

“Divine Sovereignty ( 主权 ) and Human Responsibility in Our Salvation” Canons: First Head,  
articles 1-6. Bible reference: Romans 10:11-11:10.

By Pastor Rand Lankheet, at New Horizon URC, second service, March 11, 2018

*Before reading: In the second service, I'm starting a series of sermons on “The Doctrines of Grace.” ( 恩典的教义 ) They are sometimes called “The Five Points of Calvinism.” ( 加尔文五点 )*

These five points are found in a document known as “The Canons of Dort.” ( 多特信经 )

*Dort is shortened version of “Dordrecht.” Dordrecht is a city in the Netherlands.*

*A series of church meetings was held there in the years 1618-1619.*

*The conclusions of those meetings are known as “The Canons of Dort.” Canons. Canons with one n in the middle not two n's. A canon or canons means, an official list, or official decisions. So “the canons of Dort” are the official decisions made by that church meeting.*

*The topic found in the first canon, or the first decision, is found in Romans 10-11, among other places in the Bible. [Read Romans 10:11-11:10.]*

Introduction: Why is it that some people become Christians, and other people do not become Christians? We can ask it this way: Why are some people ready to put their faith in Jesus, and other people refuse to put their faith in Jesus?

The biblical answer involves two perspectives ( 角度 ) —a human perspective, and the divine perspective.

From the human perspective we have to say that every man, woman, and child has a responsibility to put their faith in Jesus. Each person must accept Jesus as their Saviour, by a true and living faith. This is “our HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY.”

But the Bible also teaches GOD'S ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY.

God is Sovereign. That means He rules from heaven as King, a King with absolute power over human beings. So to be saved, God is always in control. God has a plan to save certain people in this world. Why are some people saved? Because God has a plan for them to be saved.

To come to faith in Jesus both DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY and HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY play a role.

Romans chapter 10, and Romans chapter 11, give us a good example of this.

In Romans 10, Paul begins by saying that he wishes every Israelite, every Jewish person, would come to faith in Jesus. [Read vs. 1. [Read vs. 9-10, 13.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Everyone and anyone who calls on Jesus, out of true faith, will be saved.

That is one reason why preachers must preach about Jesus. It is through preaching, generally, that unbelievers learn about Jesus. Through preaching, unbelievers must be presented with their responsibility to put faith in Jesus. [Read vs. 14-15. This is also why the church sends out missionaries 宣教士 to distant lands. To bring the gospel, the good news about Jesus, to unbelievers in those lands. That, too, is part of our HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY.

So Jesus sent the 11 faithful apostles ( 使徒 ) into the land of Israel, after he ascended to heaven.

Those apostles, who were all Jews, preached to their Jewish countrymen. They started preaching about Jesus in the city of Jerusalem. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, on the Day of Pentecost ( 五旬节 ) . And, wonderfully, 3000 men came to faith in Jesus, as their Jewish Messiah, as their Saviour. And we must assume thousands of women and children, likewise, put their faith in Jesus.

But, many more thousands did NOT put their faith in Jesus. Those Jews remained in unbelief.

They were not saved. They all heard the same message, the same preaching. But only some came to faith in Jesus.

And Paul says exactly that. [Read vss. 16-18. So again, it is the responsibility of every unbeliever to hear the gospel, to learn about Jesus. It is each person's responsibility to put their faith in Jesus, as they hear that message. And, it is likewise the responsibility of the church to send out preachers, to send out missionaries, to tell unbelievers about Jesus.

So today, likewise. Each of you sitting here, has personal responsibility to come to church.

To hear the preaching of God's Word. And in response to that Word, to put your faith in Jesus. And it continues to be your and my responsibility to grow in our faith in Jesus.

And it is the God-given responsibility of this church to go out into the community, and to invite unbelievers to join with us. That they also may hear the preaching. That they also would come to faith in Jesus. And the way of salvation is not difficult: if you simply say from your mouth that Jesus is Lord; and believe in your heart that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, anyone can be saved. Anyone. That's what Romans chapter 10 says, clearly.

To become a Christian, from a certain viewpoint, is not a difficult thing. All different kinds of people throughout history have become Christians—rich people, poor people; people with good education, people without education; old people, young people; people who were quite morally good, outwardly speaking. And people who were not so morally good.

A couple of weeks ago I met a fairly young man who had a terrible past. His parents were divorced when he was a young teenager. That sent him in a downward direction. At age 14 he started doing heavy drugs. And he started stealing to support his drug habit.

By his early 20s, he had been in jail and out of jail. But while he was in jail, he heard the good news about Jesus. He started reading his Bible. And by God's grace, he became a Christian.

He has been sober ( 头脑清醒的 ) and clean for more than 5 years now. He is an active member of a church.

I sat in a room where he led a small group in prayer. It was a beautiful, sincere prayer.

This man is now helping other people with addiction and alcohol issues.

You see, anyone can become a Christian. Anyone. And anyone who hears the gospel, has a responsibility to respond, to put their faith in Jesus.

2. But Paul asks why many of his Jewish countrymen have not responded to the gospel.

They heard the same gospel as the others.

They were from the same Jewish background, the same culture, as the Jewish believers.

Why haven't they responded to Jesus in faith?

Remember, there is also **GOD'S SOVEREIGN PLAN**. God is all-powerful King.

Paul refers to this in Romans chapter 11. [Read 11:1-8.

[Read vs. 5. There is only that "remnant." A remnant is a small piece, usually of fabric.

In carpet stores, you can buy "remnants" of carpet...the left over pieces, the smaller pieces cut off from the larger roll of carpet. A remnant.

Paul says that in God's plan for Israel, only a remnant had been chosen. Chosen by God.

[Re-read vs. 5. So it was back in the days of ancient Israel, in the Old Testament, in the time of the prophet Elijah. Only a remnant was saved. Only a small portion of the Israelites put true faith in God. So, Paul says, even in his day, the first century A.D. only a "remnant" has been chosen by God. Chosen by God's grace.

Instead, says Paul, more non-Jewish people, Gentiles ( 外邦人 ), had been coming to faith in Jesus.

The majority of Jews were "hardened." [Read vs. 7-8. Some were "chosen" by God. Vs. 5.

"Chosen." These chosen ones are referred to in vs. 7 as "the elect." To be elect means to be chosen, to be chosen by God.

This is a hard teaching. But it is a biblical teaching. You see, all human hearts are naturally hardened to the gospel. But God works to soften some hard hearts. He chooses those people; he elects

them. And then God works to soften their hearts to the gospel. So that they will respond. They will put their faith in Jesus.

But, at the same time, God “hardens” other hearts. [Read vs. 7-8.

Now the apostle Paul continues in this chapter to say that someday in the future, it will be God’s plan to no longer harden the hearts of the Jews. He seems to say that someday in the future many more Jews will have their hearts softened by God. They will then come to faith in Jesus.

But this is the point of the sermon: God has a plan. For some to be saved.

God is sovereign King. He has a plan for history. At one point in history only a small remnant of Jews were saved. In the days of the prophet Elijah. Only 7000 were believers, with true faith in God. And in the first century A.D., also, just a small remnant of Jews had put their faith in Jesus. According to God’s sovereign plan, the rest of the Jews were hardened.

But God chooses only some people. He elects only some people. And God works to soften their hearts. You see, that is the perspective of God’s sovereignty. God’s kingly plan. To not save everyone on planet earth. To not save everyone throughout human history. But to only save some.

And this truth is taught throughout the Bible. Let us look at just one other place in the NT....

in Ephesians chapter 1. [Read 1:3-5. [Then read 1:11-12.

As in Romans chapter 10 and 11, here we also read about God’s plan. To choose only some.

To elect them. This is called “predestination.” ( 预定论 ) God giving each person their “destination,” ( 目的地 ) their eternal destination.

-And this is the first “canon”, the first decision in the document from that church meeting, in the city of Dordrecht, Netherlands. 400 years ago. We will talk more about the historical context next time. After months of study and discussion the pastors and scholars said this: “the Bible clearly teaches God’s sovereign plan of election ( 拣选 ) , of predestination.”

-If you would turn in the back of the blue covered songbook. Here we find the wording of Dort.

Page.... [Read article 1-2; then article 3; then article 4.

It is wonderful how this document begins. The pastors and scholars at Dort started with the Bible’s teaching about HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY. Every man, woman, and child, must hear the gospel. And each person is responsible to respond to the gospel. To put their faith, their trust in Jesus, as Saviour. And churches have a great responsibility to send out preachers and missionaries. So that everyone can hear the gospel, the good news about Jesus.

But the Bible also clearly teaches GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY, His eternal plan as King.

God has chosen, or elected only some people to be saved. [Read article 6.//

-Now, let me close with one practical point. Obviously, I don’t know all your hearts, in our small room, this afternoon. But it is likely that each of us have been saved by the shed blood of Jesus. That each of us have put our faith in Jesus.

But, listen: All of us have moments, when as Christians, we get discouraged.

Or when our faith is a bit weak. Or when we fall into some sin.

This biblical teaching of election ought to give us great comfort. It ought to encourage us.

Think of it: whose plan is it to save you? It is God’s plan. And it was Jesus, who died for you on the cross for your sins. And it is Jesus’ perfect righteousness which has been credited to you.

There is nothing you have done towards God to move him to want to save you.

No, you are saved only by God’s sovereign decision, to show you mercy.

So, you see how you can rest in God’s grace, when you are weak? Or when you are discouraged?

Or when you fall into sin? The sin that you hate... the sin that leaves you feeling ashamed?

You can be encouraged by God’s sovereign plan.

He knows that our faith is not perfect. He knows that our lives are not perfect.

He knows that sometimes our love for Him runs lukewarm ( 不冷不热的 ) , or even, at times, cold.

Praise be to God.... It is ultimately His plan, His purpose, to choose us in love.

To soften our hard hearts to trust in Jesus.  
-And it is God's purpose and plan to keep on saving us. To the very end.  
LET US PRAY.

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