

Chapter Five

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

The final chapter of the Canons of Dort defends the Reformed doctrine concerning the perseverance of the saints. The “saints,” we understand, are Christians, the persons redeemed by Jesus Christ and renewed by his Holy Spirit as described in the previous chapters. The term “perseverance” describes the notion of sticking to it, so that the question of this chapter is: can Christians in fact persist in the faith to the end? If yes, how can they do it?

The question is important. Every Christian is curious on the topic, simply because we’re aware of our weaknesses and also notice fellow Christians falling away from the faith. Could we then too fall away and lose our salvation? That’s a scary thought.

To understand the material of this chapter of the Canons, we ought first to listen to the Arminian answer to this question. In Article 5 of their Remonstrance (see pg. 29) the Arminians had stated the following:

5. that those who are incorporated into Jesus Christ and thereby become partakers of his life-giving Spirit have abundant strength to strive against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh and to obtain the victory; it being well understood (that this is) through the assistance of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and that Jesus Christ assists them through his Spirit in all temptations, extends the hand, and—if only they are prepared for warfare and desire his help and are not negligent—keeps them standing, so that by no cunning or power of Satan can they be led astray or plucked out of Christ’s hand, according to the word of Christ, John 10, “*No one shall pluck them out of my hands.*” But whether they can through negligence fall away from the first of their life in Christ, again embrace the present world, depart from the pure doctrine once given them, lose the good conscience, and neglect grace, must first be more carefully determined from the Holy Scriptures before we shall be able to teach this with the full persuasion of our heart.

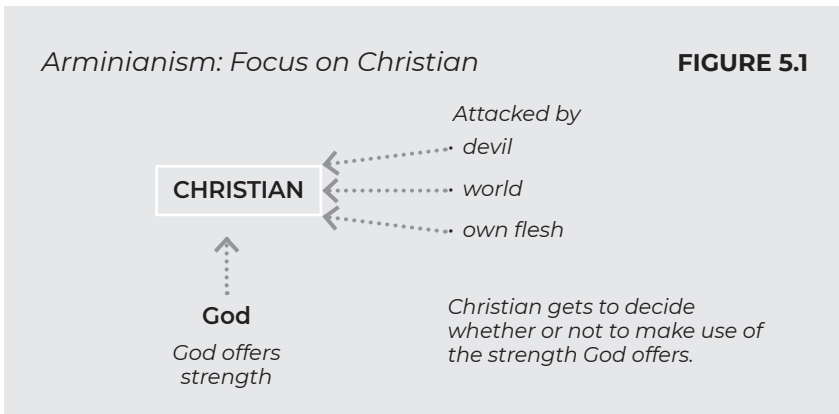
You will catch the Arminian point. Does a person once redeemed by Christ and renewed by the Holy Spirit endure in the faith because he is strong enough within himself to resist and overcome the attacks of Satan, the world, and his own flesh? The Arminians taught that yes, we are strong enough to withstand those attacks *provided we work with the assistance God gives*. So, the Arminian pictures the Christian under attack, and God standing as it were to one side with a supply of strength for the struggling Christian, but nothing happens unless *the Christian decides to work with that strength*. See Figure 5.1. In the Arminian Errors that the fathers appended to Chapter 5, they summarized this position clearly; see sidebar, Error 2.

Rejection of Errors, 5.2

Error: God does indeed provide the believer with sufficient strength to persevere, and is ready to preserve this in him if he will do his duty. But even with all those things in place which are necessary to persevere in faith and which God will use to preserve faith, it still always depends on the decision of man's will whether he will persevere or not.

Refutation: This idea contains outright Pelagianism. While it wants to make men free, it makes them robbers of God's honour. It conflicts with the consistent teaching of the gospel, which takes from man all cause for boasting, and ascribes all the praise for this benefit to the grace of God alone. It is also contrary to the testimony of the apostle: *It is God who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Cor 1:8).

Both parties involved in the controversy evaluated at the Synod of Dort agreed that every Christian is indeed under attack. Both parties



also agreed that the Lord supplies strength in the face of the attack. The disagreement focused on the question of whether God's strength was helpful to you if you failed to decide to let it work. On that point the fathers answered resolutely: God's work in our hearts and lives is not dependent on our decision or permission. God does not wait for man; he is sovereign. That's the point of Chapter 5.

We realize that the question is important for us. We experience temptations coming at us from all around, be it from the world outside or from our flesh within, and behind these temptations lies Satan's cunning. We don't want to collapse in the face of these attacks, but the fact is that time and again we do; we're obviously weak. Do we end up back on our feet due to some inner strength within ourselves? Or is it God's mighty work in us? If it's the latter, does God work in us because we let him? That's a scary thought. Might it really be that on our darkest days we are beyond his help unless we can somehow get it together and take hold of his strength? If the preaching tells you that God's strength is available for you on the condition that you can somehow grab hold of it, we're not going to find that encouraging—for we're already frustrated by the weaknesses we keep seeing in ourselves no matter how hard we try. . . .

Let's read through Chapter 5, then, and try to discover what the Scriptures taught the fathers on this matter. The answer is so very comforting and encouraging.

ARTICLE 1

The Regenerate Not Free from Indwelling Sin

Those whom God according to his purpose calls into the fellowship of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by his Holy Spirit, he certainly sets free from the dominion and slavery of sin, but not entirely in this life from the flesh and the body of sin.

The fathers began their defence in Chapter 5 by showing that the topic in question is not a stand-alone item, but in fact is the necessary result of what God has revealed concerning election (Chapter 1), redemption (Chapter 2), and regeneration (Chapter 3/4). Notice that particular words used in Article 1 are actually borrowed from the wording used in earlier chapters of the Canons. Table 5.1 lifts out the relevant wording, and shows which chapter and topic that wording alludes to.

TABLE 5.1

Wording	Chapter	Topic
God according to his purpose calls	1	Election
into the fellowship of his Son,	2	Redemption
regenerates by his Holy Spirit	3/4	Regeneration

God applies to the elect (those whom he called from eternity) Christ's work of redemption and the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration.

These elect people, Article 1 insists, God "*certainly sets free.*" He does *more* than elect and redeem

and regenerate; he also actually sets the believer free "*from the dominion and slavery of sin.*" That God's work goes beyond election and redemption and regeneration to include actual deliverance from Satan's bondage is clear from the instruction of Scripture. Consider the following data:

- As a result of the fall into sin, all people are slaves to sin and so under sin's control. So Jesus told the Jews, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin*" (John 8:34). But, Jesus continued, "*If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*" (v. 36). Jesus' words, we understand, were not intended to express that the Son would do half a job, perhaps his best (but whether he would succeed in setting us free was yet to be seen); on the contrary, Jesus Christ assured his hearers that anyone for whom the Son would shed his blood would in fact actually be set free from bondage to sin.
- In step with that promise, the apostle Paul told the Christians of Colossae, God "*has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*" (Col. 1:13, 14).
- Elsewhere Paul writes, "*Thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness*" (Rom. 6:17, 18). It's true that the word "slave" has a negative ring to our ears,

Lord's Day 13.34

Why do you call him our Lord?

Because he has ransomed us, body and soul, from all our sins, not with silver or gold but with his precious blood, and has freed us from all the power of the devil to make us his own possession.

but in the Bible the notion of being “*slaves of righteousness*” means that one has become fully free. As a stranded dolphin returned to the water is free to be all it was intended to be (a slave of the water), so we, once delivered from Satan and restored to God through Jesus Christ, are free to be everything our slavery to sin prevented us from being. Paul gets at this very thing when he said a few verses earlier: “*Sin will have no dominion over you*” (Rom. 6:14). With those words Paul is not promising what will happen to the believer at some point in the future on the day of Christ’s return, but he’s describing a present reality in the life of the believer. The believer is no longer on sin’s hook; he’s been set free and so sin is no longer boss over the believer.

Freed . . . But Not Entirely

The work of Christ to set us free from the dominion of sin is glorious indeed, and certainly calculated to thrill our hearts. The fathers would not have us conclude, though, that every trace of sin’s effect is now gone from the heart and life of the Christian. Read Article 1 again: God “*certainly sets [the elect] free from the dominion and slavery of sin, but not entirely in this life from the flesh and from the body of sin.*” To our dismay we daily experience sin’s seeming vice-like hold on us. The saints of Scripture experienced the same:

- The apostle Paul (whom we consider to be a giant in the faith) tells the saints of Rome, “*I am of the flesh, sold under sin*” (Rom. 7:14). We need to note that he wrote those words in the chapter directly after he wrote the texts quoted above, about no longer being “*slaves to sin*” (6:17). Happily, the apostle elaborates: “*For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate*” (7:15). The apostle gives voice to the despair of the Christian freed from the dominion of sin; determined though he is not to commit again that sin into which he fell yesterday, he finds himself today doing that very transgression once more. “*I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out,*” Paul laments (v. 18). How does one explain that tension? Says Paul, “*If I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me*” (v. 20). His point: though sin is not my master, sin remains within. Though I belong to Jesus Christ, and my will is bent in his direction, sin has not yet left me entirely. That’s why Paul goes on to speak of the war the Christian wages within himself: “*But I see in my members*

another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members" (v. 23). It's as if the Christian is divided within himself. In his "*inner being*" (v. 22) the Christian delights in God's law. At the same time, the rot of sin continues so that "*I do what I do not want*" (v. 20). It leads Paul to cry out the frustration that resonates in the heart of every Christian: "*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" (v. 24). Aware that Jesus Christ has already secured deliverance from the dominion of this "*body of death*," Paul cries out his relief, "*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*" In Christ Jesus there is forgiveness for enduring sin, and in him there will one day be complete relief from the sin inside that now continues to hound the Christian. That being the case, "*I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin*" (v. 25).

- James reminds his readers that "*we all stumble in many ways*" (James 3:2). With the word "*we*" James includes himself among those who stumble. He may be an apostle of the Lord, a man we regard as holy. But this man too is not above sin. He drives his point home some verses later when he writes, "*No human being can tame the tongue*" (v. 8). It's something every conscientious Christian can attest to.

With regard to sin, then, there are two realities in the life of the believer. With profound gratitude the believer acknowledges that Christ has in fact conquered Satan and defeated sin, so that I am no longer a slave to sin, no longer Satan's property, no longer obliged to obey Satan as my master. At the same time, in this broken life I remain weak and vulnerable to Satan's ongoing attacks and temptations, and repeatedly succumb to his seductions.

By way of a biblical example: the Israelites in Egypt were indisputably slaves, groaning under the burden of Pharaoh's hard labour. Once the Lord took them through the Red Sea, and they saw the Egyptians dead in the water, there could be no doubt that they were truly free from Egyptian control; Pharaoh no longer had dominion over them. But the habits they learned in the years of their slavery continued to affect them in the desert—including the patterns of Egypt to worship God through the form of an idol. Yes, Israel was free from Egypt's dominion, but not entirely in this life.

ARTICLE 2

Daily Sins of Weakness

Therefore daily sins of weakness spring up and defects cling to even the best works of the saints. These are for them a constant reason to humble themselves before God, to flee to the crucified Christ, to put the flesh to death more and more through the Spirit of prayer and by holy exercises of godliness, and to long and strive for the goal of perfection until at last, delivered from this body of death, they reign with the Lamb of God in heaven.

Lord's Day 24.62

But why can our good works not be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of it?

Because the righteousness which can stand before God's judgment must be absolutely perfect and in complete agreement with the law of God, whereas even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.

I'd rather deny the truth of the opening line of Article 2. Is it really so that “*defects cling to even the best works of the saints*”? I let my mind go back over some of the better things I've done this past week, and I really don't see “*defects*” in every one of them. . . . And to speak of “*daily*” sins of weakness seems, well, somewhat overdone. Yet the fathers at the Synod of Dort wrote these words not to summarize their experiences, but to summarize what they learned from God's Word. Scriptural passages as these shaped their thinking:

- The prophet Isaiah acknowledged that “*we have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away*” (Isa. 64:6). If the God who evaluates all things justly deems our “*righteous deeds*” to be “*like a polluted garment*” (and the Hebrew text actually refers to a bloodied menstrual cloth), how would he evaluate our lesser deeds?
- The apostle Paul explained at length in Romans 7 that sin continues to hound the child of God at each step. If a man of Paul's stature needs to lament that he cannot do the good he wants to do, but instead keeps on doing evil (as he says in 7:18), how should we evaluate ourselves? In

fact, when Paul in another place acknowledges that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, he emphatically adds—using the present tense!—that “*I am the foremost*” (1 Tim. 1:15). His reference is not to sins of his past, before the Holy Spirit changed him; his reference is to the abiding brokenness of the present, when he’s an apostle.

- John adds concerning regenerated and redeemed people, “*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (1 John 1:8).

Given such scriptural data as this, we can agree that it is certainly not too strong to say in Article 2 that “*daily sins of weakness spring up and defects cling to even the best works of the saints.*” We are, then, not to be surprised to see sin in ourselves day by day. How, though, ought we to respond to these sins?

Humility

In the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lord God has given his people so very much grace; through his sacrifice we’re set free from the dominion and slavery of sin! That glorious gospel, however, is not to get to our heads so that we become proud as if we are beyond sin. The fact that even my best works are, in God’s judgment, “*like a polluted garment*” (Isa. 64:6) reminds me that I do well to share Paul’s self-analysis: “*I am the foremost*” of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). The fathers caught that mindset when they wrote in Article 2 that daily sins are for the saints “*a constant reason to humble themselves before God.*” Such a mindset has two consequences:

1. I will be aware that I, no matter how advanced in the Christian life, remain vulnerable to Satan’s attacks and able to commit the vilest of sins. Noah’s drunkenness, Abraham’s deceit, Moses’ murder, David’s adultery, and Peter’s lies are not beyond me.
2. I will avoid looking down on those who fall into sin. Though I may not commit

Belgic Confession, Article 29

Those who are of the church may be recognized by the marks of Christians. They believe in Jesus Christ the only Saviour, flee from sin and pursue righteousness, love the true God and their neighbour without turning to the right or left, and crucify their flesh and its works. Although great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life. They appeal constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of Jesus Christ, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins through faith in him.

the exact evils another commits, I am guilty of committing other sins just as offensive to God as my neighbour's offences.

Instead, that sense of failure and inadequacy drives the child of God repeatedly to the blood of Jesus Christ. The child of God is deeply aware that daily he offends the righteous Judge of all the earth, and the only place he can find escape from the wrath of God is in the finished work of the Saviour—his precious blood atones for the sins that bother me. It's as Paul put it: "*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*" (Rom. 7:24, 25). That's what the fathers were driving at when they added in Article 2 that the Christian's daily sins of weakness cause him "*to flee to the crucified Christ.*"

That same humility compels the Christian to take seriously the instruction of Scripture to "*put to death . . . what is earthly in you*" (Col. 3:5). For I do not want to displease my God, especially not after he gave up his only Son to redeem me. How, though, shall I put to death the earthly within me? With the analogy of a coat, the apostle Paul reminds his readers that "*you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*" (Col. 3:9, 10). Notice the completed action: you *have put off* and *have put on*; Paul wants the Christians of Colossae to think of themselves as wearing a new coat, one made of heavenly material. That new coat, of course, was purchased through Jesus' blood (recall Canons Chapter 2) and is put on us through the renewing work of the Holy Spirit (recall Canons Chapter 3/4). Well now, the apostle continues, the Christian needs to act in a fashion consistent with the new clothes he's received through Jesus Christ. For the apostle continues, "*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, . . . compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another*" (Col. 3:12, 13). That's my privileged obligation: in grateful response to the redemption we've received through Jesus Christ I'll make it my business to wear proudly the heavenly clothes Christ has obtained for me. Because of my remaining sinfulness, wearing those clothes will require daily effort—as is clear from Paul's command to "*put on*" the clothes Christ has given us. That's in turn why the fathers in our article added that daily sins of weakness prompt the saints "*to put the flesh to death more and more.*" Note the "*more and more*"; this is an ongoing effort for the Christian, till the day of his death.

Prayer and Study: Defence against Daily Sins

How can the Christian make progress in wearing the clothes Christ has obtained for him? How can we resist the temptations of sin and “*put the flesh to death more and more*”? We’d love a clear answer to that question!

On the basis of Scripture’s instruction, the fathers learned to say that the Christian increasingly puts the flesh to death “*through the Spirit of prayer and by holy exercises of godliness*.”

Spirit of prayer

Paul knew very well the persistent failures of the Christian: “*I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing*” (Rom. 7:19). He also knew that the Christian—despite his failures—is “*not in the flesh but in the Spirit*” (Rom. 8:9). After all, if Christ’s blood has atoned for your sin, then Christ’s Spirit invariably dwells within you. Well now, Paul continues, this Spirit of God prompts us in the midst of life’s struggles and failures to cry repeatedly “*Abba! Father!*” (8:15). The Spirit, in other words, prompts us to pray. That prompting, though, does not mean that the Spirit treats us as robots so that we pray whenever he pushes our buttons; as responsible creatures we are to pray in step with the Spirit. As we struggle with the brokenness of life, we are in the strength of the Spirit to turn to God in prayer. Those prayers are not simply to be a cry for help, but are also to describe the temptations as we experience them. The Lord has preserved numerous psalms from saints of old who laid their specific struggles before the Lord God (see, for example, the headings introducing Pss. 52, 54, 56, 57)

and sought his strength and wisdom and deliverance in the midst of the trials and temptations of the day. As we seek to put the flesh to death more and more in the context of our actual daily battles, we do well to pray as the psalmists did—which requires, of course, that we know those psalms well. In our prayers, then, we acknowledge our vulnerability and weaknesses in the face of sin, and so acknowledge too our dependence on the Lord.

Holy exercises of godliness

The phrase describes the Christian’s need for a spiritual exercise routine. We are well aware that our bodies require regular exercise if we are to remain in (or get into) satisfactory physical shape. The same is true in relation to our service to God. The way to counter our spiritual weakness is to commit to holy exercises of godliness so as to build up our spiritual muscle. We can

do that through being busy daily with the Word of God, first in reading, then in reflecting on what was read. And no, as three push-ups and two sit-ups do not commonly constitute a fitting physical exercise routine, so a two-minute read of three verses (and a brief moment of reflection) does not constitute a fitting spiritual exercise routine. What is fitting will obviously depend from person to person, and perhaps from circumstance to circumstance. But the fact is that beginning the day with dedicated time for Bible reading, reflection on the reading, and prayer undoubtedly strengthens the Christian in his effort to stand firm in the battles of the day ahead. David's love for Scripture is instructive: though he found himself "*as in a dry and weary land*," he was "*satisfied as with fat and rich food*"—why?—because "*I remember you upon my bed and meditate on you in the watches of the night*" (Ps. 63:1, 5, 6). Elsewhere he explains how he is busy with the Word of God:

At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules. . . . Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments. . . . Their heart is unfeeling like fat, but I delight in your law. . . . The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. . . . Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. . . . How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Ps. 119:62, 66, 70, 72, 97–99, 103–105).

In fact, there is something to be said about committing entire passages of Scripture to memory. Having the Word of God at your mental fingertips assists you not just in conversation, but helps you also in knowing how to respond to the pressures on your path. The people of Israel were to experience that "*the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it*" (Deut. 30:14). Spending time with that Word, committing it to memory, and rolling it over in one's mind in the midst of life's challenges definitely helps the child of God in the midst of his weaknesses to flee to the crucified Christ and to put the flesh to death more and more.

Longing for Perfection

Of course, being busy with Scripture and devoting ourselves to prayer will not ensure that we never fall into sin (see Article 4). Paul's

frustrating cry—“*Wretched man that I am!*”—describes every Christian’s experience as long as one lives in this life. Precisely that reality prompts the saints to “*long and strive for the goal of perfection until at last, delivered from this body of death, they reign with the Lamb of God in heaven.*” It is on that day ultimately that we shall experience in full the deliverance Christ has obtained for us through his blessed sacrifice. To have no more sin, and to serve God without fault—how glorious that shall be! Well does the church echo the cry the Saviour taught us: “*Come, Lord Jesus!*” (Rev. 22:20).

ARTICLE 3

God Preserves His Own

Because of these remnants of indwelling sin and also because of the temptations of the world and of Satan, those who have been converted could not remain standing in that grace if left to their own strength. But God is faithful, who mercifully confirms them in the grace once conferred upon them and powerfully preserves them in that grace to the end.

The Christian is under constant attack from his three sworn enemies—the “*remnants of indwelling sin, . . . the temptations of the world and of Satan,*” as this article has it—and so the Christian desperately needs God’s ongoing preservation. As we look more carefully in what follows at these three enemies, it will become clear why the Christian needs God’s preserving care so badly.

Three Enemies

Indwelling sin

The evidence of Scripture that sin continues to dwell within the Christian has been presented in the previous two articles. The sensitive Christian experiences daily that this sin within us continually raises its ugly head.

The temptations of the world

We’re inclined to see the world in which we live not as an enemy but as a place to call home, and so a place where we can be comfortable. The Scriptures, however, speak differently. The following texts come to mind:

- Directly after the fall into sin, the Lord God told Satan in the hearing of our parents Adam and Eve, “*I will put enmity between you and*

the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). The term “*enmity*” describes the hostility there would be between Satan’s followers and the Lord’s followers, between the world and the church, the unbelievers and the believers.

- In step with God’s divine proclamation in the beginning, Jesus on his way to the cross told his disciples, “*Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*” (John 15:19). He had already said: “*Know that [the world] has hated me before it hated you*” (v. 18)—and those of the world expressed their hatred pointedly by demanding Jesus’ crucifixion. It may well be that we do not feel hated by the world, but I cannot go by my feelings since those feelings are affected by the fall into sin and therefore unreliable. Besides, the world is quite capable of wrapping up its hatred in a mantle of love (see 2 Cor. 11:14). Jesus’ words are conclusive on the point: “*The world hates you.*” We belittle his divine analysis to our own hurt.
- Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostle John repeats Jesus’ instruction: “*Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you*” (1 John 3:13). In step with this hatred is John’s further instruction: “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*” (1 John 2:15). We understand that if the world hates us, it is foolish for us to be in love with the world. I love God and hate the world, or I hate God and love the world; I cannot love both.
- That explains Paul’s instruction: “*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind*” (Rom. 12:2). The seed of the woman lives in enmity with the seed of the devil—and so there is no room for conformity with the world. Though we remain in this world, children of God live as *his* children, distinctly different from those in our world who do not know God.

The attacks of Satan

The reality of Satan’s attacks, and their manner too, is not for the faint-hearted. Consider these graphic illustrations:

- Jesus once told Peter, “*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat*” (Luke 22:31). Satan is pictured as a farmer shaking his sieve forcefully back and forth to separate

the wheat from the chaff, and he's determined to show that Peter is but chaff. On the sieve the wheat is helpless to lie still; it experiences continual buffeting as the sieve is jerked to and fro. From that perspective it's not at all surprising that Peter succumbed to Satan's attack and caved in the face of the girl's accusation. That experience no doubt affected Peter's words to the exiles of the dispersion: "*Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour*" (1 Peter 5:8). It will never do to make light of this enemy.

- That's the more so because of the vision Jesus showed John. "*Satan . . . was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. . . . Therefore . . . woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!*" (Rev. 12:9, 12). This enemy-from-the-beginning does not take his defeat on Calvary well, and in rage is determined to destroy any child of God he can.
- So Scripture gives this instruction: "*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*" (Eph. 6:11, 12). This text has an accumulation of loaded terms (rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, spiritual forces of evil), all of which describe the realm of demons that exercise powerful influence over this world. Because of their hellish schemes, we're told to put on heavenly armour, without which we would never be able to stand tall against Satan's attacks.

Conclusion

Put together, these three enemies—"*the devil, the world, and our own flesh,*" as the Heidelberg Catechism has it in Lord's Day 52

Lord's Day 52.127

What is the sixth petition?

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

That is:

In ourselves we are so weak that we cannot stand even for a moment.

Moreover, our sworn enemies—the devil, the world, and our own flesh—do not cease to attack us.

Will you, therefore, uphold and strengthen us by the power of your Holy Spirit, so that in this spiritual war we may not go down to defeat, but always firmly resist our enemies, until we finally obtain the complete victory.

(see sidebar)—are enough to fill any vulnerable Christian with terror. As Article 3 puts it, “*Those who have been converted could not remain standing in [God’s] grace if left to their own strength.*” But the good news is that we’re not dependent on ourselves!

God Is Faithful

The Lord God gives his people ample evidence that he himself preserves his people in the face of our threefold enemy.

- In his parable of the Good Shepherd, Christ spoke of the wolf eager to snatch away one of his sheep. But Jesus assured his disciples, “*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand*” (John 10:28, 29). Those are striking and very comforting words, for Jesus knew very well how weak the sheep were—including his disciples.
- Accordingly, after Jesus told Peter that Satan had demanded to sift him (in the passage quoted above), Jesus added these encouraging words: “*But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers*” (Luke 22:32). Though Peter certainly fell for Satan’s attack (for he denied the Lord three times), Christ Jesus held on to him so that Peter repented of his lies. More, through this experience the Lord prepared Peter for better service in the churches after Pentecost.
- Paul repented this promise from the Lord Jesus when he sought to encourage Christians who would experience Satan’s rage: “*But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one*” (2 Thess. 3:3).

Wrap Up

Could it be possible that the God who first elected a people from eternity, then sent his only Son into this world to die for these people, and thereafter poured out his Spirit to renew these people—could it really be possible that this God would now turn his back on these same people and leave them to Satan’s devices? That distinctly is not the God of the Bible! Instead, the God “*who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*” (Phil. 1:6). My survival does not ultimately depend on me, but on him—and that’s why I am safe though the world be with devils filled.

This delightful gospel fills the Christian with grateful confidence. Though deeply aware that his weaknesses abound and that Satan's attacks multiply and that the world's hatred grows, the child of God shares Paul's optimism: "*My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen*" (Phil. 4:19, 20). That's the promise the fathers dared to record in their Canons: "*But God is faithful, who mercifully confirms them in the grace once conferred upon them and powerfully preserves them in that grace to the end.*"

That's a much richer confession than the Arminians had. To their way of thinking, the Christian was dependent on his own decision; God would give strength if you would care to use it. But we know so well that we repeatedly don't stand tall, and so we're left to conclude that we're failures—and so bound to be losers. With the Scriptures the Canons would have us know that the Lord God holds on to *duds*.

What a God this is!

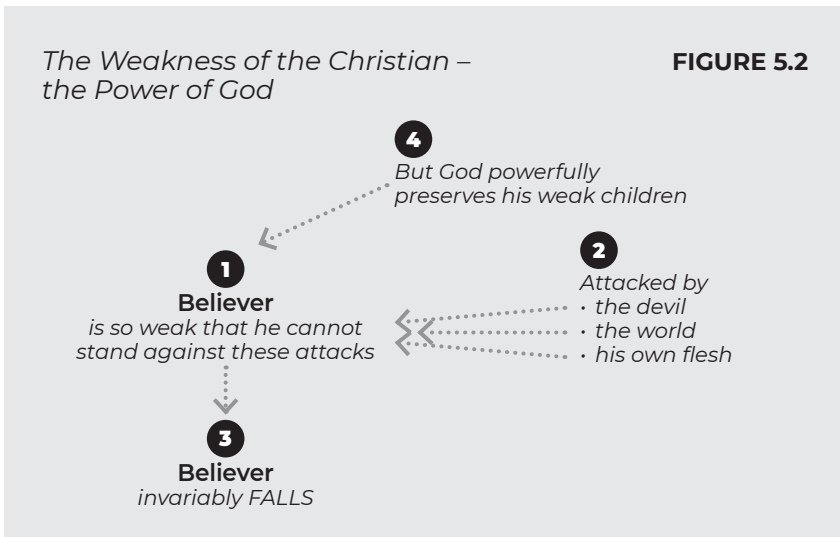
Questions for Discussion:

1. Sin continues to dog the Christian.
 - a. Would you say sin is your master? Why do you answer as you do? Supply biblical proof for your answer.
 - b. Do you notice in your own life that sin's mastery is broken? If so, how? If not, how?
 - c. According to the Arminian, who deserves the credit for your resisting Satan's attacks? Explain why the Arminians thought as they did on this point.
2. Even the regenerated Christian has but a small beginning of the obedience God requires.
 - a. How strong are you against the attacks of the devil, the world, and your own flesh? Try to provide illustrations from your life to support your answer.
 - b. How do you feel about your weaknesses and failures?
 - c. Explain what your prayer and Bible reading habits are. Do you notice a connection between prayer and Bible reading habits on the one hand, and how you fare in the battles against sin on the other? What does that connection look like in your life?
3. The devil, the world, and our own flesh continue to attack us.

- a.** Do you take seriously the reality of Satan's ongoing attacks against you? How does awareness of his attacks influence or determine what you do or where you go?
- b.** Is the world a scary place for you? Why or why not? Does your answer affect how you are involved in your community? Explain your answer.
- c.** Are you confident that you can control the urges of your flesh? Why do you answer as you do? Try to provide illustrations from your life to support your answer.
- d.** What effect does the promise of perseverance have upon you? Explain why you answer as you do.

ARTICLE 4

In the previous three articles the fathers confessed that the believer in this life is and remains so weak that he is unable to stand on his own in the face of temptation. That material is captured in Figure 5.2. This weak believer (#1) is also under pitiless pounding from the devil, the world, and his own flesh (#2), so that he habitually collapses (#3). The glorious gospel is, though, that the God who redeemed this weak believer through Jesus Christ also preserves him in the face of his enemies, so that he ultimately perseveres and reaches the goal of perfection (#4). In the next number of articles the Canons work out in more detail how these weak believers actually collapse (Article 4), what misery this collapse can lead to (Article 5), and how God ultimately preserves them (Article 6).



Saints May Fall into Serious Sins

Although the power of God whereby he confirms and preserves true believers in grace is so great that it cannot be conquered by the flesh, yet the converted are not always so led and moved by God that they cannot in certain particular actions turn aside through their own fault from the guidance of grace and be seduced by and yield to the lusts of the flesh. They must therefore constantly watch and pray that they may not be led into temptation. When they do

not watch and pray, they not only can be drawn away by the flesh, the world, and Satan into serious and atrocious sins, but with the righteous permission of God are sometimes actually drawn away. The lamentable fall of David, Peter, and other saints, described in Holy Scripture, demonstrates this.

Article 4 assumes and confesses that God is sufficiently powerful and gracious to preserve his own in the face of the attacks that keep assailing the believer. We shall not pause at this point to show from Scripture that God is indeed that mighty; Chapter 3/4 has already served to explain God's mighty power in redeeming sinners through Jesus' blood and in renewing sinners through his Spirit.

The fact that God is Almighty, though, does not mean that his people can never fall into sin (see #3 in Figure 5.2). The fathers put it like this: "*The converted are not always so led and moved by God that they cannot . . . turn aside through their own fault from the guidance of grace and be seduced by and yield to the lusts of the flesh.*" To say it differently: God in his wisdom may withdraw his preserving hand, so that the believer is left to his own devices in the face of the attacks that be. Invariably, the believer will fall into sin.

There are two realities caught in that sentence that do not sit well with us. The first is: I prefer to think that I am sufficiently strong to resist the desires of my own flesh, the enticements of the world, and the temptations of the devil. The second is: surely the Lord God would not leave us to fend for ourselves in the face of Satan's attacks? Did we not confess in Article 3 that he would always hold onto us? So what are we to make of the confession of Article 4? We'll need to touch on each of these two points.

How Weak Is the Child of God?

A number of respectable figures mentioned in Holy Scripture illustrate how very weak we in fact are.

- Noah strikes us as a man of great spiritual strength. The Scriptures record expressly that "*Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God*" (Gen. 6:9). For decades on end he kept working on his huge boat on dry land, all the while warning those who ridiculed his labours that was about to destroy all mankind (see Gen. 6, 7; Heb. 11:7; 2 Peter 2:5). Yet after he had seen the power of

God in the flood and tasted the mercy of God in his redemption from the judgment, “*he . . . became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent*” (Gen. 9:21). He did that though he knew God’s command that he was to “*have dominion over*” God’s creation (Gen. 1:26), and not let any created thing—say, grapes—have dominion over him.

- Of Abram the Scriptures say that “*he believed the LORD*” when God promised him offspring as many as the stars of heaven (Gen. 15:6). Yet the very next chapter (see Gen. 16:4) relates how Abram went to bed with Hagar, his wife’s slave, in order to receive an heir through her. That act was not just unfaithfulness to his wife Sarai, but was also evidence of him not trusting God’s promises.
- Moses was obviously a man of great spiritual strength. To go to none less than Pharaoh with the instruction to let God’s people go, and then to receive the mandate to lead some two million people through the desert—he was no slouch! Yet this same man one day quite deliberately swung his fist to kill that Egyptian (Ex. 2:12), and on another day he struck the rock to produce water, in blatant defiance of God’s specific instruction (Num. 20:8, 11).
- David was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). This man wrote many psalms that testified of how he trusted in the Lord in the midst of life’s challenges. We know too that he so loved the Lord that he longed to build a temple for God in Jerusalem. Yet this same man committed adultery with Bathsheba (1 Sam. 11:4), then killed her husband to cover his tracks (11:14), and lived in hardened denial of his misdeeds for a number of months till God finally exposed him through Nathan the prophet (12:7–13). This same man failed as a father inasmuch as he did nothing to protect his daughter Tamar from his lustful son Amnon (13:7).
- Peter had a place within the inner circle of the Lord’s disciples. Yet when the pressure was put on him he denied three times that he so much as knew who Jesus was (Matt. 26:69–75). During the time of his apostleship he chickened out of taking the stand he ought to have taken, so Paul had to correct him publicly (Gal. 2:11).

If saints of such stature fell into sins of drunkenness, adultery, murder, theft, deceit, and the like, should I be surprised when I fall into similar sins? I may indeed be dismayed, and deeply disappointed in myself (as I should be), but I may not be surprised. The same is true when I hear that a brother or sister long esteemed in the church—an elder, say, or a minister—has fallen

into sin. The Lord has told us repeatedly throughout his Word that every sinner remains inclined to any sort of evil, no matter how admired or aged. In my seminary days an instructor once warned us students never to be surprised at what we might uncover in the congregation. Over the more than three decades since then, I have found his words to be so very true.

This awareness makes one humble. “*Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall*” (1 Cor. 10:12). In fact, we embrace Jesus’ instruction to pray the sixth petition, “*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*” (Matt. 6:13)⁵. The church has echoed the teaching of our Lord in this petition with its confession that we are completely dependent on God’s grace (see sidebar, Lord’s Day 52). So we’ll not look down upon another who has fallen into some sin, but acknowledge with humility that but by the grace of God there go I.

Lord’s Day 52.127

What is the sixth petition?

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

That is:

In ourselves we are so weak that we cannot stand even for a moment.

Moreover, our sworn enemies—the devil, the world, and our own flesh—do not cease to attack us.

Will you, therefore, uphold and strengthen us by the power of your Holy Spirit, so that in this spiritual war we may not go down to defeat, but always firmly resist our enemies, until we finally obtain the complete victory.

Would God Let Us Fend for Ourselves?

We prefer to answer that question with a pronounced “no”; God would never do that. But consider a couple of biblical examples:

- When the envoys of Babylon came to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem, “*God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart*” (2 Chron. 32:31). The result was that this godly Hezekiah proudly showed the envoys all his wealth, as if his riches were his own accomplishment.
- The episode of David numbering the soldiers of Israel is introduced in Scripture with these words: “*Again the anger of the LORD was kindled*

5 The ESV translates with the words “*but deliver us from evil,*” and adds in the footnote that “*from the evil one*” is also a possible translation. Given that Satan is a very real enemy, and—one could say—the brains behind “*the evil,*” it is preferable to hear in this petition an illusion to the Evil One himself.

against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, ‘Go, number Israel and Judah’” (2 Sam. 24:1). In another place we’re told how God prompted David to number the people: “*Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel*” (1 Chron. 21:1). Does this mean that God instructed Satan to tempt David? We certainly can’t accept that possibility, simply because God does not cause sin. It’s better to understand from putting these two passages together that God was withdrawing his support from David so that David would be vulnerable to Satan’s attack. Satan, predictably, was constantly attacking David. When the Lord withdrew his supporting hand, David fell.

These two examples serve to illustrate what we confess in Article 4, that God doesn’t always preserve his own in such a way that believers do not fall into sin.

Whose Responsibility Is Sin?

How are we to understand that God might actually withdraw his support from his child? Perhaps we ought to think of a parent who lets the hand of her toddler go to see whether he can take a few steps by himself. Mother hasn’t deserted her child, but has backed off ever so little to test her son’s ability. Or perhaps we could think of the image Moses used to describe how God led Israel through the desert for those forty years: “*Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the LORD alone guided him*” (Deut. 32:11, 12). The picture is of the eagle pushing her young from the nest up in the tree to force the eaglet to fly—yet not deserting the young bird but rushing under the failing eaglet to catch the young on her back and return it to the nest for a new lesson tomorrow. No doubt the eaglet felt abandoned at the moment the mother pushed the young from her nest, but that interpretation of the mother’s motive was, of course, wrong.

Does this somehow mean that we can blame God for our failures on grounds that God relaxed his care for us? The answer is emphatically “no.” That’s because God in the beginning equipped the human race with responsibility (unlike rocks and rabbits), and so gave us the strength needed to stand firm in the face of the devil’s attacks. That we failed in Paradise to act in step with the responsibility he entrusted to us—and so in turn made ourselves dead in sin—does not change God’s requirements; though we are now fallen he continues to hold us to the standard of obedience he laid upon us at our creation. We ought not to think either

that after our fall God is somehow obligated to hold on to us in the face of Satan's continued attacks so that we never stumble.

We can, then, never blame God when we do succumb to Satan's temptations. So David, after he numbered the people, generously acknowledged his personal responsibility for his transgression: "*David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the LORD, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly'*" (2 Sam. 24:10).

The conclusion is clear: I can never say that my sins are not my own fault.

The Need to Watch

What is the believer then to do in the face of the attacks that keep coming his way? The fathers summarize the believer's responsibility with these words: "*They must therefore constantly watch and pray that they may not be led into temptation.*" The attentive reader will recognize that this statement comes from Jesus' instruction to his disciples on the night of his betrayal. In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus three times requested his disciples to "*remain here, and watch with me*" (Matt. 26:38). But three times Jesus returned to his disciples to find them asleep. That's when Jesus told specifically Peter, "*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.*" He explained the urgency for the instruction: "*The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (26:41). Peter—and every believer with him—wants to do what is right, but does not have the inner wherewithal to accomplish it; he's bound to fall asleep on the job, or be preoccupied through some other distraction, and so become a sitting duck for Satan's attack.

Yet each Christian remains responsible to pinpoint and resist the attacks of the devil. Peter, the same man Jesus addressed in the Garden, reminded his readers some years later that "*your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion,*" and then adds this instruction: "*Resist him, firm in your faith*" (1 Peter 5:8, 9). In light of Jesus' words in the Garden, resisting Satan occurs specifically through watching and praying. Yet watching and praying are not two separate activities, but two sides of one coin. As one watches for Satan's attacks, one defends oneself through asking God for protection and strength; and as one prays for strength and protection, one keeps alert for Satan's attacks. The sum of the matter is: the Christian is very aware that if God were to let me stand on my own for

even a moment, I would definitely collapse. I cannot walk the road of life on my own strength, but remain fully dependent moment by moment on God's mercy and protection.

ARTICLE 5

The Effects of Such Serious Sins

By such gross sins, however, they greatly offend God, incur the guilt of death, grieve the Holy Spirit, suspend the exercise of faith, severely wound their consciences, and sometimes for a while lose the sense of God's favour—until they return to the right way through sincere repentance and God's fatherly face again shines upon them.

Falling into sins always has consequences. The believer himself, as well as the God of heaven, is deeply affected by his sins. Article 5 lists a number of these consequences, which we'll need to discuss in turn. We'll begin with how our sins affect God, and then turn to consider how they affect us.

Sin Offends God

Perhaps we on earth do not take sufficiently into account that our conduct on earth actually affects the "mood" in heaven. Yet that's in fact what the Lord tells us. Consider these examples:

- Wickedness multiplied on the earth in the years after the fall into sin. The Lord saw this increase in wickedness, and "*regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart*" (Gen. 6:6). So deep was his righteous grief that God determined to destroy mankind through the flood.
- While Moses met with God on Mount Sinai, God's people-by-covenant made a calf of gold and worshipped it. God was deeply offended, as his words to Moses show: "*I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them*" (Ex. 32:9, 10).
- The people of Israel grumbled about having to eat manna all the time and asked God for meat. Their discontent greatly displeased the Lord. He sent quail into the camp of Israel, but "*while the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the LORD*

was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck down the people with a very great plague” (Num. 11:33).

- The apostle Paul tells the Christians of Rome that “*ungodliness and unrighteousness*” among people on earth moves God to anger so that “*the wrath of God is revealed from heaven*” through particular judgments (see Rom. 1:18–32).

Does it matter if I fall into sin? Most certainly it matters, for my sin is against God! And this God “*is a consuming fire*” (Heb. 12:29). And: “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Heb. 10:31). God *hates* sin. Heaven’s “mood” distinctly changes on account of sin, so that those not covered in Jesus’ blood will experience divine wrath for all eternity. That’s nothing to scoff at.

Yet the sorrow of heaven against our sins on earth is not limited to righteous anger demanding justice. Zechariah speaks of “*the tender mercy of our God*” (Luke 1:78), and here uses (in the Greek) a word that describes God as moved to the pit of his stomach on account of our sins. So touched was he to his deepest innards that he sent his only Son into our world to atone for those sins—that’s a remarkable and stunning thought. Truly, who can fathom the compassion of this eternal God!

Grieving the Holy Spirit

The specific work of the Holy Spirit is to apply to the elect the redemption Jesus Christ has obtained for them. The Spirit does this by awaking these elect from their spiritual death so that they are raised to new life, and so made able to believe the gospel and delight in the Saviour (see Chapter 3/4). The result of his renewing work is that regenerated people are changed so that their old habits of sin die off in favour of new habits that reflect what God is like. But if I now give myself to sin, I obviously grieve the Spirit who has changed me! This explains why David, after his transgression with Bathsheba, pleaded, “*Take not your Holy Spirit from me*” (Ps. 51:11). That possibility was distinctly real for David, for he had experienced firsthand what it meant that “*the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul*”; he was now open to the torments of “*a harmful spirit*” (1 Sam. 16:14). That in turn is why Isaiah’s statement that stubborn Israel “*rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit*” was meant to be worrisome for the people (Isa. 63:10). And it’s why Paul instructed the Christians of Ephesus to make a point not to “*grieve the Holy Spirit of God*” (Eph. 4:30).

What, then, is wrong with grieving the Spirit? Simply this: why should the Spirit continue his work in my heart if I am in love with a sin? There is no worse penalty imaginable than that the Holy Spirit would leave me to my own devices, for then I have no defence at all against Satan's temptations. In fact, then the sin I have learned to love will reign supreme in my heart. King Saul is a clear example.

Sin Hurts the Christian

Given that sin offends and hurts God, to the point that he may take his Holy Spirit from the wayward Christian, it follows that sin necessarily has a negative effect on the Christian too. The article mentions a few examples.

Suspend the exercise of faith

Faith is not simply that one believes that Jesus died on the cross for sin. Faith is *action*, is living the gospel you believe. Sin has a way of eroding one's desire to live Christianly, so that willingness to fight sin evaporates, and so does willingness to serve the neighbour. The presence of unconfessed sin makes it difficult to pray. Bible reading too becomes a burden (recall the "*holy exercises of godliness*" mentioned in Article 2) because it ever reminds me of my sin. Going to church also becomes a chore because again I'm confronted with what I've done. David described the problem graphically: "*When I kept silent*"—the reference is to his refusal to admit his wrongs—"*my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer*" (Ps. 32:3, 4). Notice well what David is describing. He was a grouch at the kitchen table, was losing weight, his face was drawn, he lacked energy. We'd be inclined to say that he was depressed, or needed a counsellor to help him cope better with life. Once he acknowledged his sin, however, relief flooded over him: "*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven*" (Ps. 32:1).

There is a powerful lesson here. There is no medication, no prescription, no holiday, no counselling that can lift God's hands of judgment from pressing upon unconfessed sin. Here honesty has a vital place; I deny or hide or ignore my sins and sinful habits to my own hurt.

Wound the conscience

The Lord has created in people a conscience so that there is a sense of what is right and wrong. Especially those whom the Holy Spirit has renewed have a sense of what pleases the Lord and what does not. But

sin has a way of dulling that conscience, so that one becomes insensitive to what's right or wrong. King David undoubtedly knew that his adultery with Bathsheba was sin before God. But for reasons of his own (and let's be honest, we can well imagine what those reasons were!) David did not confess his sin, but hid it from God and man. So when news came to David that Bathsheba was pregnant, he sought a way to cover his tracks. He had Bathsheba's husband Uriah come home from the battlefield with the instruction to spend the night with his wife (2 Sam. 11:8, 13); that could help explain the upcoming baby. . . . When Uriah refused to spend the night at home, David in desperation gave the command to place this faithful soldier in the frontlines of the fight so that he might be killed (v. 14); that way he could not testify that the child was not his. Why did David's conscience not prevent him from putting this plan into action? This illustrates the point: his unconfessed sin of adultery left his conscience wounded so that he was vulnerable to further sins, this time of murder.

Lose the sense of God's favour

To have the smile of God upon you is obviously a rich treasure. The Lord even promised to his people Israel that he would “*make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you*” (Num. 6:25). But when you embrace sin you no longer see the smile of God on you, but you see instead his frown—for you know that God is displeased with you. That frown in turn spells out the reality of distance between you and God. It leads to a deep restlessness within your heart: God has forsaken me.

Jeremiah's cry after the destruction of Jerusalem provides a clear illustration: “*I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath; he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light; surely against me he turns his hand again and again the whole day long.*” It's not a pretty picture: “*He has made my flesh and my skin waste away; he has broken my bones; he has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation; he has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago. He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; he has made my chains heavy; though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer*” (Lam. 3:1–8). Jeremiah's prayer is not simply the cry of an individual, but is the lamentation Jeremiah wants the people of Israel to adopt as their own. The people of Israel have turned from the Lord so that God sent the Babylonians to destroy their city and take them into exile. Heaven felt closed and God far away because of Israel's sin. This is characteristic of what those who refuse to repent of sin experience.

Restoration

Despite the damage sin does to the Christian—he loses a sense of God’s favour, his conscience is wounded, he finds it difficult to pray—he eventually does turn from his sin and is restored to God. Repentance occurs in his life. We’ve spoken in Chapter 3/4, Articles 11 & 12 about what this repentance is, so that we need not pause now to describe it. It is enough to say with our article that as a result of this repentance “*God’s fatherly face again shines upon them.*” That’s the feel of relief! It is the sense of Psalm 32: “*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered*” (v. 1). “*Blessed*”: that involves feelings too!

Perhaps this short paragraph raises a pressing question with you: how can you be so sure that the Christian will eventually turn from his sin and be restored to God? That’s the topic of Article 6.

ARTICLE 6

God Will Not Permit His Elect to Be Lost

For God, who is rich in mercy, according to the unchangeable purpose of his election, does not completely withdraw his Holy Spirit from his own even in their deplorable fall. Neither does he permit them to sink so deep that they fall away from the grace of adoption and the state of justification, or commit the sin unto death or the sin against the Holy Spirit and, totally deserted by him, plunge themselves into eternal ruin.

Article 6 begins with the essential word “for.” This word, we realize, introduces for us the reason why the fathers could be confident in Article 5 that the Christian will “*return to the right way through sincere repentance.*” What, then, is the reason for that confidence? It comes down to who God is.

God, says Article 6, “*does not completely withdraw his Holy Spirit from his own even in their deplorable fall.*” The article adds two reasons: God “*is rich in mercy*” and his “*purpose in his election*” is “*unchangeable.*” After we unpack those two concepts we can speak about God not withdrawing his Holy Spirit “*completely.*”

God’s Identity

One might like to think that the reason why a fallen Christian can get back on his feet is because of his own determination to do better, or his

own inner strength to make good the damage he has caused. The Canons of Dort do not speak in these terms at all, simply because the Canons had earlier confessed that every person is by nature dead in sin. With the fall into sin people have not—shall we say—fallen off a three-storey building so that one lies injured on the ground, able yet to call for help, make decisions as to what help to receive, and even cooperate in getting onto the stretcher. Mankind has instead fallen off a seventy-three-storey building so that one lies broken and dead on the sidewalk below, crushed, shattered, lifeless. It is true that the child of God has been raised to renewed life through the mighty work of the Holy Spirit. But even then, the child of God does not have strength within himself to stand tall in the face of the ongoing attacks of his three sworn enemies, the devil, the world, and his own flesh—as we discussed in Article 3 above.

That is why the child of God is ever driven back to God. If the Lord would not preserve his own, the child of God could not endure in the battles of life. If that is true in the battle itself, how much more is it true after he's fallen before Satan's attack and sinned against his God! But would God care to assist his disobedient child? The confession says yes, because God "*is rich in mercy.*"

Rich in Mercy

"Mercy" catches the notion that God does not deal with sinners as they deserve. God's hatred of sin is such that each sinner, every time he sins, makes himself worthy of God's eternal judgment. It's what God said to Adam in the Garden: "*In the day that you eat of [that tree] you shall surely die*" (Gen. 2:17). Or in Paul's words, "*the wages of sin is death*" (Rom. 6:23).

But it pleases God not to punish each sinner according to what that sinner deserves. That is his mercy. The Bible is full of examples of this generous mercy.

- At Mount Sinai the Lord God established a bond of love with a nation of slaves he had recently set free. He told them to serve only him, and to do so without the use of images. Yet within weeks of receiving that command, the people of Israel had Aaron construct a calf of gold so that they might worship God through this image (Ex. 32:4, 5). Despite this blatant disobedience, the LORD did not destroy Israel. He explained his patience this way: "*The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving*

iniquity and transgression and sin” (Ex. 34:6). The phrase “*steadfast love*” appears in other translations as “mercy.”

- David acknowledges that “*the LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,*” and shows this mercy specifically in the context of our sins. “*He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities*” (Ps. 103:8, 10).
- Jeremiah had described how downcast he (and Israel) felt because of the Lord’s heavy hand upon the people’s sins. Their being taken into exile, however, did not lead Jeremiah to total despair, for “*the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness*” (Lam. 3:22, 23).
- The apostle Paul, in his twisted zeal for God, once persecuted the church of the Lord. He describes what happened next, “*But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim. 1:13, 14).
- Because of our rebellion in Paradise, we “*were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*” Paul’s next sentence is striking: “*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved*” (Eph. 2:3–5). That classic statement of the gospel shows up so delightfully who our God really is!

This, the church does not hesitate to say, is still our God: rich in mercy! The child of God may today fall into sin, as did Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, and so many other saints of Scripture. That fall may hurt us, and grieve God deeply too. But we have hope because of who God is: in the face of the judgment we deserve, his mercies are new every morning—for Jesus’ sake.

Unchangeable purpose of his election

Our article mentions a second factor contributing to the fallen saint’s confidence of restoration. This second reason reaches back to the decision God had made, before he created the world, to save particular persons from hell and damnation. We’ve discussed in detail in Chapter 1 what election is (Article 7). To repeat briefly: from the entirety of the human

race who through the fall into sin would join Satan's side, God chose particular persons for redemption through Christ's death. These persons he adopts as his children and he gives them life eternal (see Figure 1.4).

The question now becomes: did Noah's drunkenness prompt God to scratch his name from the list of the elect? Did Moses' murder, or David's adultery, or Peter's lies cost them their salvation? Most importantly to us, do *my* sins prompt God to scratch *me* from his list of the chosen? To put it differently: does the fact that I fall into sin give God an opening to change his mind about saving me?

The Arminians had said that yes, that's certainly so (see sidebar, Error 1). But the fathers rejected that position as unbiblical. Consider the significance of these passages:

- The psalmist experiences that life has its problems—and that certainly includes the fact that sinners earn God's rejection. Yet he says, "*The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever*" (Ps. 138:8). David is confident that God will bring to completion all he has planned for him. That would include salvation itself.
- Through the prophets the Lord God rebuked the people of Israel for their persistent sins. Yet God also told them why he did not destroy them altogether. "*I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed*" (Mal. 3:6).
- The apostle Paul reminds the Philippians of his confidence that "*he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of*

Rejection of Errors, 5.1

Error: The perseverance of the true believers is not a fruit of election or a gift of God obtained by the death of Christ, but a condition of the new covenant, which man before his so-called decisive election and justification must fulfil through his free will.

Refutation: Holy Scripture testifies that perseverance follows from election and is given to the elect by virtue of the death, resurrection, and intercession of Christ: *The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened* (Rom 11:7). Also: *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised to life—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* (Rom 8:32–35).

Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). These Philippians were sinners no different from you and me. But Paul is sure that not even their weaknesses will derail God’s eternal plans for these particular men and women.

- When Paul tells the Ephesian saints about God’s eternal election, he dares to draw out the glorious comfort embodied in their election. “*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*” (Eph. 1:11). Notice that Paul uses in that sentence the pronoun “*we*”; that’s obviously a reference to Paul himself plus the “*saints who are in Ephesus*” to whom he’s now writing (1:1). These are people with faces and names, sinners who struggle with life’s brokenness and failures. Yet Paul is confident that these particular sinners “*have obtained an inheritance*”—and that’s of course eternal life in Jesus Christ. Would any of these “*saints who are in Ephesus*” in the future fall into some sin? Invariably, yes, for all people sin. But Paul is confident of their salvation because God does not change; he instead stands unflinchingly by his decisions to save.

It is passages of Scripture as these that prompted the fathers to be so optimistic in our article about why sinners will certainly repent in due time and return to the right way. The cause lies fully in God!

The Arminian Position

To draw out more clearly how rich this gospel is, it may be helpful to pause for a moment to consider what the Arminians were saying on this point. And please remember: what the Arminians were saying is the default position of the sinful human heart; there is something in us that wants their position to be true. Their position is caught in Error 3 as printed in the sidebar.

Think it through. Would you be comfortable being told in the preaching that you, a true regenerate believer as you know yourself to be, could tomorrow definitely and completely fall away from faith in Jesus Christ, and so lose your salvation? Granted, what’s attractive about this line of thought is that I’m in the driver’s seat of my eternal destiny, and that thought pleases me. But if we think it through further, and are honest with our ability to resist sin, we’ll need to acknowledge that we are in fact incredibly weak. We decide today that tomorrow we’re going to improve our act so that we’ll eventually be better people, even acceptable to God. But after a year we’re still struggling with the same failures we battle today;

we experience that we do not actually end up becoming better people. Our battles with procrastination, with laziness, with drinking, with smoking, with over-eating, with sexual sin, and so much more, illustrate the point. And if we manage to overcome the one vice, we find to our dismay that another struggle takes its place. Becoming better, becoming less sinful, becoming more attractive to God is so impossible. That, of course, is because we are by nature dead in sin (and not just injured), and even after our regeneration we remain inclined to every evil. With that in mind, hearing in the preaching that I, who today love the Lord Jesus Christ dearly, could tomorrow deny him without ever repenting and so lose my salvation, is scary.

Thankfully, the Bible tells us that we are not in the driver's seat; God is. Consider:

- The Psalms never boast of the psalmist's own achievements, but always keep asking God for help; more, the Psalms ooze confidence that God most certainly will help the sinner currently experiencing Satan's attack.
- Jesus told his disciples, "*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out*" (John 6:37). Notice who is in the driver's seat here, and who is not.
- On another occasion he said, "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand*" (John 10:27, 28).

Rejection of Errors, 5.3

Error: True regenerate believers not only can fall completely and definitely from justifying faith and also from grace and salvation, but indeed they often do fall from them and are lost forever.

Refutation: This opinion nullifies the grace of justification and regeneration and the continuous preservation by Christ, contrary to the clear words of the apostle Paul: *God shows his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God* (Rom. 5:8, 9). And contrary to the apostle John: *No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God* (1 John 3:9), and also to the words of Jesus Christ: *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand* (John 10:28, 29).

- Paul assured the Christians of Rome that nothing in all creation was “able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39).

My own sins, and even my own hardness of heart, then, cannot prompt God to change his mind about my salvation so that he would decide to scratch me from the list of the elect after all. The gospel is so rich because of who God really is.

The Sin against the Holy Spirit

Before we leave Article 6 behind us, we need to note its reference to “*the sin unto death*” and “*the sin against the Holy Spirit*.” For our purposes it is sufficient to equate these two as one and the same transgression. The topic comes up in this article because the Arminians taught the folk of the pew that true regenerate believers could commit those sins (see sidebar, Error 4). What, then, is this sin?

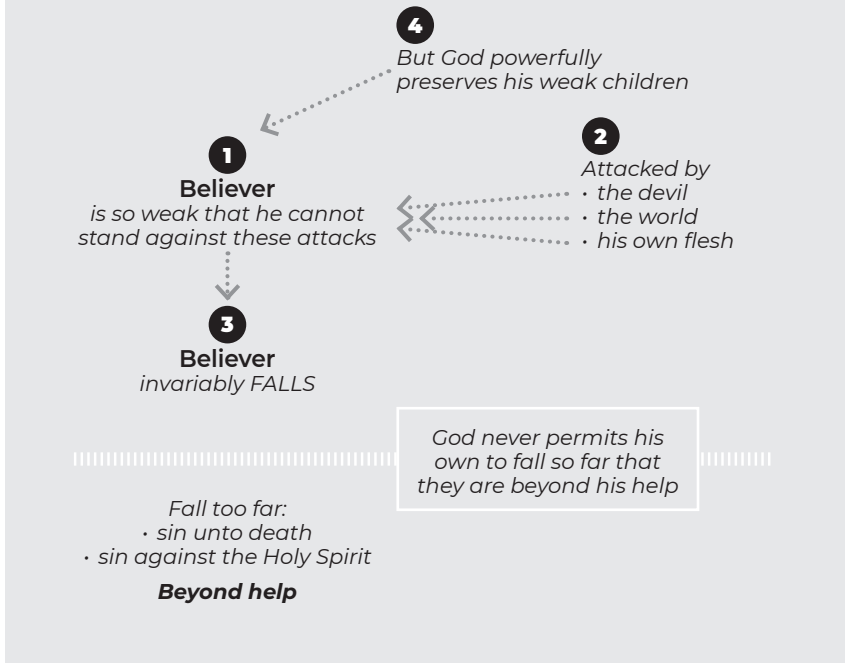
Rejection of Errors, 5.4

Error: True regenerate believers can commit the sin that leads to death or the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Refutation: The same apostle John, after speaking of those who commit the sin that leads to death and forbidding prayer for them, immediately adds: *We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning (namely, with that kind of sin); but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him* (1 Jn 5:16–18).

Jesus once said that the sin against the Holy Spirit is the one sin that cannot be forgiven. Said he, “*Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come*” (Matt. 12:31, 32). This becomes a scary thought to the sensitive Christian when he falls into sin, because it’s easy enough to jump to the conclusion that I must have committed that unforgiveable sin—whatever it is—because I feel like God isn’t listening to my prayers, and I have no desire to read the Bible anymore, . . . and so I must surely be beyond help, and damned after all. See Figure 5.3.

What then is the sin against the Holy Spirit? Some would say that it’s the sin of adultery, or perhaps it’s blasphemy. Both are wrong. Consider the context in which Jesus spoke about this sin against the Holy Spirit.

*The Child of God Cannot Fall Too Far***FIGURE 5.3**

The Pharisees had claimed that Jesus cast out demons because he was filled with the devil: “*It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons*” (Matt. 12:24). What’s remarkable about this accusation is that the Pharisees picture the prince of demons casting out demons—and that hardly makes sense, for why would the devil cast out his own demons from his slaves? On the other hand, the Holy Spirit was very clear throughout the Old Testament as to what the Son of God would do when he came to earth, and that includes removing the consequences of sin. The Pharisees knew the Bible, and so could know that what Jesus was doing—casting out demons—fit exactly into what the Holy Spirit had prophesied he would do. By deliberately putting Jesus in league with Beelzebul, “*the prince of demons,*” the Pharisees purposely slandered Jesus, and openly rejected him as God’s servant. That deliberate act of rejecting Jesus Christ, in the face of evidence pointing to the contrary, is the sin against the Holy Spirit. There is no forgiveness for that hardened, deliberate rejection of God’s good news. Forgiveness is not possible because one

rejects the very Spirit who works faith and repentance. The heart is then hardened. This stubborn refusal to accept the promise of the gospel is also the “*sin that leads to death*,” of which the apostle John speaks (1 John 5:16).

God, the fathers confess, will not permit his chosen ever to commit this sin. Instead, through his Holy Spirit he will sovereignly compel them to embrace the good news of redemption in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The child of God can most certainly fall into sin, even serious sin. The Lord our God, though, does not let his elect fall to a point beyond his help or compassion. That gives delightful comfort in the face of sin. That is why Article 5 could positively state that God’s own will “*return to the right way through sincere repentance*” so that “*God’s fatherly face again shines upon them*.” Not how I feel on account of my sins—rejected, alone, miserable—determines the reality, but God’s mercy and faithfulness does. He brings to completion the work that he has begun.

That emphasis on *God’s* gracious compassion is the fine point of Chapter 5.

Questions for Discussion:

4. Though we wish it were not so, saints may fall into serious sins.
 - a. How strong are *you*? Do you actually think that you could do what David did? Explain why you answer as you do. What attitude does this awareness promote within yourself?
 - b. We like to say that God is always there for us. Would God ever leave you to fend for yourself? Put into words how you feel about that possibility. Does this leave you with comfort?
 - c. Who is responsible for *your* sin? How can you arm yourself to withstand the attacks of the devil, the world, and your own flesh?
5. Sin has terrible consequences.
 - a. Explain what effect our sin has upon God. Why would this be so?
 - b. Explain what effect our sin has upon ourselves. Why would this be so?
 - c. Why did David’s bones grow old with his groaning in Psalm 32? Can this happen today? What is the solution?

- 6.** God has promised to hold on to his own.
 - a.** What's the difference between the Reformed position and the Arminian position on the effect of believers falling into sin? Which position is richer? Why?
 - b.** What is the sin against the Holy Spirit? Could you be guilty of committing this sin?
 - c.** Does God ever withdraw his Holy Spirit from his children-by-covenant?

ARTICLE 7

Chapter 5 of the Canons, you'll recall, deals with the question of whether or not believers—that's the "saints"—will still be Christians when they die, or whether they could fall away. So far, Chapter 5 has acknowledged that Christians can most certainly fall into serious and grievous sins, and even experience for a while that God doesn't seem to love them. In fact, an outsider looking in could even conclude that a particular Christian is no longer a believer. God, however, as this chapter had insisted in Article 6, will never permit his own to fall so deeply that they are beyond help. The next three articles draw out how the Lord God preserves his own so that they eventually return to him.

God Will Again Renew His Elect to Repentance

For in the first place, in their fall, he preserves in them his imperishable seed of regeneration, so that it does not perish and is not cast out. Further, through his Word and Spirit he certainly and effectually renews them to repentance. As a result they grieve from the heart with a godly sorrow for the sins they have committed; they seek and obtain through faith with a contrite heart forgiveness in the blood of the Mediator; they again experience the favour of a reconciled God and adore his mercies and faithfulness. And from now on they more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

Article 7 confesses that the Lord does two things in relation to his fallen children:

1. He preserves in his elect the "*imperishable seed of regeneration*" in their time of apostasy; and
2. Through his Word and Spirit he eventually renews them to repentance.

In what follows we need to discuss both of these points in detail. I take a moment first, though, to repeat what I've stressed before: each sinner is always responsible before God to repent of his own sin (see Chap. 1, Art. 1; Chap. 2, Art. 6, 9; Chap. 3/4, Art. 14). The fact that God works graciously in the hearts of those who have fallen into sin never negates the sinner's responsibility to repent of his own transgressions.

Imperishable Seed of Regeneration

God preserves in his own “*his imperishable seed of regeneration.*” What, we wonder, is this “*seed of regeneration*”? We’d earlier spoken in detail about what “regeneration” is (see Chap. 3/4, Art. 11). So it will be enough now to remind ourselves that all mankind, as a result of our fall into sin, ended up on Satan’s side, dead in sin and imaging what Satan is like. Through Christ’s shed blood, however, those chosen to life are taken from Satan’s side back to God’s side (see Figure 3/4.10). These redeemed people, now back on God’s side, do not remain dead in sin (so that they continue to reflect what Satan is like); they are instead changed through the Spirit of Jesus Christ so that they begin again to image what God is like. That change is known as regeneration, or rebirth, or conversion, or being made alive, or being raised from the dead, and other such terms.

Why, though, would the Canons speak of a “*seed of regeneration*”? What does that phrase refer to? A brief look at how Scripture uses the term “seed” in connection to regeneration will assist us. Consider the following passages:

- “*No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God*” (1 John 3:9). John had earlier said, “*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (1 John 1:8). Though sin, then, is inevitable for the Christian, John insists that whoever has been born of God does not make “*a practice of sinning.*” That phrase indicates that the Christian does not *plan* to sin, and when he nevertheless does sin, he does not *remain* in his sin. That’s because God himself has planted a seed in his heart—he’s regenerated—and God’s work always bears fruit.
- Peter tells the “*elect exiles of the dispersion*” (1 Peter 1:1) to “*love one another earnestly from a pure heart,*” and gives this explanation: “*You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God*” (vv. 22, 23). A perishable seed in the ground—one can think of a bean seed, or a potato—will eventually rot (if it’s too wet or perhaps too dry) so that it can no longer sprout, grow, and bear fruit. The seed God places in the heart of the believer, however, is imperishable; it never rots or dies so that it cannot grow and bear fruit. Yes, the seed God works in the believer may lie as if dormant for a period, but in due time the waters of God’s word will moisten and warm the seed so that it grows and bears fruit. God’s work is never futile.

With the phrase “*imperishable seed of regeneration*,” then, the Canons refer to the beginnings of God’s mighty work in sinners’ hearts that will ultimately end up in obvious change and repentance.

This contrasts with what the Arminians were saying, as captured in the sidebar (see Error 8). Arminian preachers had told their congregants that they and their children, though once born again, could fall away from God so totally that the seed of regeneration God had worked in their heart could decay and perish. This, they added, could happen not just once in the course of one’s lifetime, but repeatedly, so that one is a true Christian one day, a year later a hardened unbeliever, then some time later a devout and genuine Christian again, then in due time again a fervent apostate, etc. That’s why the fathers pointed out in Article 7 that Scripture teaches differently: though the believer falls in this life (even looking to all the world like a crass unbeliever), God’s work of rebirth in him always remains and so needs never to be repeated. God’s work is not corruptible, and so the work he has begun in a sinner’s heart—that seed of regeneration—will one day most certainly bear fruit.

Of course, the fact that God’s work is imperishable does not mean that believers can freely give themselves to sin (or remain in sin) on the assumption that God will one day rescue them. I remain responsible to resist sin and remain Christian in thought and heart. That being said, I may not when I fall into sin lose all hope as if now I’m beyond God’s rescue. That God preserves in his own his imperishable seed of regeneration is for weak Christians truly comforting.

What, though, does it take to prompt repentance and growth in the fallen child of God? That’s the second element that needs attention.

God Renews His Saints to Repentance

God, we learned, does not let the believer who has fallen into sin remain in his sin. At his time, God picks him up and restores him. This is the work of God the Holy Spirit through his Word.

Rejection of Errors, 5.8

Error: It is not absurd that one, having lost his first regeneration, is again and even often born anew.

Refutation: This doctrine denies that the seed of God, by which we are born again, is imperishable, contrary to the testimony of the apostle Peter: *you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable* (1 Pet 1:23).

God's Word, of course, is powerful to get things done. When nothing yet existed, "*God said*" (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, etc.), and instantly light appeared, as did dry land, vegetation, and so much more. "*By the word of the LORD the heavens were made. . . . For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm*" (Ps. 33:6, 9). Through the prophet Nathan God's word hit David in his sin. "*You are the man,*" said Nathan to the lapsed king, as he exposed his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband (2 Sam. 12:7). That word from God broke David's heart so that he acknowledged his sin, and repented, "*I have sinned against the LORD*" (2 Sam. 12:13). This is what the fathers described when they said in Article 7: God "*through his Word and Spirit . . . effectually renewed (David) to repentance.*"

Repentance

David's acknowledgment of his sin provides a biblical example of what repentance is. As every Christian needs to repent of his sins, we do well to bore a little deeper into what repentance actually looks like. A couple of examples from Scripture illustrate it.

- David wrote Psalm 51 "*when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.*" The psalm gives us no limp "I'm sorry" from David's mouth, but rather a cry from a broken heart. Savour his plea to God: "*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. . . . For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight*" (Ps. 51:1, 3, 4). David offers no excuses, lists no mitigating circumstances, and points no fingers. Sincerely and humbly he takes 100 percent responsibility

Lord's Day 33.88–90

What is the true repentance or conversion of man?

It is the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new.

What is the dying of the old nature?

It is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sin, and more and more to hate it and flee from it.

What is the coming to life of the new nature?

It is a heartfelt joy in God through Christ, and a love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

for his transgression. Later in the psalm David gives colour to his repentance: “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise*” (v. 17).

- Peter’s repentance was just as emotional. The rooster’s crowing just before Jesus was sentenced to death reminded Peter of Jesus’ own prophecy, “*Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times*” (Matt. 26:34). That recollection broke Peter’s heart; “*he went out and wept bitterly*” (Matt. 26:75).

Men don’t cry, we like to say to each other, but repentance defies such cultural conventions. The child of God who gave himself to sin and initially refused to repent, and whose heart the Spirit has eventually broken, offers no excuses for his sin; he instead takes full responsibility for what he did and casts himself upon the mercy of the heavenly Judge. The Holy Spirit had David elsewhere put it like this: “*The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit*” (Ps. 34:18). The fathers put it well in our article: “*They grieve from the heart with a godly sorrow for the sins they have committed.*” There really is nothing wrong with tears flowing from a broken heart.

Worldly grief

Given our depravity, it is not surprising to learn that someone’s grief for sin could actually turn out to be not “*godly sorrow,*” but something the Bible calls “*worldly grief.*” Ponder Paul’s words: “*I rejoice . . . because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief. . . . For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death*” (2 Cor. 7:9, 10). Paul does not in this passage tell the Corinthian Christians what “*worldly grief*” is, but the Corinthians will surely have known Paul’s meaning from other passages of Scripture. Give thought to whether the remorse expressed in the following passages might be “*godly sorrow*” or “*worldly grief*”:

- “*When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ . . . And he went and hanged himself*” (Matt. 27:3–5).
- Esau “*sold his birthright for a single meal. . . . When he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears*” (Heb. 12:16, 17).

We realize well that neither Esau's tears nor Judas' suicide illustrate "godly grief"; both instead illustrate grief that focused on the self. Since God's glory and honour are not central to their repentance, their remorse did not please God at all.

Forgiveness

The blessed fruit of one's repentance is that the Lord God graciously grants forgiveness of sins. After David acknowledged as sin his affair with Bathsheba, Nathan the prophet assured David of God's forgiveness with these words, "*The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die*" (2 Sam. 12:13). So David dared to pray, in the same psalm wherein he confessed his sin, "*Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice*" (Ps. 51:8). In another psalm David described how he had refused to acknowledge his sin and how in turn God's hand had pressed heavily upon him—so much so that his "*strength was dried up as by the heat of summer*"; he lost weight, he no longer had energy for his work, he was discouraged and depressed. But, he adds, "*I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity,*" and as delightful result he could "*rejoice*" and "*shout for joy*": "*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven*" (Ps. 32:1, 3, 4, 5, 11).

The Favour of God

The term "*blessed*" in the above quote is striking. The word used in the original refers to someone so privileged that others are envious of what he received. In this context the reference is to forgiveness from none less than the Creator and Judge of all the earth. Instead of being on the receiving end of God's judgment, this repentant sinner is on the receiving end of his blessing, his smile, his favour. That's enough to make anyone jealous—and seek the same favour from God through repentance of his own sins.

This sense of favour from God fills the forgiven person with gratitude, and with a desire to live the more eagerly for the Lord's glory. Deliverance from the heavy hand of God—already in this life, and eventually in the life to come—cannot but prompt thanksgiving and a concerted determination to serve the Lord wholeheartedly. As the fathers put it at the end of our article, repentant sinners "*again experience the favour of a reconciled God and adore his mercies and faithfulness and . . . they more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.*"

Those closing words of Article 7 are borrowed from Paul’s instruction to the Christians of Philippi to “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Phil. 2:12). Paul’s point is not that we have to organize or achieve our own salvation, for Paul knows so very well that salvation is from Christ alone. His point is instead that precisely because the Christians of Philippi have come to treasure the riches the Lord has given them, they shall from now on eagerly and readily unpack those riches in a lifestyle befitting the gospel. In our article, then, the point is that the restored sinner—precisely because he’s been graciously restored—will from now on eagerly and thankfully live in lockstep with the salvation the Lord has freely given him.

ARTICLE 8

The Grace of the Triune God Preserves

So it is not through their own merits or strength but through the undeserved mercy of God that they neither totally fall away from faith and grace nor remain in their downfall and are finally lost. With respect to themselves this could not only easily happen but would undoubtedly happen. But with respect to God this cannot possibly happen, since his counsel cannot be changed, his promise cannot fail, the calling according to his purpose cannot be revoked, the merit, intercession, and preservation of Christ cannot be nullified, and the sealing of the Holy Spirit can neither be frustrated nor destroyed.

Article 8 draws out two aspects concerning the fallen sinner’s salvation. These two are:

1. The fallen saint is simply not able to save himself from falling, let alone to restore himself;
2. God’s identity as God means that the fallen saint will never fall so deeply that he is beyond God’s help; instead, God will most certainly bring about his restoration.

The Fallen Cannot Help Themselves

With the opening two sentences of Article 8, the fathers summarized briefly the material that had been covered in the previous articles:

- Article 1 had said: sin remains in the hearts of the saints.

- Article 2 had said: daily sins of weakness defile even the best works of regenerated people.
- Article 4 had said: the saints can fall into serious sins.
- Article 5 had said: those sins can be so serious that saints feel far from God.

How, then, can the saints survive and reach the goal of life eternal? Says Article 8, “*So it is not through their own merits or strength . . . that they neither totally fall away from faith and grace nor remain in their downfall and are finally lost,*” and even adds: “*With respect to themselves this could not only easily happen but would undoubtedly happen.*”

That’s a damning statement that does not sit well with our sinful hearts. We’d much rather think that we’re not much damaged through the fall (injured, say, through a fall off a three-storey building instead of dead after a fall off a seventy-three-storey tower). So we’re happy to think that we have a free will by which we can make responsible decisions, so that in turn our repenting from sin is up to us and depends on us. As we’ve discovered and confessed in previous articles, that position is simply not the teaching of Holy Scripture. We humbly acknowledge that tragic reality—and therefore seek our assistance and salvation from God alone. That’s what Article 8 now hastens to explain.

The Work of the Triune God

Divine Scripture insists that saints’ surviving in the struggles of faith and ultimately reaching the goal of perfection is the mighty, gracious work of the triune God himself. So Article 8 draws out the contribution of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. See Figure 5.4 for a graphic presentation of this material.

God the Father

Concerning the work of God (the Father) our article summarizes Scripture’s instruction that God’s “*counsel cannot be changed, his promise cannot fail, the calling according to his purpose cannot be revoked.*” Three elements touching on God’s character are listed here.

1. God’s counsel cannot be changed

God determined before he created the world what was to happen in the course of world history. That includes not just the rise and fall of nations, or the ebb and flow of the seasons, but also that some specific

persons would ultimately receive the crown of glory. Since God is Almighty, there is no force in all creation able to frustrate this divine decision. The psalmist says plainly, “*The counsel of the LORD stands forever*” (Ps. 33:11). That quote is the more significant because the psalmist contrasts this divine “*counsel*” with the broken plans of the peoples (v. 10).

2. God’s promise cannot fail

After he created the world, the Lord claimed a people for himself, and sealed that claim with the sacrament. Then much can happen in the life of a child of God, but “*for those who love God all things work together for good*” (Rom. 8:28)—including Noah’s drunkenness, Abraham’s distrust, Moses’ murder, David’s adultery, and Peter’s denial. These men of stature fell deeply, but even their fall could not separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus (8:39). This is what Jesus had pledged to his disciples when he spoke about the sheep the Father had given him: “*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand*” (John 10:28, 29). As Paul said it elsewhere: “*But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one*” (2 Thess. 3:3).

3. God’s calling cannot be revoked

Further, God has elected a certain number of persons to salvation (Canons, Chapter 1 covered this topic in detail). Paul says concerning these people, “*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). Notice that the number of those whom God “*called*” is the same as the number of those he “*justified*,” and is also the same as the number of those he “*glorified*.” The point is that no one falls off the wagon as they travel to the goal of the New Jerusalem. Those who are “*called*” and even “*justified*” may fall into tragic sins, but the golden chain of salvation—predestination-calling-justification-glorification—cannot be broken. Paul repeats the point some chapters later: “*For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable*” (Rom. 11:29).

I have questions about how this all works, many of which arose in Chapter 1 and some of which received answers. What I may not do now is place myself above God as if I can judge whether his counsel or promise or calling is fair, or whether God is in fact acting in step with his counsel or his promise or his calling. My place as a finite creature obliges me to be humble about my questions, and trust what my almighty and eternal Creator says in relation to those who have fallen into sin.

God the Son

The second person of the Holy Trinity also has a stake in the wellbeing of those who have fallen into sin. Article 8 acknowledges that *“the merit, intercession, and preservation of Christ cannot be nullified.”*

1. The merit of Christ

The term *“merit of Christ”* describes the benefits Christ achieved for his people through his work on the cross. By his sacrifice, death, and resurrection, Jesus has obtained for us treasures as the forgiveness of sins, being righteous in God’s sight, and eternal life. Scripture sums up Jesus’ work: *“He entered once for all into the holy places . . . by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption”* (Heb. 9:12). When I fall into sin, then, I need not despair that all is now lost; there remains forgiveness in the blood of Christ. The Son of God was willing to die for sinners (and he knew beforehand how terribly we would sin!); how could he then disown any of us when we actually do fall into gross sin? It is so reassuring to learn that even my worst sins cannot cancel what Christ has achieved for me.

2. The intercession of Christ

After Jesus through his victory on the cross merited delightful treasures for those the Father chose to life eternal, he ascended into heaven to continue to work for those very same persons for whom he died. In heaven he prays to the Father on behalf of his people. *“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”* (1 John 2:1). Those words are liberating for the sinner; he may know that Christ in heaven today speaks up on his behalf before the Lord God. So Paul rejoices that there is no one

Lord’s Day 1.1

What is your only comfort in life and death?

That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil.

He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation.

Therefore, by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for him.

in all creation—not even God himself!—who will condemn us anymore, and gives this explanation for his certainty: “*Christ Jesus is the one who died, . . . who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us*” (Rom. 8:34). Even my worst sins cannot nullify the intercession of Christ.

3. The preservation of Christ

In third place, Jesus at his ascension into heaven received a throne from God so that he would be Lord of lords and King of kings. God “*seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named. . . . And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church*” (Eph. 1:21, 22). The terms “*rule and authority and power and dominion*” refer to the world of demonic powers that exercise so much influence in this world. This includes Satan, that enemy who does all in his power to tear God’s people away from Jesus Christ during our earthly lives. Given Christ’s sovereignty, however, it follows that Satan cannot succeed in tearing any from Jesus’ protective care, no matter where we find ourselves in this life. Jesus once told his disciples, “*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out*” (John 6:37). This reality is a source of delightful comfort to the child of God; even my worst sins cannot nullify the preservation of Christ.

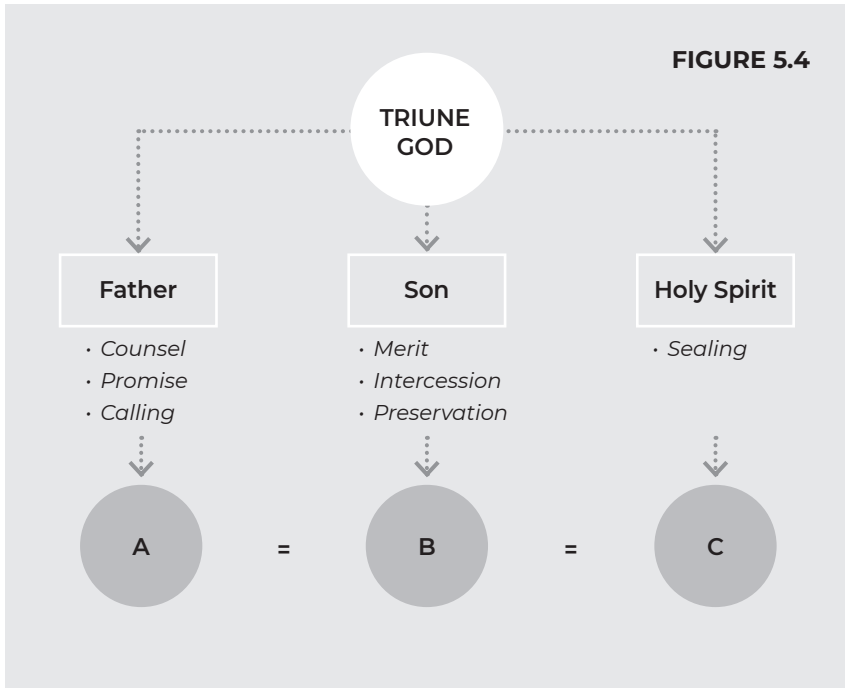
God the Holy Spirit

The third person of the Holy Trinity is equally involved in preserving the fallen saint. As Article 8 put it, “*The sealing of the Holy Spirit can neither be frustrated nor destroyed.*” The term “*sealing of the Holy Spirit*” comes from the apostle Paul: “*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*” (Eph. 1:13). When the Ephesian Christians first heard and believed the gospel of redemption, they received—says Paul—the Holy Spirit in their hearts as a reassurance that the salvation promised in the gospel was in fact for them. Just as a graduation certificate or perhaps a passport bears a seal to demonstrate its authenticity, so these saints had received the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that God’s promise of salvation was sincere. Of course, you know you have received the Holy Spirit because you find yourself believing the gospel, and noticing too that sin bothers you while righteous deeds delight you.

Well now, this guarantee, this sealing of the Holy Spirit, can neither be frustrated nor destroyed. If no circumstance in the world can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (as Paul declared in Romans

8:38, 39), then no sin I commit can separate me from the Holy Spirit either—for he is true God. This is the delightful comfort the church has embraced in Lord’s Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism (see sidebar; notice in this Lord’s Day references to the same three persons of the Holy Trinity).

All of the above can perhaps be graphically depicted like this:



The reader will notice three circles, marked A, B, and C, below the works connected to each of the three persons of the Trinity. The three circles are deliberately of equal size. The purpose of the circles is to illustrate that the number of those upon whom the Father has acted (his Counsel, Promise, and Calling) is in turn the precise number (and names!) of those upon whom the Son has acted (his Merit obtained on the cross) and continues to act today (his Intercession in heaven and his Preservation on earth), and is ultimately the precise number whom the Holy Spirit seals. As the Father and the Son “*are one*” (John 10:30), so their agenda is one, and as the Spirit is in turn the Spirit “*of Christ*” (Rom. 8:9), so the agenda of the Holy Spirit is in lockstep with the agenda of the Son. Every person whom the Father has chosen to save, the Son in turn has delivered from bondage to Satan, and

the Spirit for his part has sealed with his guarantee of salvation.

Conclusion

When any of God's chosen, then, fall into sin, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each involve themselves in that sinner's deliverance. Triune God, unchanging as he is, will never permit his own to perish. Given that we experience to our shame and sorrow that our weaknesses repeatedly get the better of us, that we're so vulnerable and helpless in the face of Satan's attacks and the world's temptations, this confession is cause for deep relief and rejoicing. Our salvation does not ultimately depend on whether we "*do [our] duty*" (as the Arminians had put it; see Error 2), but it depends on God's boundless grace. He preserves in the midst of our mess! To him all glory and praise!

A pressing question will no doubt arise now in the mind of the conscientious reader. It's this: is all of this actually true for *me*? I'm aware of my own sin and of my own vulnerability to the temptations of the devil, the world, and my own flesh. Will God actually hold on to *me* when I fall? How can I be sure? That's the question Article 9 addresses. As it turns out, the Canons will need some more articles to cover the full answer (that's Articles 9–13), but the heart of the answer is contained in Article 9.

ARTICLE 9

The Assurance of This Preservation

Believers themselves can be certain of this preservation of the elect to salvation and the perseverance of true believers in the faith. And they are indeed certain according to the measure of their

Rejection of Errors, 5.2

Error: God does indeed provide the believer with sufficient strength to persevere, and is ready to preserve this in him if he will do his duty. But even with all those things in place which are necessary to persevere in faith and which God will use to preserve faith, it still always depends on the decision of man's will whether he will persevere or not.

Refutation: This idea contains outright Pelagianism. While it wants to make men free, it makes them robbers of God's honour. It conflicts with the consistent teaching of the gospel, which takes from man all cause for boasting, and ascribes all the praise for this benefit to the grace of God alone. It is also contrary to the testimony of the apostle: *It is God who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Cor 1:8).

faith, by which they firmly believe that they are and always shall remain true and living members of the church, and that they have forgiveness of sins and life eternal.

Can the believer know for sure that God will always hold on to him, no matter how deeply he may fall into sin? Yes, says this article, yes!

That's not, however, what Arminian preachers told the folk of the pew. As Error 5 has it (see sidebar), the believers of the day heard in church that “*without a special revelation we can have no certainty of future perseverance in this life.*” Since many faithful churchgoers did not have such a “*special revelation,*” they lost the sense of comfort that came with confessing Lord's Day 1 (see the sidebar above). In the face of that lack of comfort bedeviling the folk of the pew, the fathers at the Synod of Dort searched the Scriptures on the point and then dared to reassure the faithful that they did not require a special revelation before they could be sure that they would stick to the faith till the end. The fathers were insistent: “*Believers themselves can be certain and are certain of this preservation of the elect to salvation and the perseverance of true believers in the faith.*” The topic of *how* they can be certain is left for Article 10; in Article 9 the emphasis lies on *the fact* that one can be certain.

Rejection of Errors, 5.5

Error: Without a special revelation we can have no certainty of future perseverance in this life.

Refutation: By this doctrine the sure comfort of true believers in this life is taken away, and the doubting of the followers of the pope is again introduced into the church. The Holy Scriptures, however, always deduce this assurance, not from a special and extraordinary revelation, but from the marks peculiar to the children of God and from the very constant promises of God. So especially the apostle Paul declares that nothing in all creation *will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Rom 8:39). And John writes: *Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And this is how we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us* (1 Jn 3:24).

The Fact of Certainty

David was a man of the same flesh and blood as we are, and so we're not at all surprised that he fell into sin.

What is striking, now, is what David dared to say in his psalms. I do not know whether he wrote particular psalms before or after his affair with

Bathsheba. But somewhere in the course of his life he dared to write, “*You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption*” (Ps. 16:10). “Sheol” is a reference to the realm of the dead. Though God had said that death is the wages of sin (Gen. 2:17; cf. Rom. 6:23), David was sure that his death would not be the end, and the corruption and decay that characterizes the grave wouldn’t be his final destiny either. In fact, David says in the next psalm, “*As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness*” (Ps. 17:15). David here is not only confessing the existence of life after death in the presence of God, but he’s acknowledging that he himself—sinner though he is!—will personally have a place in God’s presence. His sins of youth, and his sins of middle age and of old age too, could not destroy the fact that God had set aside a place for him in his eternal presence. This is certainty!

Similarly, Job was confident that he would see God’s face. Though he was guilty of sin (see Job 42:6) he could testify by the Spirit, “*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold*” (19:25–27). Notice again how personal this conviction is; despite his weaknesses, Job is certain that *he* will see God. He will, in other words, persevere; his sins will not prevent him from reaching the goal of God’s presence.

Jesus spoke in equally convincing terms that the saints would stick to the faith, no matter their weaknesses. “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand*” (John 10:28). Those are striking words. Jesus knows how weak his disciples are, knows that in the Garden, Peter, James, and John will fail him as they fall asleep, knows that Peter will deny him publicly, and he knows too that every disciple will flee when he’s arrested. Yet he does not doubt that each of his own shall receive eternal life.

No wonder, then, that Paul was confident of his future. The man who had persecuted the church so horribly and had consented to the murder of so many early Christians (Acts 26:10), and who as a Christian apostle still could not master his inner drive for sinning (Rom. 7:18), could in senior age testify to the certainty of his salvation: “*There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day*” (2 Tim. 4:8). How delightful: such a man is *certain* of forgiveness and life eternal!

Peter, too, was very aware of how quickly a believer could still fall into sin (see Matt. 26:69–75; Gal. 2:11), and so doesn't hesitate to warn his readers of Satan's temptations (see 1 Peter 5:8, 9). Yet to these same people he dares to speak of "*an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*" (1 Peter 1:4, 5). Notice the very personal word "you." There is no question to Peter's mind that those particular Christians to whom he's writing will one day receive the inheritance God has prepared for them. This is the material of Article 9: "*Believers themselves can be certain of this preservation of the elect to salvation and the perseverance of true believers in the faith.*"

Measure of Faith

This is not to say, however, that every believer is as confident as David was, or as Paul was. The weaknesses that continue to harass us affect also our level of confidence in God's promises. One day we may well be certain that we shall persevere, but the next day we find ourselves doubting whether we'll survive the struggle. We relate so well to Paul's descriptive words: we are like "*children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes*" (Eph. 4:14). How we wish it were not so!

How encouraging, then, to notice that so many of the psalms the Lord has preserved for us give expression to precisely this same sense of longing. David voiced his anguish: "*How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?*" (Ps. 13:1). Here David—yes, David!—is anything but certain of God's nearness and love and grace. If he were now to die, would he see God, or would he be lost forever? Psalm 42 reflects the same anguish: "*I say to God, my rock: 'Why have you forgotten me?'*" (v. 9). Words as these have a very different taste than the confidence David expressed in Psalm 16, "*You will not abandon my soul to Sheol*" (v. 10).

This up-and-down is the universal experience of every Christian on this earth. The fathers at the Synod of Dort knew life well, both from Scripture and from experience, and so dared to acknowledge in Article 9 that saints "*are indeed certain according to the measure of their faith.*" The fluctuations of that measure—one day we experience it as full, and the next as running on low—ought not to alarm us as if down days mean we're not elect after all. Down days are instead part and parcel of life, and the weaknesses and sense of vulnerability that characterize those days

are intended to drive us again to the God who promises to hold on to us no matter what. Driving us again to God confronts us with *why* we'll persevere; it's *he* who holds onto us, not we who hold onto him.

Questions for Discussion:

7. Article 7 had explained why the fallen child of God will certainly be restored.
 - a. What is the “imperishable seed of regeneration”?
 - b. The Lord works repentance through his Spirit and Word. What does that say about the need for the sinner’s faithful church attendance? And personal devotions? As it is, the fallen sinner typically stumbles on church attendance and Bible reading too. What options are available to bring the Word to the fallen brother or sister?
 - c. What is the difference between godly grief and worldly grief? Since we have all fallen into sin and so have had need to grieve on account of sin, would you describe your grief as godly or worldly? Why do you answer as you do?
 - d. Have you, as a result of your failings, become more diligent in working out your own salvation with fear and trembling (as the last sentence of the article has it)? Explain why you answer as you do.
8. Only the triune God can restore the fallen.
 - a. Why is the sinner, if left to himself, most certainly finally lost?
 - b. Explain the work of each of the persons in the Holy Trinity in preserving God’s own when we fall into sin.
 - c. How is this emphasis on the work of the triune God much more comforting than the teaching of the Arminians?
9. The Canons would comfort us with the assurance that believers can be certain that they will persevere to the very end.
 - a. Are you sure of your election to salvation and so of your perseverance in the faith? Explain why you answer as you do.
 - b. Are you always equally confident of your salvation? Should we see this wavering as a problem? Explain your answer.
 - c. Can you be sure of your neighbour’s salvation (say, your spouse or sibling—a person you know very well)? What, then, of a person somewhat further removed from you? Explain why you answer as you do.

ARTICLE 10

The Source of This Assurance

This assurance is not produced by a certain private revelation besides or outside the Word, but by faith in the promises of God, which he has most abundantly revealed in his Word for our comfort; by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit that we are children and heirs of God; and, finally, by the serious and holy pursuit of a clear conscience and of good works. And if the elect of God did not have in this world the solid comfort of obtaining the victory and this unfailing pledge of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable.

Article 9 had made the bold claim that believers in this life can be certain, and even are certain, that God preserves them to the end. The claim is bold because—as Article 4 had acknowledged—these same believers can fall into all sorts of grievous and offensives sins. God’s identity as God, however, gives the reassurance of perseverance; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit complete the work this one God has begun (Article 8). Believers cling to this promise, and so are certain that they’ll one day receive the promised inheritance. The next three articles cover a number of aspects related to this blessed assurance.

Article 10 begins with a direct broadside against the Arminian position. They insisted that you need a special divine revelation in order to achieve certainty that you will actually end up in heaven (see sidebar, Error 5). That special revelation confirming your salvation could come via a dream or a voice or a particular Bible passage speaking powerfully to you, etc. Those who did not receive such a revelation could have no certainty, and so could do nothing more than hope for the best. This position, it should be noted, follows the decree issued at the Council of Trent (1545–1562), where the Roman Catholic Church issued a curse over the person who said he could be sure he would be saved without having a special revelation. In fact, this desire for a special revelation is typical of those who fail to think of God’s dealings with people in terms of the covenant (see below). In the present article the fathers reject that position and assert that one may be confident of salvation because of three truths:

1. God has given particular promises;
2. The Holy Spirit testifies with our spirits;

3. The pursuit of a clear conscience and of good works is God's doing.

We'll deal with each of these three in turn.

God Has Spoken

The infinitely glorious and eternal God of heaven on high was pleased to connect to specific finite people on earth in a relation described in Scripture as a "covenant." A covenant is a bond of love, and its content is caught in this divine promise to Abraham: "*I will . . . be God to you and to your offspring after you*" (Gen. 17:7). What, though, does the phrase "*be God to you*" mean? A man offers a lad, "I'll be mentor to you," and we know what that means. A gracious woman tells an orphan that "I'll be mom to you," and we know what that means too. But what does God mean when he tells Abraham that he'll be God to him?

After the fall into sin the Lord had driven the human race out of his presence so that they were on their own in a world of thorns and thistles, of sweat and death (Gen. 3:17-19). No longer could the human race enjoy the garden of plenty that God had initially prepared for his people. But now God promised to Abraham that he would "*be God to you*," and that means first of all that the distance between God and Abraham generated by the fall into sin was overcome so that God would be his God. The reason this distance could be overcome is because one day God's Son Jesus Christ would come to atone for sin so that in turn Abraham would be righteous before God. In second place, the promise to "*be God to you*" implies that the sovereign Creator would deal generously and tenderly with Abraham as a father with his child. This God, then, would ensure that evil never touch Abraham unless it work for Abraham's benefit. In third place, the promise to "*be God to you*" would mean that God would be pleased to live with Abraham, renew him through his Spirit to image God again, and grant him the blessing of life with God forever.

We need to note that God did not form a covenant with mankind in general, but with a specific individual and his family. Abraham and his family, then, were highly privileged that God would stoop to be *their* God. At the same time, Abraham should not doubt God's promise to him, because with his own ears he had heard God lay his claim of love upon him, and then had the claim confirmed through the very personal sign of circumcision (Gen. 17:10). Abraham's children should also not doubt God's promise to them, *not* because God came to them in a special revelation as he had to father Abraham, but because God's word to Abraham should be sufficient for

them—for he had said that he would establish his covenant “*between me and you [that’s Abraham] and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you*” (Gen. 17:7). To confirm the reality of his bond of love with them (and so remove all cause for doubt), the Lord instructed that each of Abraham’s (male) descendants should receive on their bodies a sign of the covenant in their circumcision. No Israelite should expect “*a certain private revelation besides or outside the Word*” once spoken to father Abraham and subsequently recorded in Holy Scripture; each Israelite should instead “*by faith*” embrace “*the promises of God, which he has most abundantly revealed in his Word*” for their comfort.

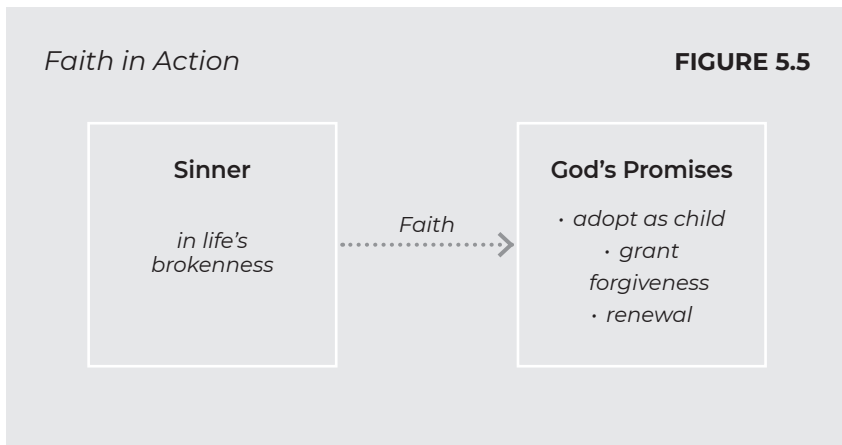
The same remains true in the New Testament dispensation. Paul writes about the tree known as Israel, from which many “*branches were broken off . . . because of their unbelief*,” and adds that people of any race or language are “*grafted*” into that tree to share in its nourishing root (Rom. 11:17, 20). The result is that Abraham is “*the father of all who believe*” (Rom. 4:11; cf. Gal. 3:7), irrespective of whether one is Jewish or Roman, Indonesian or Indian. This is what God meant when he told Abraham that he would be “*the father of a multitude of nations*” (Gen. 17:5). Instead, however, of circumcision now functioning as the sign of the covenant, God in the New Testament dispensation has given a new sign to confirm his bond of love, namely, baptism (Col. 2:11, 12). Those who today are baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 28:19) have received the same promise God gave to Abraham, that is, “*to be God to you*” (Gen. 17:7), with all the wonderful wealth that being God to a sinner entails, including the privilege of being children of God, the good news of the forgiveness of their sins through Jesus’ blood, and the pledge of renewal through the Holy Spirit till one receives perfection in the life to come.

Does one need, then, some private revelation besides or outside the Word? *In his Word* God has spoken of what he does for sinners, and then confirmed that promise to particular people through the sacrament of baptism. One does not need further confirmation; in life’s ups and downs one needs instead to cling to what God has already said. One does that, says our article, “*by faith*.”

By Faith

Faith, we need to understand, is not so much a thing one has as it is an *action* one *does*. That’s evident from Hebrews 11, a chapter so loaded with action words: “*by faith Abel offered*”; “*by faith Noah . . . constructed*”;

“*by faith Abraham obeyed*” (vv. 4, 7, 8), etc. In the brokenness of our fallen world, the Christian daily experiences questions and doubts about whether he really is a child of God, whether his sins are actually forgiven, or whether he will truly inherit life eternal. Yet precisely these delightful privileges are the gifts God has promised in his covenant with sinners. What is the child of God now to do with these promises? The obligation of the sinner-in-his-weakness is that he daily *accept* these promises of God as true and real, and true specifically in relation to *himself*. This “accepting” is faith in action. “Faith” is the ongoing activity of grabbing hold of God’s promises in life’s brokenness, and then walking the road of life holding on to those promises (see Figure 5.5).



Living “*by faith*” is not unlike the frail man walking the hallway of the nursing home holding on to the handrail for support. His holding on to that handrail is never a secret or a hidden activity. Similarly, the Christian holding on to God’s promises is also never a hidden activity, but is obvious to those who watch. As you see yourself grabbing hold of and clinging to God’s promises, you may be assured that you’ll persevere in the faith till the end and receive the crown of glory. Of course, that confidence is not based on your ability to hold on to the handrail of God’s promises, but is based on the conviction that God unfailingly keeps his promises—and that’s the reality you keep holding on to no matter how weak you feel. That’s why the fathers at the Synod of Dort dared to reassure the people of the pew that they could indeed “*be certain of . . . the perseverance of true believers*”—how?—“*by faith in the promises of God.*”

Testimony of the Holy Spirit

There was, the fathers continued, a second element with which the folk of the pew could work as they contemplated whether they would persevere till the end. The fathers spoke of “*the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit that we are children and heirs of God.*”

The reference here is to these words of Scripture: “*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*” (Rom. 8:14–17). With these words the apostle recalls that people with whom God established his covenant will not recognize God as their Father (and themselves as his children) without the mighty working of the Holy Spirit. That’s because everyone is dead in sin, and dead people cannot cry out for help. But the Holy Spirit mightily works in sinners’ hearts—this is regeneration—so that they actually do cry out to God with that term of confidence and hope: “*Abba, Father!*” By making us speak this way to God and about God, the Spirit “*bears witness . . . that we are children of God.*” God, after all, would not regenerate to new life people he has passed by in his eternal election.

And children of God, of course, are heirs of all his promises, including forgiveness of sins and life eternal. Hearing ourselves, then, address God as “Father” (in word and thought) reassures the Christian believer that he will indeed persevere in the faith till he receive the crown of glory on the last day.

Pursuit of a Good Conscience and of Good Works

The fathers listed a third element that the people of the pew could look for in their quest for assurance that they would in fact receive eternal life. They spoke of “*the serious and holy pursuit of a clear conscience and of good works.*” This element is drawn from statements of Scripture as this: “*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are*” (1 John 3:1). The “*kind of love*” the Father gave was evident to the eye (note the word “*see*”); these Christians behaved differently than the people around them.

People still on Satan’s side behave as people belonging to the Liar, and so look “*dead in . . . trespasses and sins*” (Eph. 2:1). That lifestyle focuses on

“*the passions of our flesh*” so that one “[*carries*] out the desires of the body and the mind” (Eph. 2:3); it’s a lifestyle focused on self. Even when a person on Satan’s side seeks what’s good for the neighbour, or is troubled in conscience because he hurt the neighbour, his activity or his conscience responds as it does because of concern about himself.

On the other hand, the person delivered from bondage to Satan and restored to God is changed through the renewing of the Holy Spirit so that he delights to love even as God has loved him. In following Jesus Christ, that love is not a mushy feeling, but is activity rooted in self-denial and so service to God and neighbour without regard to self. The point is not that the renewed person has totally pure motives for his actions; in this life sin remains deeply rooted in his heart. But in the heart of the renewed person there is at core a God-centred kind of love. The resulting pursuit of a clear conscience and of good works cannot be hidden from those who observe him.

“*The tree is known by its fruit,*” Jesus said to the Pharisees (Matt. 12:33; cf. 7:16–20). We may, then, look at the fruit we bear and conclude from that fruit whether we are children of the devil or in fact children of God. And since God does not fail to complete what he began, the godly fruit we bear may encourage us to conclude we are children of God and so will be with God on the last day.

Peace

These three—faith in the promises of God, the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and pursuit of a clear conscience and of good works—give the believer a confidence that he truly belongs to the Lord God and so will receive the promised reward. That confidence in turn gives a sense of peace in the believer’s heart so that he is not anxious about where his life will ultimately end. As David put it, “*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of*

Lord’s Day 32.86

Since we have been delivered from our misery by grace alone through Christ, without any merit of our own, why must we yet do good works?

Because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit to be his image, so that with our whole life we may show ourselves thankful to God for his benefits, and He may be praised by us.

Further, that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits, and that by our godly walk of life we may win our neighbours for Christ.

death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (Ps. 23:4). That’s why the fathers concluded this article with these striking words: *“And if the elect of God did not have in this world the solid comfort of obtaining the victory and this unfailing pledge of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable.”* Of course; imagine having the most glorious of promises laid out before you, your appetite thoroughly whetted, and then being told you can’t have a clue today as to whether you’ll ever receive a dot of it. That’s cruel, and miserable.

But as it is, the elect of God are of all men the richest, able to enjoy each day to the full precisely because they know who owns them and loves them.

ARTICLE 11

This Assurance Not Always Felt

Scripture meanwhile testifies that believers in this life have to struggle with various doubts of the flesh and, placed under severe temptation, do not always feel this full assurance of faith and certainty of perseverance. But God, the Father of all comfort, will not let them be tempted beyond their strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, and by the Holy Spirit will again revive in them the certainty of perseverance.

The hard reality is that believers in this broken life do not always feel so sure of their salvation. That’s disappointing, and a source of disquiet to the Christian. To calm the doubts Christians have from time to time, the fathers in pastoral wisdom included an article to comfort believers in the midst of these misgivings. They draw their readers’ attention first to the fact that Scripture itself recognizes the reality of doubt, and then directs the focus again to God’s wonderful promises.

Doubt

Various passages come to mind as illustrations of believers doubting God’s promises. Consider the following:

- God had promised Abram offspring as many as the stars of heaven (Gen. 15:5). The Scripture even emphatically adds that Abram *“believed the LORD”* (Gen. 15:6). Yet when no child was born in the years that followed, Abram decided to take matters into his own hands, and *“went in to Hagar, and she conceived”* (Gen. 16:4). That action surely speaks of

Abram's doubt that God would do as he had promised.

- In the desert the people of Israel rejoiced in their deliverance from Egypt's slavery. Yet when the spies returned from the Promised Land with news about how well armed the Canaanites were, they began to doubt whether the God who delivered them was able to bring them into the land he had promised them (Num. 14:2, 3).
- Asaph worked in the temple of Jerusalem day after day, and so repeatedly saw the sacrifices and heard the explanation of those sacrifices through the priests. We're inclined to say that if anyone should have full assurance in God's promises of salvation, it would have to be Asaph. But this is the man who laments, "*My feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.*" He explains why: "*I was envious . . . when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. . . . They are not in trouble as others are; . . . their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. . . . All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence*" (Ps. 73:2–3, 5, 7, 13). What he saw in real life took away his sense of confidence in the Lord's promises. The thought grew ever stronger in his mind that he would get further ahead if he followed the example of the wicked instead of the promises of God.

How well we relate to these and similar experiences! We'd dearly love God to cause his children always to be on a spiritual "high," never doubting, always confident, but we find out painfully that alas, it is not so. That's no surprise, say the Canons. "*Scripture . . . testifies that believers in this life have to struggle with various doubts of the flesh and, placed under severe temptation, do not always feel this assurance of faith and certainty of persevering.*" "*Scripture . . . testifies*": that's comforting. My doubts and uncertainties are then not unique after all. And as God held on to the saints of old despite their doubts, he'll surely hold on to me as well.

Doubt is sin

Doubt is so real, and so common; it's part of life. Is doubt, then, acceptable for the Christian? The Arminians said yes; "*it is praiseworthy to doubt*" (see sidebar, Error 6). "*Praiseworthy,*" they said, because they felt that being confident of receiving eternal life will take away the incentive to live a godly life—because you're saved anyway. It's an argument that even makes sense to us. If you're certainly going to heaven, you may as well eat, drink, and be merry; there's no risk in sinning because you've got salvation all sown up. . . .

But the Bible distinctly disagrees that “*it is praiseworthy to doubt.*” Give some thought to the following texts:

- God’s response to Israel’s misgivings about whether God could bring them into the Promised Land was the penalty to let *none* of that generation (bar the two obedient spies) inherit the land (Num. 14:30). That outcome does not suggest that the Lord was pleased with Israel’s doubts in his promises!
- The author of the letter to the Hebrews pointed to Jesus Christ in his effort to encourage doubting Christians. He wrote, “*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith*” (Heb. 10:19, 22). The “*holy places*” to which the apostle refers is a reference to the presence of God, the very goal each Christian longs to reach. In the context of reaching that goal, the apostle speaks of “*confidence,*” and even of “*full assurance of faith.*” His point is clear: Christians need not approach God doubting whether he will receive them; on the contrary!

The biblical picture is instead that the child of God may be certain of God’s promises. In their refutation of the Arminian position, the fathers drew attention to John’s words, “*Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him*” (1 John 3:2). Notice the bold statements of facts, both in terms of confessing that one is a child of God now as well as the undoubted confidence that we shall see God on the last day.

Rejection of Errors, 5.6

Error: By its very nature the doctrine of the certainty of perseverance and salvation causes false security and is harmful to godliness, good morals, prayers, and other holy exercises. On the contrary, it is praiseworthy to doubt.

Refutation: This error ignores the effective power of God’s grace and the working of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. It contradicts the apostle John, who teaches the opposite with these clear words: *Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure* (1 Jn 3:2, 3). Furthermore, it is refuted by the example of the saints in both the Old and the New Testament who, although they were certain of their perseverance and salvation, nevertheless continued in prayer and other exercises of godliness.

Actually, it is perfectly understandable that doubt is sin. The One whose Word we doubt is none other than holy, eternal, sovereign God! Who gives finite creatures, sinners at that, the right to be suspicious of any promise coming from *his* mouth? Given his divine identity, failing to take him fully at his Word is by definition sin. That reality underlines again how very much we need his abundant grace in Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Escape from Temptations

Article 11 also confesses what the Lord does in the face of the doubts I may have about being his child and about whether I'll persevere in the faith. God is well aware of my doubts and questions, but he—thankfully!—never has second thoughts about his decision to make me his child.

- The Christians of Corinth lived in a city characterized by immoral behaviour. Fornication, drunkenness, homosexuality, theft, swindling, idolatry, and other sins surrounded and threatened these Christians on every side. Always the temptation was there for the young Christians of Corinth to give in to the lure of these behaviours. That's why the apostle told his readers, "*Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall*" (1 Cor. 10:12). But immediately he added to that warning these words, "*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it*" (10:13). The thought is striking. Earlier verses of that same chapter listed numerous instances when the people of Israel showed themselves to be very vulnerable to Satan's attacks—and anybody who reads through the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers will find ample evidence of the point. More, the earlier chapters of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians pointed up how weak and prone to sin the Corinthian Christians themselves were. But in the midst of all this human weakness the apostle says with confidence that "*God is faithful, and . . . with the temptation he will provide the way of escape.*" Notice: there is no hint here of God disowning his people because of their sins, and no hint either that God might leave us to ourselves. Thankfully!!
- When Paul saw need to write another letter to the Corinthians, he began by emphasizing just who God really is. He described God as "*the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions*" (2 Cor. 1:3, 4). One of those "*afflictions*" that

upsets a child of God is surely his own sins and the consequences of those sins—including the doubt concerning forgiveness that can eat away at his assurance of salvation. But God’s very identity as God, says Paul, “*comforts us in all our afflictions,*” including those doubts. How does God comfort us? He remains “*the Father of mercies,*” so much so that his mercy is sure to trump even our sins. That is comfort! See further the sidebar on Lord’s Day 16.44.

Lord’s Day 16.44

Why is there added: He descended into hell?

In my greatest sorrows and temptations I may be assured and comforted that my Lord Jesus Christ, by his unspeakable anguish, pain, terror, and agony, which he endured throughout all his sufferings but especially on the cross, has delivered me from the anguish and torment of hell.

Examples of escape

Can one list examples in Scripture where children of God were greatly tempted, perhaps doubted their place before God, but God in mercy provided the way of escape from Satan’s snare? There are numerous examples indeed. Here are just a few:

- Satan set out deliberately to trip Job up and prompt him to curse God (Job 1:11). Job lost his abundant wealth and his ten children in a single day, later lost his health, and then had to digest the fact that his wife gave him evil advice. You’d expect that in the face of such pressure Job would in fact “*curse God and die,*” as his wife advised him to do (2:9). But Job didn’t. Instead, he continued to speak good of the Lord his God. Yes, in the discussions with his friends Job admitted to bitterness in his soul (27:2) and thought thoughts of God he should not have thought (see Job 23), so that he needed to repent of sin—and he did (42:6). But the very fact that he held firm in his faith, be it in such weakness that he needed to repent, was God’s gracious work in his life. God, in other words, delivered him from Satan’s temptations.
- The Book of Psalms provides numerous examples of a child of God overcome by enemy attack—and behind every enemy is ultimately Satan. Repeatedly the Psalms testify of the believer’s inner struggle, including doubts about the Lord’s care and so his own ability to

persevere. But always the Lord God provided deliverance, no matter how great the pressure was. One can refer to Psalms 13, 22, 42, 44, 88, and 109 as obvious examples.

- Jesus tells Peter, “*Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat*” (Luke 22:31). In the hours that followed, Peter found himself under enormous pressure, and ended up denying his Lord and Saviour. But Jesus had added, “*I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail*” (22:32). The reason, then, that Peter ended up repenting of his sin is that the Lord Jesus Christ had prayed for him and so ultimately delivered him from Satan’s snare. This same Peter could years later write confidently of the God “*who called us to his own glory and excellence*” (2 Peter 1:3). With that little word “*us*” the apostle is acknowledging God’s plans not just for his readers but also for himself.

Because of this evidence gleaned from the Bible, the fathers at the Synod of Dort dared to comfort the troubled people of the pew of their day with the reassurance of Article 11: “*God, the Father of all comfort, will not let [his people] be tempted beyond their strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, and by the Holy Spirit will again revive in them the certainty of perseverance.*”

ARTICLE 12

This Assurance Is an Incentive to Godliness

This certainty of perseverance, however, so far from making true believers proud and complacent, is rather the true root of humility, childlike reverence, genuine godliness, endurance in every struggle, fervent prayers, constancy in suffering and in the confession of the truth, and lasting joy in God. Further, the consideration of this benefit is for them an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works, as is evident from the testimonies of Scripture and the examples of the saints.

Does the certainty that you have forgiveness of all your sins and the assurance that you will inherit eternal life make you more godly or less godly in this life? The Arminians said that it makes you less godly; see sidebar, Rejection of Errors 5.6, as printed with Article 11 above.

The attentive reader will understand that it made sense for the Arminians to insist that it was dangerous to teach that you could be certain

of your salvation. You'll recall: at the core of Arminian thinking was their insistence that people are not dead in sin (since we haven't fallen off a seventy-three-storey building, but only off a three-storey building), and so are able and expected to contribute to our salvation. We have a free will, and God is the perfect gentleman who pushes nothing onto us without our permission. The ball, then, is always in our court. So we can't afford to relax and assume our salvation is guaranteed. Instead, uncertainty about our salvation keeps us on our toes and prompts us to keep doing our best.

As it is, though, God through Jesus Christ has graciously adopted people dead in sin to be his children, and through his Holy Spirit has raised them to new life. That glorious reality means I'm not permitted to question whether God's gift is genuine; instead, I'm meant to embrace it, without doubt.

Godly Fruit

Still, it does seem rather logical that the Christian who is confident of the forgiveness of his sins and certain of eternal life will become careless about his godliness, his morals, his prayers, or other holy exercises. So we need to note that the Lord in his Word tells us pointedly that that's not the case. Consider these passages:

- Jesus tells particular people (it's actually his disciples, real men like Peter, James, Thaddeus, Thomas, etc), "*I am the vine; you are the branches*" (John 15:5). Try to picture the analogy in the eye of your mind: Jesus as the vine, with Peter, James, Thaddeus, Thomas, and the rest of the disciples attached to Jesus as branches. The analogy means that these disciples draw their sap from Jesus-the-vine. Jesus now adds, "*Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing*" (v. 5). With those words Jesus says two things relevant to the thought expressed in our article. The first is that no Christian can

Lord's Day 24.63, 64

But do our good works earn nothing, even though God promises to reward them in this life and the next?

This reward is not earned; it is a gift of grace.

Does this teaching not make people careless and wicked?

No. It is impossible that those grafted into Christ by true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

do any good thing apart from Jesus Christ, just as a branch cannot bear any fruit apart from the vine it's attached to. This gives the lie to the Arminian thought that a Christian can bear fruit (including perseverance) on his own strength. The second is that Jesus says plainly that branches on his vine invariably bear much fruit. The disciples cannot be fruitless as long as they're connected to the true vine, simply because this vine's sap is by definition life giving.

- Those who will receive eternal life are, biblically speaking, connected to Jesus Christ—for there is no salvation outside of him. To be connected to Christ means you shall bear fruit. When the Arminians, then, said that certainty of salvation makes a man careless (so that he doesn't bear good fruit), they simply were disregarding Jesus' own instruction.
- The ascended Christ has given his Holy Spirit to change people's hearts. People are by nature on Satan's side, and so (as the Bible calls it) "*dead in sins*" (see Eph. 2:1). Those transferred through Jesus' blood from Satan's side to God's side (Col. 1:13, 14) do not remain dead in their sins, but are made alive through Jesus' Spirit and changed in such a way that they image God again (recall Figure 3/4.10). The Spirit's work is always effective, so that those restored to God invariably shall bring forth good fruit (be it, of course, as yet imperfect). More was already said on this point with the discussion on Chapter 3/4, Article 11 that need not be repeated here. But the point speaks to the matter at stake, and that is that those belonging to God invariably lead a God-pleasing lifestyle, contrary to claim of the Arminians.

Gratitude and Good Works

Jesus spoke on another occasion about the tree. Jesus was telling his hearers in the Sermon on the Mount how they could recognize false prophets; these would, after all, come looking like sheep while in fact they were ravenous wolves. It was their "*fruits*" that would betray their true identity. "*Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit*" (Matt. 7:16–18). Notice the word "*cannot*." The child of God forgiven of sin and made heir to life eternal cannot fail to bring forth good fruit. Gratitude for the gift of salvation will invariably look like the pursuit of obedience, doing good works.

The apostle Paul taught the Galatians “*works of the flesh*” characterize the behaviour of fallen man. He lists examples as “*sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these*” (Gal. 5:19–21). In contrast, the child of God produces “*the fruit of the Spirit*,” with conduct characterised by “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*” (Gal. 5:22, 23). Certainly, to bring forth this “*fruit of the Spirit*” remains an effort for the child of God (see 5:16, 25), but the overriding behaviour pattern of the child of God will certainly, says Paul, reflect the “*fruit of the Spirit*” instead of “*the works of the flesh*.”

John had reminded his readers that “*we are God’s children now*” (1 John 3:2). That glorious, God-given identity of his readers prompted the apostle to add, “*Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure*” (1 John 3:3). There’s the gratitude, and the good works that invariably follow.

There is nothing new in this. David had long ago delighted in the deliverance the Lord had freely given him. “*For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling; I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living*” (Ps. 116:8, 9). He right away added how he would respond to the Lord’s deliverance: “*What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD, I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people*” (vv. 12–14). Here is no evidence of complacency or of carelessness, and no sense of living it up because the future is secure anyway. Rather, here is a spirit of humility and of gratefulness—and so a hearty desire to say “Thank You” to God not just in words but also in deeds.

That’s the conduct characteristic of the child of God. Jesus Christ “*gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works*” (Titus 2:14). Zealous for good works: because salvation is God’s gift of grace, this characterisation is a fitting description of the blessed recipient of God’s mercy.

ARTICLE 13

This Assurance Does Not Lead to Carelessness

Neither does this renewed confidence produce carelessness or neglect of godliness in those who have been restored after

their fall; rather, it produces in them a much greater concern to observe carefully the ways of the Lord, which he prepared beforehand. They observe these ways in order that by walking in them they may retain the certainty of their perseverance. Then shall the face of their gracious God not turn away from them again because of their abuse of his fatherly goodness, with the result that they would fall into still greater anguish of spirit. Indeed, to those who fear God the contemplation of his face is sweeter than life, but its withdrawal is more bitter than death.

Perhaps the thought arises in your mind: isn't the threat of eternal damnation a good way to encourage a community to smarten up in its lifestyle? I fully expect that many of us have been on the receiving end of that warning. Actually, it's a position the Arminians held. Said they, "*By its very nature the doctrine of the certainty of perseverance and salvation . . . is harmful to godliness, good morals, prayers, and other holy exercises*" (see sidebar above, Error 6).

Article 12 had already drawn out that this simply isn't true, insisting that if God has saved you he will also cause you to bear fruit befitting your election. Article 13 now makes the same point, but from the other side: being sure of salvation does not lead to careless living.

Not Play with Sin

From a very human point of view, the statement of the fathers in Article 13 makes perfectly good sense. After all, if you've hurt yourself badly by falling out of a tree, you're not likely to climb that tree again. Similarly, you'd think, if a Christian has fallen into sin and repented of his wrong, he'll exercise greater caution next time in making sure it doesn't happen again.

And that, the fathers say, is in fact how it is. That sense of God's displeasure and his hand pressing heavily down upon you is for the sensitive child of God such a horrid thought that he'll do whatever he can to make sure it doesn't happen again. That sort of reaction is also what you read about in the Bible:

- David experienced the painful results of falling into sin, and being unrepentant about it. "*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer*" (Ps. 32:3, 4). You can see it in the eye of your mind: David lost weight,

he no longer had the strength to do his work. He finally cracked under the pressure of God's hand; *"I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin"* (v. 5). That sense of forgiveness prompted a threefold reaction in David:

1. He sang out his jubilation at the gift of forgiveness of his sins: *"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven"* (v. 1), a jubilation he repeats in v. 11, *"Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"*
 2. He confessed that God would preserve his own in moments of intense temptation. *"You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance"* (v. 7). This is the confidence confessed in Article 11.
 3. He tells his hearers—and that includes himself!—*"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding"* (vv. 8, 9). This third point is an instruction to others as well as to himself not to be so stupid as to make the same mistake again. The reason is clear: it's no fun having God's hand of displeasure pressing heavily upon you! It's the point of our analogy of the tree: you've fallen out once, it hurt too much, and so you make sure it's not going to happen again. That's David's counsel: don't play (again) with sin. This is the point of our current article.
- After Peter recounted to the other apostles and the brethren his vision of the blanket coming down from heaven, his hearers responded with this word: *"Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life"* (Acts 11:18). Note how the word "repentance" is characterized; this repentance "leads to life." The reference is not to receiving eternal life when one dies, but is instead to receiving a lifestyle now that's in step with the gospel. The point then is that those who turn from sin (be they Jews or Gentiles) do not continue in sin (say, on grounds that we're going to receive eternal life anyway), but instead the repentant make a point of living in a manner that's *alive* in a deep, biblical way. It's a lifestyle of obedience.
 - The apostle Paul says a similar thing to the Christians of Corinth. After he's exposed sin in them and noted their sorrow, he writes, *"For godly sorrow produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret,*

whereas worldly grief produces death” (2 Cor. 7:10). His point here is that sorrow for sin does not lead to repetition of the sin, but leads instead to turning from the sin and then adopting a lifestyle that befits salvation. This response to sin, he wants us to know, is typical of the Christian.

This, surely, is not surprising. After all, the work of the Holy Spirit is to renew the sinner so that he no longer images his old father the devil, but images instead his new Father in heaven.

Observing the Lord's ways

Instead of following the way of sin, the person sure of eternal life will make a point of trying hard to do what pleases the Lord. In his lifestyle he's already reaching forward to the perfection of the New Jerusalem.

- Paul insists that those whom the Lord has redeemed “*are . . . created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*” (Eph. 2:10). His point is that the redeemed have a lifestyle that's characterized by going out of their way to do what the Lord wants.
- Elsewhere the same apostle mentions how he continually prays for Christians that they might “*walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God*” (Col. 1:10). Paul can dare to pray this only because a lifestyle of striving to please the God who saved us characterizes every child of God.

So the fathers in our article say plainly that being confident of salvation “*produces*” in the child of God “*a much greater concern to observe carefully the ways of the Lord, which he prepared beforehand.*” As heirs of the New Jerusalem we'll eagerly begin today to live as citizens of *that* world, and not as residents of a world that's going to pass away. In so doing, we're the more assured that we'll receive what we don't yet see.

The Face of God

The second part of our article mentions “*the face of their gracious God.*” Among people one can commonly see on the other's face whether he is happy or displeased. Similarly, where God's face smiles upon you, you have assurance that God is pleased with you, whereas his face turned from you indicates his displeasure.

- The people of Israel were assured through the blessing that the priests were to lay upon them at the tabernacle (that's where the gospel of redemption in the coming Saviour was proclaimed) that God's favour rested upon them. As the priests were to put it, "*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you*" (Num. 6:24, 25). God's face shining upon them was his smile of pleasure over them.
- God promises the reverse if and when his people would forsake him and break his covenant. "*Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them, and they will be devoured. And many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?' And I will surely hide my face in that day because of all the evil that they have done, because they have turned to other gods*" (Deut. 31:17, 18).

Does it in reality make a difference whether God's smile is directed at you or his face turned away from you? Consider these passages:

- Three times Asaph implored God, "*Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!*" (Ps. 80:3, 7, 19). He repeated this request in the time when God had turned his face away. "*O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?*" (v. 4). Clearly, the thought that the Lord had turned his face away from Israel was too horrid to tolerate; "*Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see*" (v. 14).
- The prophet Isaiah explains how the people of Israel actually felt on account of God's displeasure. "*You have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities. . . . Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look. . . . Your holy cities have become a wilderness; Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation*" (Isa. 64:7-10). God's face turned away was not pleasant for the people!
- No wonder, then, that David would give up anything to enjoy God's nearness: "*Your steadfast love is better than life. . . . So I will bless you as long as I live*" (Ps. 63:3, 4).

Perhaps you will say that surely there's a third position between God's smile and God's displeasure. With people there is, for one can walk away from an unhappy person and get outside his sphere of influence.

That, however, is not how it works with the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. You cannot get away from this God (Ps. 139). One is either for him or against him (Luke 11:23); in God's world there is no neutral ground, no position halfway between his blessing and his curse, his favour or his displeasure. Well did the fathers word it in the article in question: *"To those who fear God the contemplation of his face is sweeter than life, but its withdrawal is more bitter than death."* The need for God's fatherly smile drives the Christian, redeemed as he is through Jesus' blood, to excel in striving to live in obedience to God's revealed will. There is simply no place for carelessness—or sloppiness, or half-hearted efforts—in the life of the Christian.

Questions for Discussion:

10. There are those who insist that you cannot be sure of your election unless you receive a special revelation from God.
 - a. Is this claim correct or not? Justify your explanation.
 - b. Are you sure of your eternal salvation? On what grounds are you sure—or perhaps unsure?
 - c. List the three means the fathers mentioned in this article and explain the content of each. How do these assure you of your salvation?
 - d. You have been baptized once, and perhaps have received Lord's Supper frequently. How do you work with those sacraments in your daily life?
11. Believers experience that we struggle with doubt.
 - a. Should we despair when we find ourselves doubting God's promises? Why or why not?
 - b. Of what value are your feelings/experiences? Explain your answer.
 - c. Is it OK to doubt? Why or why not?
 - d. What can we do to diminish doubts in our hearts?
12. Assurance of eternal salvation prompts the child of God to a lifestyle of gratitude.
 - a. Explain why certainty of salvation leads to humility, reverence, godliness, and the other Christian characteristics listed in Article 12.
 - b. Do you see these characteristics in yourself? Explain why you answer as you do. Perhaps ask others who know you well whether they see

in you that you are in fact an heir to life eternal. What do your elders say to you in relation to your lifestyle?

- c.** Article 12 mentioned “complacency.” What is complacency? Do you see complacency in yourself or in your circle? Do others see it in you?
- 13.** Assurance of salvation does not lead the child of God to carelessness in lifestyle.
- a.** Does this line of thought ring true to your experience over the years of your life? Why or why not?
 - b.** Have you ever been warned that unless you smarten up you will surely be eternally lost? Does such a warning help you or hinder you to appreciate the fact that salvation is *by grace*? Explain your answer.
 - c.** Do you think that God is actually smiling upon you? Or are you more likely to think that God frowns on you? Why do you answer as you do? What is the scriptural instruction on the point?
 - d.** Do you see yourself playing with sin? If so, how? What are you doing about it??

ARTICLE 14

The Use of Means in Perseverance

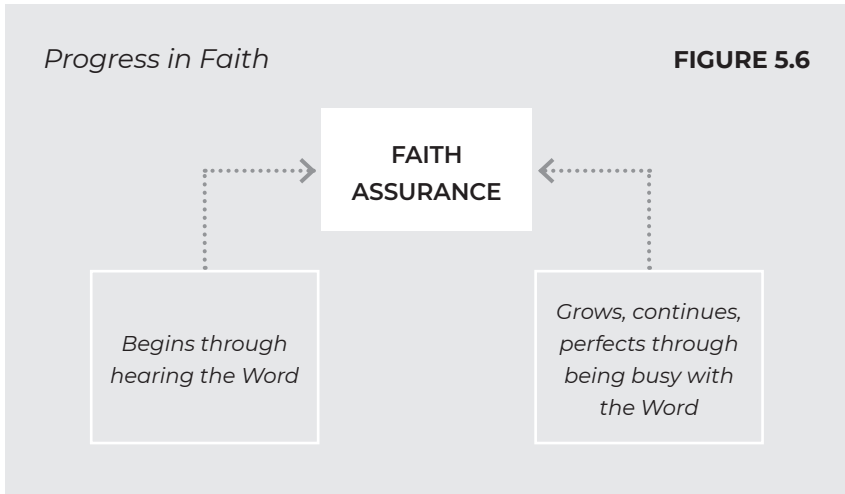
Just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the preaching of the gospel, so he maintains, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of his Word, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises, and by the use of the sacraments.

The previous articles had drawn out what the Scriptures say about being certain of one's salvation. The believer can definitely be sure that he has forgiveness of sins today and will inherit eternal life on the last day on the simple grounds that God cannot fail; he will complete the work that he has begun. How, though, does the Lord hold on to his own? That topic receives attention in the present article.

It is the Lord God who holds on to his people in all life's trials and tribulations, and ensures that they reach the goal of perfection. This does not mean, however, that the child of God bears no responsibility for how his life unfolds. God in the beginning did not create people to be without responsibility (unlike rocks or rabbits); he instead created us with the ability to respond (that's response-ability!) to whatever the Lord sovereignly put on people's path.

On people's path God placed first of all *himself*. His work of creation confronts all people with his majesty, and people turn a blind eye to it to their own hurt (see Rom. 1:18–25). He told people more about himself through his revelation in Holy Scripture where he clarified how he created this world, how come life is broken and messy, what God has done to restore sinners to himself through Jesus' blood and Spirit, and so much more. It is his will that this Word be proclaimed to his people week after week so that through the proclamation of the Word as his tool, the Holy Spirit might work faith in sinners' hearts (see Rom. 10:14, 15). So the Canons could say in Chapter 1, Article 3 that God mercifully sends heralds of his most joyful message of salvation to those particular persons he elected to salvation in Jesus Christ, and could confess in Chapter 3/4, Article 17 that God uses the proclamation of the Word to prompt regeneration in sinners' hearts.

This element of how God works in sinners' hearts is picked up again in our present article. This time, however, the emphasis lies not on how people through their hearing the Word *come* to faith, but it lies instead on



how the Lord uses the Word to *maintain* the faith, *grow* the faith, and even *perfect* the faith in the sinner’s heart and life (see Figure 5.6). Through our staying busy with the Word, God strengthens us in the faith so that we become more confident that he will preserve us in the faith till the end. That’s the conviction of the article: *“Just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the preaching of the gospel, so he maintains, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of his Word.”*

It’s a thought we can much understand. Learning the rudiments of handling a hockey stick does not make one a good hockey player, though it’s an essential start. To excel at hockey one needs to maintain and improve stickhandling skills, and that obviously takes continued practice. So it is too with the faith. The Lord would not have us be content with possessing the basics of believing, but would have us grow in the faith. In fact, he would have us excel in working with the faith in life’s trials so that we respond to these trials in a God-honouring fashion. To put it differently: on the team belonging to the kingdom of God he would have nothing but the best—and that will involve our continued practicing to live the faith in the struggles of today’s world.

Busy with the Word

God uses specific means to ensure that faith continues to grow. We’re not surprised at that, for that’s how life works. In our infancy our mothers ensured growth in our little bodies by giving us particular food.

Similarly, the Lord God ensures growth in our young faith by feeding us—not with milk and eventually vegetables, but with the diet of his Word. Give thought to the emphasis of the following texts:

- As the people of Israel were about to cross the Jordan to enter the land of promise, Moses gave them this instruction from God: “*Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long*” (Deut. 6:1, 2). Moses was referring to the commandments, laws, and ordinances that had earlier been given in Numbers, Leviticus, Exodus, and Genesis—and so his reference was to the entire Bible Israel had in those days. Moses added that these commandments were not just to be *taught* to the people, but were also to be inscribed onto their *hearts*, for he adds, “*And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise*” (vv. 6, 7). Moses’ point is clear: the people of Israel, older and younger alike, were daily to be *busy* with the Word of God. They were to develop the habit of busying their minds daily on God’s revealed will, and so talking about the Word with one another. The blessed result would be that older and younger Israelites alike would grow and continue to grow in the service of their Lord and Master. It’s something we understand so well: your body grows not by eating one meal per week, but by eating meals day after day.
- David wrote so many psalms, and led the people of Israel through sharing much God-centred wisdom. He could do it because he stayed busy with the Word, and so grew in the Lord’s service. The words of Psalm 119 capture his thinking, “*Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation*” (vv. 97–99). In those moments of the day when his work did not require him to concentrate on the specific task at hand, his thoughts gravitated to the Word of God, so that in turn he rolled God’s promises around in his mind, applied them in his circumstances, and trained himself to act in step with God’s will. In the process he grew in the Lord’s service.

- In his revelation to John on Patmos, the Lord Jesus Christ declared, “*Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it*” (Rev. 1:3). Surely, the Lord cannot be clearer; there are definite benefits to be had through continued reflection upon and interaction with the Word of God!

God intended people to be responsible creatures. Now that he has given his Word, it is our duty to be busy with that Word in order to develop expertise in the Bible. The desired result of such habitual focus on the Word is further growth in the faith. This growth includes an ever-deepening awareness that the Lord will most certainly hold on to those he chose to life eternal, as well as the growing conviction that *I too am an heir to life everlasting*.

I grew up in a busy home where my parents had their hands full with the responsibilities of work and family. Three times a day we gathered around the kitchen table to eat, and after each meal we read a portion of Holy Scripture. The result was that by the time I was twenty I had been led through the entire Scriptures six or seven times. Obviously, that translates into a reasonable familiarity with Scripture. More, that familiarity (and the discussions that came with the Bible reading) encouraged skills in working with the promises of Scripture in the midst of life’s questions. I remain today deeply thankful for the diligence my parents displayed in maintaining the habit of intense Bible training through the years of my youth.

It’s a pattern I would encourage all parents to follow. Life in our Western culture is busy, but we recognize very well that practice is essential in areas of life as music and sport; that’s why we ensure that our children have and make time for practicing. How much more true is this when it comes to the faith—that single area of life upon which our eternal destiny hinges (for one is not saved by music . . .). Had my parents been content to read from the Bible at two of the three meals per day, I would have been through the Scriptures in my youth not six or seven times, but four. And had they felt that supertime was the only meal that allowed time for Bible reading, I would have been led through the entire Bible but twice by the time I was twenty. Obviously, that would have meant less Bible knowledge, less Bible discussion, and less Bible thinking in my formative years. One will never be drafted for a position on a hockey team without persistent practice.

Meditation

Needless to say, reading the Word requires more than reading a given passage; it requires also that we spend time reflecting on the passage

read. That need is captured in Article 14 with the word “meditate.” We had already bumped into that word in the quote from Ps. 119:97–99 in the previous paragraph. The point of the term “meditate” in the Bible is simply that one thinks about, contemplates, muses upon the Scripture he’s just heard or read. As the psalmist lay awake in the quiet of the night (see Ps. 63:6), or as he had time to think as he walked the roads of life (Ps. 1:2), he made it his business to think about God and his promises, as well as about the gospel of redemption and the salvation the Lord prepared for him. There is nothing monk-like about this meditation; it’s rather the habit the child of God finds himself doing when he has nothing else he needs to think about. It is what Mary did with the words of the shepherds concerning her Son: “*Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart*” (Luke 2:19).

It’s a habit so many of us in the busyness of our Western world have never mastered. It’s a practice, though, I’m convinced we need to develop. To get the most out of the food we eat, we need to chew it and the body needs to digest it. In the same way, to get the most out of the Word we’ve heard or read, we need to spend time reflecting on it. The more we’re “in the Word,” the more we grow in God’s service, and the more the certainty of God’s promises encourage and enthuse us.

Perhaps, then, we do well to carve out quiet time somewhere in the space of the day or night, when we can quietly and without interruption make a point of bringing to mind the promises and commands of our God, and give thought to how those promises and obligations bear upon us in the specific circumstances in which we find ourselves. Developing the habit will take effort and self-denial, but the fruit—growth in the Lord’s service and appreciation for his promises—makes the effort more than worth it.

Exhortations, Threats, and Promises

Few of us appreciate exhortations, and even fewer of us appreciate threats. There’s something negative about both words; we much prefer more positive terms. In Article 14, however, the fathers summarized Scripture to teach that God “*maintains, continues, and perfects*” the confidence of faith “*by the hearing and reading of his Word, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises.*”

Two questions arise in relation to these exhortations, threats, and promises. The first is this: is it in fact true that the Lord God grows our faith not just through promises but also through exhortations and threats? The

second is: is it correct for the fathers to mention “*exhortations*” and “*threats*” before they mention “*promises*”? I ask the second question because it is a given in our culture that positive talk (like promises) is more productive than negative talk as suggested by terms as exhortations and threats.

Growth through exhortations and threats

The term “exhortation” in this article comes from a word used frequently in the New Testament to convey the notion of urging someone to believe the gospel (Acts 2:40) or to remain faithful to the Lord (Acts 11:23). The author of the letter to the Hebrews characterizes his entire epistle as “*my word of exhortation*” (Heb. 13:22). Elsewhere the term is used also to encourage believers (Acts 15:32) or to comfort them (2 Cor. 1:3–7). The biblical use of the term, then, does not contain the negative loading we tend to hear in the term with our Western ears.

When the fathers, then, used the term in this article, they intended to convey a sense of the urgency God lays on each hearer to respond again to the gospel of redemption. The apostles in Scripture and the fathers at the Synod of Dort assumed that their hearers knew something of the gospel, but now urged them to *work* with what they knew.

The term “threats” calls attention to how the Lord has pressed upon his people the need for obedience. Time and again, the Lord told his people what to do (or not to do), and in the same breath told them the dire consequences that would follow on disobedience. Already in Paradise God told Adam, “*Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat,*” and immediately added the threat, “*For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*” (Gen. 2:17). The law he gave to his people at Mount Sinai came complete with extensive promises of blessings upon obedience and curses upon disobedience (see Lev. 26). In step with the promises of that chapter, the prophets uttered countless warnings of the disaster that

Lord's Day 44.115

If in this life no one can keep the ten commandments perfectly, why does God have them preached so strictly?

First, so that throughout our life we may more and more become aware of our sinful nature, and therefore seek more eagerly the forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ.

Second, so that, while praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach the goal of perfection.

would invariably follow upon Israel's continued disobedience. John the Baptist used threats to encourage repentance (Matt. 3:7, 8), as did also Jesus Christ as he outlined in his numerous parables the negative consequences upon hardness of heart (consider Matt. 21:43, 44). In countless passages, the apostles did the same in their letters to the churches.

Human nature may not appreciate threats and exhortations; we prefer to have space to decide for ourselves, at our own time and without pressure, what is acceptable behaviour or doctrine. But the Lord our God knows this fault in our fallen nature, and so does not hesitate to speak plainly and pointedly—even using threats—in order to prompt us to greater obedience.

Actually, behind our dislike for exhortations and threats is that inbred Arminian thought that we're not so depraved and bad after all; we'll see the right way in due time, so give us space. The Lord knows that that's not true, and would have us acknowledge it. The confession of our abiding inclination to evil, then, ought to make us welcome Scripture's plain talk—and treasure it in the preaching also.

Promises

The Lord also uses promises throughout Scripture to set before sinners what he has determined to do. Immediately after the fall into sin, the Lord made clear to Satan and to mankind (in whose hearing he spoke to the serpent) what he would do: "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel*" (Gen. 3:15). This indication of divine intent is, we realize, the proclamation of the gospel of grace; God promised to send his Son to crush Satan. That promise was glorious for the woman, but terrible for the serpent—as it was also for those who would follow either party. Either way, the promise demanded a response from those who heard, be it for the first time or for the umpteenth time. That same promise would be repeated throughout the centuries of earth's history countless times in various forms, many of which are recorded in Scripture. We have read it ourselves, and heard it expounded repeatedly in the preaching as we travelled the roads of life. Always, in the midst of life's dirt and mess, that promise requires a response. A positive response prompts growth in faith, whilst a negative response results in the shrivelling of whatever faith there may be.

Sacraments

The Word of God reaches us through our ears, and is the means the Lord commonly uses to work faith as well as maintain it and cause it to grow (recall Figure 5.6). As it is, in his care for his people, the Lord has provided the gift of sacraments so that he might reach our hearts also through the senses of sight, taste, and touch. As the fathers considered the means the Lord uses to cause his chosen to persevere in the faith, they mentioned also the sacraments.

The New Testament knows two sacraments, baptism (which replaced circumcision in the Old Testament) and Lord's Supper (which replaced the Passover). The message of both sacraments is actually the message of the gospel itself, which is that the Lord has given his Son to atone for sins through his death on the cross. By reaching the believer through the senses of sight, taste, and touch, the Lord would give a greater certainty that the gospel message is in fact for *us*.

Just, then, as God would have us reflect on, meditate on, think on the Word we *hear* (or read) in order to grow through what it promises (or threatens or exhorts), so he would have us reflect on, meditate on, and think on the Word we receive through the other senses in the sacraments of baptism and Lord's Supper. We do that by recalling, perhaps in life's trials, Mom's report that we were baptized years ago. Such recollection reassures us that God in fact claimed us for himself with the promise that he would "*be God to you*" (Gen. 17:7)—which, of course, means that he would be *my* God and Father, would forgive *my* sins in Jesus Christ, and would renew *me* through his Holy Spirit. That one-time baptism, then, is good for daily use! Similarly, we may recall midweek the glorious message pressed upon us through the taste of the bread and wine at the recent Lord's Supper

Lord's Day 25.65, 66

Since then faith alone makes us share in Christ and all his benefits, where does this faith come from?

From the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and strengthens it by the use of the sacraments.

What are the sacraments?

The sacraments are holy, visible signs and seals.

They were instituted by God so that by their use he might the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel.

And this is the promise: that God graciously grants us forgiveness of sins and everlasting life because of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross.

celebration; as surely as I saw with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and tasted that wine with my mouth, so certainly has Christ died for *my* sins. It's clear: the more we're busy with the delightful message of these sacraments, the more the glories of the gospel encourage and strengthen us.

Are we then responsible to ensure that we grow in faith, and so too in the assurance that the gospel of redemption is really for us, that we're heirs to life eternal? The fathers learned God's answer from Scripture, and were happy to confess it in the Canons: God preserves his own in the face of Satan's fiercest attacks, and does so through treating us as responsible creatures. So we are duty bound to work with the tools God uses to strengthen us. Through our diligent use of those means, we increasingly excel in his service—to his glory and our encouragement.

ARTICLE 15

One final article concludes the Canons of Dort:

This Doctrine Is Hated by Satan but Loved by the Church

This doctrine of the perseverance of true believers and saints, and of their assurance of it, God has most abundantly revealed in his Word for the glory of his Name and for the consolation of the godly, and he impresses it on the hearts of believers. It is something which the flesh does not understand, Satan hates, the world ridicules, the ignorant and the hypocrites abuse, and the heretics attack. The Bride of Christ, on the other hand, has always loved this doctrine most tenderly and defended it steadfastly as a treasure of inestimable value; and God, against whom no counsel can avail and no strength can prevail, shall see to it that she will continue to do so. To this God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honour and glory forever. Amen.

This final article of the Canons of Dort is a song of praise to God. This song of praise occurs even while the child of God experiences so much hatred from Satan's side. But the fact that God has chosen particular persons to life and that they invariably reach the goal of perfection, plus the fact that a sinner can know himself safe in God's hands and be certain that no matter what might happen today he shall be with his Lord tomorrow, combine together to compel the child of God to sing out his praise: "*to this God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honour and glory forever.*" This

glorious gospel Satan hates with a passion. After all, it implies his defeat. More, it means that all praise is directed ultimately to God alone. And Satan can't stand that.

Hated

Satan hates the glorious confession contained in the Canons of Dort. He hates what God revealed about how he chose certain persons to salvation. He hates the fact that God gave every last one of his chosen ones to Jesus Christ, and hates the fact that he couldn't trip up Jesus Christ. He hates the fact that Christ successfully atoned for the sins of everyone whom the Father gave to the Son, and hates the fact too that Christ in heaven today intercedes for each of his own and God always hears him, no matter how terribly that person has sinned. Satan hates the fact that the Holy Spirit renews the hearts of each of God's chosen ones, and hates the fact that despite remaining weaknesses and indescribable temptations the saints of God persevere till the end, finally to receive the crown of glory. It frustrates him enormously.

That is why Satan in the course of the history of the church has sought repeatedly to take some of the glory away from the God who accomplishes so much. How better to do that than by making people think obedience and salvation is their own decision, that God is the perfect gentleman who waits patiently for our decisions. . . . Though the fathers at the Synod of Dort demonstrated clearly in the Canons how wrong that thought is, too many Christians today continue to embrace an inflated understanding of man's ability and are happy to teach that the ball is in man's court. In fact, this is typical Evangelicalism (as the term is commonly understood in today's Western world), with its heavy dose of Arminian thinking.

It is a gift of God's grace that numerous among these Evangelical brothers and sisters have of late come to see the folly of having a God so small that he waits for our decision to receive him. Why oh why would such a small God be worthy of trust, let alone of worship and praise? A very positive aspect of the neo-Calvinism that's arisen across North America in the last couple of decades is its insistence that God is *God*, Almighty. This God is so great that all matters of this world—from climate to politics to illness to salvation itself and who gets saved—are all in God's almighty hands. In this world the Canons of Dort has much to teach those who adore a God of such might. This old confession is so very up to date!

Loved

The church of Jesus Christ most surely loves and defends the doctrine confessed in the Canons of Dort. This confession speaks of *grace*, abundant *grace*, only *grace*. Try to fathom it: I fell into sin, rebelled against my Creator, made myself thoroughly obnoxious to God, spiritually dead. Yet God in mercy saved a wretch like me—and holds on to me despite all my remaining failings and transgressions? What mercy that is; what a God that is!

No wonder “*the Bride of Christ . . . has always loved*” the content of the Canons of Dort “*most tenderly and defended it steadfastly as a treasure of inestimable value.*” Right in the face of Satan’s hatred and Satan’s attacks and Satan’s blasphemous belittling of God, saints through the ages have stood firm in the glorious gospel of God’s greatness (cf. Rev. 14:12). It’s fixed in the minds of the redeemed: “*The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations*” (Ps. 33:11). Hence the bold words at the end of this article: “*God, against whom no counsel can avail and no strength can prevail, shall see to it that [the church] will continue to [tenderly love and steadfastly defend this gospel].*” The gates of hell cannot prevail against the church of God (Matt. 16:18).

Encouragement

It’s so delightfully encouraging. “*Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour,*” says the apostle (1 Peter 5:8). He hastens to add, “*Resist him, firm in your faith*” (v. 9). Then he trumps it all with this wonderful promise: “*The God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you*” (v. 10). There it is, everything that these Canons have talked about compressed into one glorious promise!

Well, then, do the Canons end with the song of praise that will resound throughout all ages and to all eternity: “***To God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honour and glory forever. Amen.***”

Questions for Discussion:

14. The preaching of the gospel plays a major role in one’s faith.
 - a. What means does the Lord use to work faith in a sinner’s heart?

- b.** What means does the Lord use to maintain the faith once it's there, and to grow and perfect it? What implications follow for:
1. attendance in a faithful church; 2. Bible readings in the family setting; 3. personal Bible study?
 - c.** Should exhortations and threats have a place in the preaching? Why or why not? What does this say about "user-friendly" preaching?
 - d.** The article adds that God "maintains, continues, and perfects" the work of grace "by the use of the sacraments." How do you actually use your baptism and your participation at the Lord's Supper in the course of your daily life?
- 15.** The claim is made that the doctrine explained in the Canons of Dort is thoroughly God-centred.
 - a.** Explain how this statement is correct.
 - b.** Why does Satan hate this claim? How does Satan seek to undermine this statement?
 - c.** Has being busy with the doctrines confessed in the Canons been profitable for you? Explain how.
 - d.** Finally, now that you've been through the Canons of Dort, how widely embraced would you think Arminianism is in today's North American Christianity? In other words, how relevant would the four-hundred-year-old document known as the Canons of Dort be in today's context? How can its influence be augmented?

Conclusion

After the fathers had completed their response to the errors of the Arminians, they adopted a conclusion to accompany the Canons of Dort. Like the rest of the Canons, this conclusion was pitched in first place to the common folk of the pew, for their encouragement and instruction. It reads as follows:

This is the clear, simple, and straightforward explanation of the orthodox doctrine with respect to the five articles in dispute in the Netherlands, as well as the rejection of the errors by which the churches have for some time been disturbed. The Synod judges this explanation and rejection to be taken from the Word of God and to be in agreement with the confessions of the Reformed churches. Hence it clearly appears that some have acted very improperly and against all truth, fairness, and love in wishing to persuade the public of the following:

- *The doctrine of the Reformed churches concerning predestination and related subjects, by its very character and tendency, turns the hearts of men away from all godliness and religion.*
- *It is an opiate for the flesh administered by the devil, and a stronghold of Satan, where he lies in wait for all, wounds multitudes, and mortally pierces many with the darts both of despair and false security.*
- *It makes God the author of sin, an unjust tyrant and hypocrite; and is nothing more than a renewed Stoicism, Manichaeism, Libertinism, and Mohammedanism.*
- *It leads to sinful carelessness, since it makes people believe that nothing can prevent the salvation of the elect, no matter how they live, and that, therefore, they may safely commit the most atrocious crimes. On the other hand, it would not in the least contribute to the salvation of the reprobate, even if they had performed all the works of the saints.*
- *The same doctrine teaches that God has predestined and created the greatest part of the world for eternal damnation*

by a mere arbitrary act of his will, without taking into account any sin.

- *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.*
- *Many innocent children of believers are torn from their mothers' breasts and tyrannically thrown 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 help to them.*

And there are many more teachings of this kind which the Reformed churches not only do not confess but even detest wholeheartedly. Therefore, this Synod of Dort adjures, in the Name of the Lord, all who piously call upon our Saviour Jesus Christ not to judge the faith of the Reformed churches from the slander gathered from here and there. Neither are they to judge from personal statements of some ancient or modern teachers, often quoted in bad faith, or taken out of context and explained contrary to their meaning. But one ought to judge the faith of the Reformed churches from the public confessions of these churches themselves and from the present explanation of the orthodox doctrine, confirmed by the unanimous consent of the members of the entire Synod, one and all. Moreover, the Synod warns the slanderers themselves to consider how severe a judgment of God awaits those who bear false witness against so many churches and their confessions, disturb the consciences of the weak, and try to make many suspicious of the community of true believers. Finally, this Synod exhorts all fellow ministers in the gospel of Christ to conduct themselves in a God-fearing and reverent manner when they deal with this doctrine in schools and churches. In teaching it, both in speaking and writing, they ought to seek the glory of God's Name, the holiness of life, and the consolation of afflicted souls. Their thinking and speaking about this doctrine should be in agreement with Scripture according to the analogy of faith. And they must refrain from all those expressions which exceed the prescribed limits of the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures and which may provide shameless sophists with a good opportunity to scoff at the doctrine of the

Reformed churches, or even to slander it. May Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is seated at the Father's right hand and gives gifts to men, sanctify us in the truth, lead to the truth those who err, silence the slanderers of the sound doctrine, and equip the faithful ministers of his Word with the Spirit of wisdom and discretion, that everything they say may tend to the glory of God and the building up of those who hear them. Amen.

This conclusion is largely a summary of what is recorded in the articles of the Canons. For that reason, not much needs to be said about this conclusion. Two points only need our attention, relating specifically to the first paragraph and the last.

From the Word of God, in Step with the Confessions

In their conclusion, the fathers prefaced the summary list of the heresies taught by the Arminians with this sentence: “*The Synod judges this explanation and rejection to be taken from the Word of God and to be in agreement with the confessions of the Reformed churches.*” (Note: the “*confessions of the Reformed churches*” are the Belgic Confession of 1561 and the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563.) The judgment that Synod’s work was taken from the Word of God sounds so arrogant. Ought one not to be more careful about asserting that the work you’ve done is categorically in harmony with the Word of God?

It might seem so. But when is one arrogant? Is one not arrogant when he sets himself above the Word of God? If God Almighty has clearly spoken on a given point, is accepting what he says not true humility, while questioning what he says or contradicting what he says evidence of arrogance? The fathers listened carefully to the Word of God, and wrote down what they heard in relation to the questions of their day. By so doing, they consciously placed their Confession *under* the Word of God. As we have worked our way through the Canons of Dort, we frequently took up our Bibles to read in them what it is that God has revealed about the doctrine of election and reprobation, about the death of Christ and man’s redemption, about the corruption of man, his conversion to God, the manner of man’s conversion, and about the perseverance of the saints. Our study of the Canons of Dort was really a study of God’s Word. As a result, we too can summarise God’s Word on these topics with the words of these Canons. That’s humility. Arrogance is to formulate answers to the questions

of Arminianism in terms that differ from the Word of God (even if what God says in his Word is difficult to accept and harmful to one's pride). It is humility to echo precisely what God has revealed to us.

In our contemporary Western culture, this is the perspective we need to cling to, lest we lose our grip on the confessions as a whole.

Prayer

Article 15 was said to be a song of praise to God for a gospel which is GOD-CENTRED. Throughout the Canons, God's greatness was pointed up: it is sovereign God who freely saves dead sinners. To God therefore be all praise. How then do I resist those who attack and oppose the doctrine confessed in the Canons? How do I resist those who teach contrary to God's Word (e.g., the Arminians), and those who slander the truth of his Word and persist in their refusal to repent? The weapon of the Christian against satanic attack on the truth of God's Word is *prayer* and so the fathers so aptly concluded the Canons with this prayer:

“May Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is seated at the Father’s right hand and gives gifts to men, sanctify us in the truth, lead to the truth those who err, silence the slanderers of the sound doctrine, and equip the faithful ministers of his Word with the Spirit of wisdom and discretion, that everything they say may tend to the glory of God and the building up of those who hear them. Amen.”

Index

Old Testament

Genesis

1:3	267
1:26	143
1:31	147, 151, 178
2:7	107, 173, 200
2:15-17	106
2:17	255, 307
3:5	10
3:9	37
3:15	239, 308
3:18	213
3:19	107
3:17-19	107, 282
5:1,3	151
5:22, 24	39
6:5	147
6:6	250
6:9	245
9:21	246
15:6	169, 246, 287
17:5	283
17:7	96, 282, 283, 309
43:9	111
45:5	47

Exodus

11:10	44
32:9, 10	285
34:6	256

Leviticus

12:6	152
------	-----

Numbers

6:24, 25	299
6:25	253
11:33	251
14:2,3	288
23:14	61
23:19	61

Deuteronomy

6:1,2	304
6:6,7	304
7:6	75, 171
7:7	60, 171
7:8	60, 171
10:14-15	40
29:29	77
30:14	237
31:17, 18	299
32:11, 12	248

1 Samuel

16:14	251
-------	-----

2 Samuel

12:7, 13	267
12:20-23	97
24:1	248
24:10	249

1 Chronicles

21:1	248
------	-----

2 Chronicles

32:31	247
-------	-----

Job

2:9	291
14:4	152
17:3	111
40:4, 5	98

42:6	173
------	-----

Psalms

8:4,5	144
13:1	279
16:10	278
17:15	278
23:4	287
32:1, 3, 4	252, 296
33:6, 9	267
33:11	75, 272, 312
34:18	268
42:9	279
51:4	70
51:1, 3, 4	267
51:5	152
51:10, 11	210, 251
51:17	268
63:1, 5, 6	237
63:3,4	299
73	288
73:24	75
80	299
103:8, 10	256
116:8, 9	295
119:62-105	237
119:71	214
119:97, 98	225, 306
119:122	111
124	22, 23
127:3	152
138:8	45, 49, 57, 86, 257
147:19-20	170
19:21	75

Proverbs

Ecclesiastes

7:29 147

Isaiah

1:18 114

10:5-7 48

14:32 86

30:9 43

42:3 88

46:9-11 136

46:10 75

53:12 116

55:1 171

55:2,3 171

55:9 75

55:11 42, 74

63:10 251

64:6 233, 234

64:7-10 299

Jeremiah

7:2-4 203

17:9 147

Lamentations

3:1-8 253

3:22, 23 256

Ezekiel

11:19 184

18:32 207

33:8 223

33:11 174

36:26, 27 185, 186,

..... 210, 212

Amos

6:1 72, 203

Micah

6:6-7 167

Nahum

1:6 109

Habbakuk

1:13 37

Zechariah

4:6 213

Malachi

3:6 257

**New
Testament****Matthew**

1:21 134

5:16 207

5:45 201

6:13 247

7:16-18 294

11:21 40, 171

11:25, 26 75

12:24 261

12:31, 32 260

12:33-35 66, 286

13:3-9 177

13:18-23 92, 178

13:55 115

16:22-23 162

23:13 203

25:41 212

26:34 268

26:38 249

26:41 249

26:75 70, 268

27:3-5 268

27:22 125

27:45, 46 117

28:19-20 120, 159,

..... 220

Mark

15:13,14 186

Luke

1:35 116, 154

1:78 251

2:19 306

6:24-26 73

12:48 41

13:34 43, 174

18:11-14 202

22:31 239, 292

22:32 241

22:42, 44 117

23:46 117

John

1:1, 3, 14 116

1:29 110

1:45 115

2:2 29

3:1, 3 191

3:3 188

3:16 29, 37, 114,

..... 117, 120, 124

3:36 28, 125

5:39, 40 43

6:37 65, 259, 274

6:44 157

8:24 125

8:34, 36 230

10 30

10:11, 27, 28 134, 259

10:27-30 61, 241,

..... 272, 275, 278

11:31, 39, 43 184

11:43 180

11:44 184

12:32 157

14:6 52, 112

15:5 29, 293

15:18, 19 239

17:2 75

19:30 117

INDEX

Acts

1:8	120, 170
2:22-23	48
2:39	95
2:44, 45	186
4:12	52, 112
7:51	142
11:18	297
13:46	177
13:48	59, 180, 220
16:6	39, 170
16:7	170
16:10	39
16:14	39
17:25	200
17:28	201

Romans

1:7	64
1:18	162
1:20-21	162
3:22	56
3:24	128
5:6, 8-9	100
5:12	35, 93, 154, 155
5:18, 19	36
6:3-5	36, 155
6:14	231
6:16-17	44, 208
6:17, 18	230
6:23	255
7:5	165
7:7, 9-11	165
7:14	66
7:15	184
7:14-8:1	87, 231
7:18	187
7:19	215, 236
7:22-24	216
7:24	68, 70, 235
8:3	165
8:9	236

8:14-17	285
8:15-17	65, 238
8:28	272
8:29, 30	134
8:30	56, 272
8:31-37	138
8:34	274
8:35	97
8:39	260
9:5	116
9:11	60, 76
9:16	180, 189
9:18	44
9:20	99
9:22, 23	83
10:14-15	39
10:14-17	219
10:14, 17	86, 168
11:17, 20	283
11:29	272
11:33-36	99, 158, 181
12:2	239
16:3-15	65

1 Corinthians

1:2, 3	206
1:31	181
2:14	162
3:6	220
3:11	52
4:7	128, 201
6:9-11	186
7:14	95
10	30
10:12	247, 290

2 Corinthians

1:3, 4	290
3:18	216
4:16	217
5:15	114
5:17, 18	128
5:20	174

5:21	110, 117
7:10	70, 268, 298
10:17	128
11:14	138

Galatians

3:10	166
3:13	117
5:19-23	67, 192, 295

Ephesians

1:1	258
1:3, 4	76, 78
1:4	58
1:4, 5	56, 171
1:5	59
1:11	48, 137, 258
1:13	274
1:21, 22	274
2:1	5, 285, 294
2:1,2	181
2:1-3	148
2:1, 4, 5	44, 64, 210
2:3	44, 94, 286
2:3-5	256
2:8	44, 128, 169, 180, 186, 195
2:10	71, 298
2:11, 12	96
2:19	96
4:14	279
4:20-24	216
4:25-32	216
4:30	251
6:11	184, 240
6:12	215, 240
6:17	168, 184

Philippians

1:6	86, 241, 258
1:29	128, 195
2:12	270
2:13	210
4:19, 20	242

Colossians

1:10	298
1:13, 14	230
3:5	235
3:9-10	235
3:12,13	235

1 Thessalonians

1:5	168
-----	-----

2 Thessalonians

3:3	241, 272
-----	----------

1 Timothy

1:12-15	202, 256
1:15	234
2:1	207

2 Timothy

2:13	106
3:16, 17	76
4:1-2	220
4:8	278

Titus

2:13	116
2:14	295

Hebrews

2:17	115
3:12-13	127
4:12	184
4:15	116
7:9-10	155
7:22	111
9:12	113, 273
10:11,12	113
10:19, 22	289

10:31 92, 108, 251

11 39, 198,
199, 283

12:16, 17 268

12:29 251

13:22 307

James

1:18 219

2:26 119

3:2 232

3:8 232

1 Peter

1:1 76, 265

1:4, 5 279

1:23 219, 265

2:8 83

2:9 76

2:12 207

2:22 116

5:8 138, 240, 249

5:8-10 312

2 Peter

1:3 292

1:4 66

1:5-8 66

1 John

1:8 234, 265

2:1 273

2:2 114

2:15 237

3:1 285

3:2 289, 295

3:3 295

3:5 116

3:9-10 217, 265

3:13 239

4:9-10 38

4:19 72

5:16 262

5:20 116

2 John

1 76

Revelation

1:3 305

3:14-22 204, 205

7:9, 14 139

12:12 138, 240

13:8 82

20:15 109

22:20 238

Index to Confession References

Heidelberg Catechism

Lord's Day 1	273
Lord's Day 2	166
Lord's Day 3	13, 14, 15, 19, 157
Lord's Day 4	107
Lord's Day 5	108
Lord's Day 6	115
Lord's Day 10	218
Lord's Day 11	112
Lord's Day 13	230
Lord's Day 16	291
Lord's Day 21	138
Lord's Day 23	14, 119, 202
Lord's Day 24	233, 293
Lord's Day 25	196, 220
Lord's Day 31	221
Lord's Day 32	181, 208
Lord's Day 33	216, 267
Lord's Day 44	68, 90, 307
Lord's Day 52	240, 247

Belgic Confession

Article 14	145
Article 15	6, 18, 153
Article 16	6
Article 17	37
Article 21	6
Article 27	137
Article 29	73, 203, 221, 234
.....
.....

Canons of Dort

Chapter 1

Article 1	33, 35
Article 2	37
Article 3	38
Article 4	41
Article 5	42
Article 6	47
Article 7	51
Article 8	53
Article 9	57
Article 10	59
Article 11	60
Article 12	63, 83, 90
Article 13	70
Article 14	73
Article 15	79, 83
Article 16	82, 83
Article 17	92
Article 18	97

Chapter 1, Rejection of Errors

Article 1	52
Article 2	53, 54
Article 3	54
Article 4	58
Article 5	57
Article 6	61
Article 7	64
Article 8	79
Article 9	40, 51, 170

Chapter 2

Article 1	105
Article 2	108
Article 3	111, 126
Article 4	114
Article 5	117
Article 6	124
Article 7	127
Article 8	131
Article 9	136

Chapter 2, Rejection of Errors

Article 1	129
Article 2	103
Article 3	101
Article 4	104
Article 5	102, 127
Article 6	127
Article 7	112

Chapter 3/4

Article 1	143
Article 2	151
Article 3	156
Article 4	160
Article 5	161
Article 6	167
Article 7	169
Article 8	172
Article 9	176
Article 10	179
Article 11	181
Article 12	187
Article 13	193
Article 14	195
Article 15	199
Article 16	209
Article 17	218

Chapter 3/4, Rejection of Errors

Article 1	155
Article 2	144
Article 3	145, 164
Article 4	150
Article 5	160
Article 6	182, 196
Article 7	190, 224
Article 8	185
Article 9	198

Chapter 5

Article 1	229
Article 2	233
Article 3	238
Article 4	244
Article 5	250
Article 6	254
Article 7	264
Article 8	270
Article 9	276
Article 10	281
Article 11	287
Article 12	292
Article 13	395
Article 14	85, 302
Article 15	310

Chapter 5, Rejection of Errors

Article 1	257
Article 2	228, 276
Article 3	259
Article 4	260
Article 5	277, 278
Article 6	289
Article 8	266