

Lesson 18 **THE DEATH OF CHRIST AND THE
REDEMPTION OF MAN BY IT**

Canons of Dort: The Second Head of Doctrine

18.1 Extending the Theme

The Canons of Dort may be seen as incorporating a simple theme of the gospel upon which one builds in ever widening concentric circles. The theme is the sovereign grace of God and His free election without regard to persons. The sovereign decision of God is enhanced and exalted in His equally free decision to pass by other persons, leaving them in the ruin in which they plunged themselves, and ultimately pronouncing condemnation upon them due to their own hardness of heart and wilful disobedience. The second head of doctrine elaborates on this theme.

1. Wrath and Mercy

The LORD has an unending wrath against the sin of mankind, Psalm 7:11. At the same time, He has a deep and unending mercy for sinners, Psalm 103:8f. God's mercy and justice may not be opposed to each other as if these were conflicting principles in God, see Articles 16 and 21, Belgic Confession. The simplicity of God means that He cannot be divided into parts or into conflicting principles, see Deuteronomy 6:4-6.

2. The Ground of Salvation

God's wrath against sin is an undivided and eternal wrath against all that opposes Him. Therefore, this wrath must be fully satisfied in order for a real payment of sins to take place. The

Reformed said that the death of Christ was a sacrifice of such worth that it was abundantly sufficient to take away the sin of the world, 1 John 2:2. They held to the view that the greater the Surety, the greater the worth of the sacrifice. And the Surety offered is none other than the precious blood of God's only Son, 1 Peter 1:18, 19.

3. The Genuine Announcement

The Remonstrants held that with the Reformed view of election one did not really need to call anyone to faith, and there was no room for genuine preaching, or a genuine call of the gospel. However, the Reformed said that the good news of the full payment for sin in Christ's blood must be preached to all nations.

At the same time this is not a preaching of universal atonement, as was championed in the last century by K. Barth and his followers, and still maintained in varying degrees by many sects today, for example, the Methodists, certain millennialists, and the Salvation Army. Rather, the preaching of the good news must be accompanied by the demand to repent and believe, 1 Corinthians 2:2. In other words, one must preach both law and gospel, both promise and demand in the context of God's covenant. The two aspects of the covenant may never be divorced from each other.

4. The Glorious Message

The preaching of the gospel does not represent simply an offer of Christ's salvation which at the same time leaves its efficacy and power in the strength of man. This was the fallacy of the Remonstrants, who distinguished between the acquisition of salvation and its appropriation in a wrong manner. The first they gave to Christ, the second they left to man's power. Hence, the sacrifice of Christ

only made salvation possible for man, and it is up to man himself to realize this possibility for himself.

The Reformed stated that both acquisition and appropriation are part of Christ's glorious redeeming work. While this goes beyond human understanding, it is not unreasonable. The Remonstrants, rejecting it, promoted a reasonable religion, that is, a religion made palatable to the standards of human reason.

The Reformed saw the death of Christ as the actual payment or substitutionary sacrifice provided for a definite number of people, Romans 5:7, 8.

18.2 The Remonstrant View Rejected

The Remonstrants did not deny the death of Christ on the cross, but denied that it was a substitutionary death. They saw Christ primarily as the example for all believers, and His death as offering of love which God accepted not on account of any intrinsic merit, but strictly as an act of self-sacrifice and love through which the way of obedience was plainly shown to all believers.

The Remonstrants held that the death of Christ appeased the wrath of God, but only in such a way that it opened the possibility for Him to approach man with a reconciled disposition. In His new approach, God sets new conditions for man to be reconciled to Him, and it is in man's power to fulfil these conditions. They termed God's approach to man a **covenant**. Here they used the Scriptural term in their own sense.

The Remonstrants held that the Reformed view deprived the preacher of his message. It is not possible to preach conditions which

man is not able to fulfil in his power. To this the Reformed responded that preaching is God's means to bring His elect to salvation. The ministers must preach the law and the gospel not only to build up the saints in the faith, but also to move their hearts to faith.

I. Reference Passages

Study and Review Articles 16 and 20, Belgic Confession
1 Timothy 2:1-10, 1 John 2:1, 2

II. Review Questions

1. What was the Arminian heresy that the second head of doctrine counteracts?
2. Which Lord's Days of the Heidelberg Catechism also stress the necessity of Christ's full satisfaction for the reconciliation of the world? Which Articles of the Belgic Confession say the same thing?
3. Is there any relationship between the Arminian heresy and the Roman Catholic doctrine of good works? See Lord's Day 11, Heidelberg Catechism.
4. What are the means Christ uses in order to give His salvation to those whom the Father has given Him?

III. Extra Questions

1. What did Karl Barth teach concerning the number of those who are saved?
2. What does the **annihilation theory** teach with regard to the judgment of those who do not believe the gospel?