perhaps that is the meaning. But consider that

there is no mention in any passage of these tables' being inferior. In fact, scripture says that these tables were "like unto the first." Consider also that God was pleased to touch these tables with his holy finger and write upon them his holy law. Nothing suggests the inferiority of the tables hewn by Moses.

Then what is the meaning of Moses' hewing the tables? It is this: the inferiority of the law. Not that the law is inferior in itself! The law is holy and just and good (Rom. 7:12). It is glorious and much to be desired. It is God's law, written with his own finger! But by God's decree and determination, the law does not and cannot save a man. It is weak. Not because there is anything wrong with the law! It is God's law, written with his own finger! But because there is something wrong with man, who is fallen and depraved. Man cannot obtain life through the law because he is sinful. The law is weak through the flesh (Rom. 8:3; Canons 3–4.5). There is something that can save, but it is not the law.

The sign and proof of the law's inability to save, and thus its inferiority, is that the law was given by Moses. Moses hewed the tables. Moses carried the blank tables up the mountain. Moses carried the written tables down the mountain. Moses read the tables to God's people. The law was given by Moses, a mere man.

Then what is it that saves from sin? Jesus Christ and his gospel! The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). The gospel declares the Savior, who is full of grace and truth (v. 14). The salvation that the law could not give because of the weakness of the flesh, the

gospel of Jesus Christ does give because it is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

The law is good; the gospel of Christ saves! For it is “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1:13).

—AL

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome one, welcome all to the August 1 issue of *Reformed Pavilion*. This issue arrives in our inboxes as we look around and try to discover where July disappeared to. Summer began just yesterday, it seems, but it is already two-thirds gone. So quickly do our days fly—as quickly as a dream fades, as quickly as the grass withers, as quickly as a tale is told and comes to its end. But just as brief as are our earthly days, so long are the years of God. For from everlasting to everlasting, he is God. And in Christ this God is our eternal dwelling place in all generations. Onward, then, summer. And upward, then, the eyes of God’s people.

This issue of *Reformed Pavilion* is the first since the magazine was founded that does not include an article by Herman Hoeksema. See last week’s issue for an explanation that accompanied the final article. Writers and readers alike will have to adapt to the end of Hoeksema’s *Banner* articles. I am sure that for a while it will feel like the magazine is missing something. But God has been good to our little magazine since the beginning, and he will be

good to us now—not because we are worthy of it but because he is merciful to his helpless and sinful people. He did not forsake the widow of Zarephath long ago; so may he provide a handful of flour in our barrel and a little oil in our cruse week by week for the articles in *Reformed Pavilion*.

This issue also marks the beginning of a new series of articles explaining the Canons of Dordt. Last summer, *Reformed Pavilion* published a corrected translation of the Canons. Beginning this summer, let us study the Canons together, and let us enjoy the gospel of God’s gracious salvation in Christ confessed therein. This series of articles will draw material from a Saturday Canons class that is conducted via Zoom in Singapore, the Philippines, and Michigan. But the articles, at least for now, will be written new each week. There may come a time when we will fall back on transcripts from the class. We will see how it goes, trusting our God to provide our instruction according to his will and good pleasure.

With that, blessed reading.

—AL



Introduction to the Canons

Theme

The noble theme of the Canons of Dordt is the sovereignty of God in the salvation of man. From the beginning of man's salvation in God's eternal election of him to the end in God's powerful preservation of him, salvation is the sovereign work of the sovereign God by his sovereign grace through his sovereign Christ according to his sovereign will. In its theme of the sovereignty of God in the salvation of man, the Canons of Dordt confesses the biblical truth of salvation. "Salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9). "The salvation of the righteous is of the LORD" (Ps. 37:39). "God; who hath saved us" (2 Tim. 1:8–9). "According to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). "For by grace are ye saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8).

The Canons of Dordt develops its theme over against the wicked notion that God's salvation of man is contingent upon man. God's eternal choice of a man in election was not contingent on what that man would be or do. God's gift of atonement in Christ was not a universal gift, contingent for its efficacy upon the will of the sinner. God's preservation of man is not contingent on man's perseverance. In its opposition to the notion of contingency, the Canons of Dordt confesses the biblical truth of salvation. "God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:8–9). "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9).

In its doctrine of the sovereignty of God in salvation, the Canons teaches the fundamental truth about salvation: God saves man, and man does not save himself. In its doctrine of the

sovereignty of God in salvation, the Canons also teaches a fundamental truth about God: God is God. God wills and does what he pleases. God does not depend upon man in salvation or in anything; God does not ask counsel of man, seek permission from man, or wait upon man. God is sovereign over man in salvation and in all things—divine sovereignty. And the truth of divine sovereignty always stands opposed to the notion that God is dependent upon man—divine contingency.

Comfort

The doctrine of the sovereignty of God in salvation is the good news of the gospel for sinners. The problem facing the sinner is that he cannot deliver himself from his sin. He is fallen in Adam and is dead in his trespasses. He cannot raise himself from spiritual death to life. He does not even have the right to try to raise himself, liable as he is to God's righteous curse upon him for his sin. At no point is the sinner able to deliver himself or to cooperate with God in delivering himself. If God's salvation of man were at all contingent upon the will or work of the sinner, there could be no salvation for the sinner. But the good news of the gospel is that God has sovereignly done what the sinner could not do.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved). (Eph. 2:4–5)

In the sovereignty of God, who saves his people in Christ, the sinner is happy and blessed.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Rom. 5:1–2)

This gospel of divine sovereignty in the salvation of man is the gospel of the Canons of Dordt.

For example, the Canons has this comforting thing to say about its doctrine of perseverance:

This doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and true believers, and the assurance thereof—which doctrine God hath most abundantly revealed in his word and engraves upon the hearts of the faithful, for the glory of his name and for the comfort of pious souls—the flesh indeed does not understand; Satan hates it; the world ridicules it; the ignorant and hypocrites abuse it; and the spirits of error assault it. But the bride of Christ hath always most tenderly loved it as a treasure of inestimable worth, and hath steadfastly defended it; and God, against whom neither counsel can avail nor strength prevail, will see to it that she may continue to do so in time to come. Now, to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen. (Canons 5.15)

Controversy

The doctrine of the Canons is controversial. Man's doctrine is that of divine contingency. That is, man's doctrine is that God depends upon man's will and man's work in salvation. Indeed, the Canons of Dordt was written by the Synod of Dordt in 1618–19 in order to answer the doctrine of the Remonstrants that was spreading throughout the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. The heart of Remonstrant doctrine is divine contingency. Over against the Remonstrants' divine contingency, the Synod of Dordt confessed divine sovereignty.

By its doctrine of the sovereignty of God in salvation, the Canons shows what is at stake in the controversy between divine sovereignty and divine contingency. The controversy is not merely about one's confession of salvation, as critically important as that is. But the controversy is also and especially about one's confession of God. There is an inseparable connection between the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of God. One's doctrine of salvation is necessarily one's doctrine of God. If one's doctrine of salvation is that God waits upon man in any sense, then one's doctrine of God is that of divine contingency: God is not absolutely sovereign; God is not absolutely God. But if one's

doctrine of salvation is that God does not wait upon man in any sense, then one's doctrine of God is that of divine sovereignty: God is God. Either one's God is the sovereign God who sovereignly saves sinners by his sovereign grace or one's god is a dependent god, whose will and work is contingent upon the will and work of man. Divine sovereignty versus divine contingency—it must be one or the other.

Divine sovereignty versus divine contingency—this is the grand controversy of the ages. The Canons of Dordt takes its place in this history—long conflict. Divine sovereignty versus divine contingency was the controversy in paradise after the fall—aprons of fig leaves provided by Adam and Eve versus the coats of animals' skins provided by God. It was the controversy between Cain and Abel—an offering of the fruits of Cain's labor versus Abel's offering of a substitutionary lamb. It was the controversy between the Pharisees and Jesus—the salvation of the self-righteous versus the salvation of sinners. It was the controversy between the Judaizers and Paul—salvation by the works of the law versus salvation by the faith of Christ. It was the controversy between Pelagius and Augustine—salvation by man's effort versus salvation by grace. It was the controversy between Rome and the Reformation—justification by faith and works versus justification by faith alone. It was the controversy between the Remonstrants and the Reformed that necessitated the Synod of Dordt and its Canons—salvation by man's free will versus salvation by God's sovereign grace. Divine sovereignty versus divine contingency—this is the grand controversy into which the Canons of Dordt enters on behalf of the absolute sovereignty of God in the salvation of man.

The controversy continues today. Although the words may change and the battle may shift to different ground, the essential battle is still divine sovereignty versus divine contingency in the salvation of man. The Canons of Dordt continues to stand as so many cannons of the gospel that thunder against every cruel doctrine that salvation in any sense waits upon the will or work of the sinner. The Canons of Dordt continues to stand as the resounding peal of the gospel that salvation in every sense depends upon our sovereign God alone.

—AL