

“The Unconditional Nature of Election” Bible reference: Romans 8:28-30; 9:1-23
Canons of Dort: First Head, Articles 7, 9, 10-12
By Pastor Rand Lankheet, at New Horizon URC, Second sermon, on March 18, 2018

Introduction: Many Christians believe in the teaching of election. That God has elected people to be saved in Jesus. This is the biblical doctrine of election or predestination.

But this is how many Christians explain it: God in his sovereignty can see all things—things past,

present, and future. So, they say, God looked into the future to see whether people would accept Jesus as their Saviour or would reject him. And on the basis of what God saw, He decided either to choose them, or to reject them.

This is one understanding of the biblical teaching of election. It is God electing people based on their future, foreseen faith.” Election based on foreseen faith. Others call it “election based on God’s foreknowledge.”

But, brothers and sisters, that is NOT, it is not, what the Bible teaches about election.

-Look at [Romans 8:29. “Those whom God foreknew.” Yes, God has a certain “foreknowledge.” But what is it? It is not that God looks down the long hallway of time. That He sees all the possible outcomes. And then based on what people do, God decides to elect them, or not elect them. No!

You see, that would make God dependent on human beings. It would make God’s election dependent on human decision. God would be more like a spectator, sitting on the bleachers of a large stadium, watching the action below. And, based on the action of people below, God makes his decision. That is NOT how the Bible explains God’s plan of election.

Instead, the Bible says, repeatedly, God is the Supreme King. He is in complete control of all human beings, all their actions. Think of the man Abraham. God did not simply look down the long hallway of time, to see what Abraham would do, when God revealed himself to Abraham. No! The Bible says that God simply decided to choose Abraham. In fact, there are Bible verses where God says He could have chosen anyone else. In fact, he says, there were other people, bigger and stronger, than Abraham. There were nations with greater numbers, greater military strength, than Israel. But, without considering Abraham’s character or conduct, in the present or in the future, God simply chose Abraham.

Romans 8:29 says that “those whom God foreknew he also predestined...” What does that mean? It means this: God has prior knowledge. Before anything happens, God already knows it. The Bible says that from eternity of all God’s actions are known to Him.

Before anything happens, God already knows it.

Look at how verse 29, leads into verse 30. [Read vs. 29-30.

Those whom God knew ahead of time, knowing everyone and everything, God also predestined. God has set their destiny. And those whom God predestined, eventually, He also “called” them. Obviously, God had to wait until they were born. But eventually, God called them as they heard the gospel. He called them outwardly, having the gospel preached to them. God also called them inwardly, moving them by His Holy Spirit, changing their hearts.

So we go on to read in vs. 30, that those whom he called, God also justified.

That is, God credited them with the perfect righteousness of Jesus. He saved them!

So you see, at every step, God is in complete control.

Now, as with other biblical teachings, we have to compare Scripture to Scripture.

We have to find other Bible verses which either confirm or contradict any interpretation we give to a particular Bible verse. So let us ask: are their OTHER VERSES which confirm God’s election, not based on what people will do in the future? Not based on foreseen faith?

But based completely on God’s sovereign decision?

Yes, there are many verses which confirm this interpretation. We read a few of those verses earlier. From Romans chapter 9. [Read 9:10-13.

Did God look down the long hallway of time to first see what Esau would do? To see what Jacob would do? Did God base His decision to elect one of them, on how they might respond in the future? No!

Vs. 11 is absolutely clear: It was BEFORE Esau and Jacob were born, that God had chosen Jacob.

BEFORE they were born God had rejected Esau. It was BEFORE either of them had done anything good or bad. The last words of vs. 11 says this: [Read vs. 11b.

God's choosing one of them was not based, not based, on their works.

Not based on what they would do...in the present, or in the future.

This is why the Synod of Dort decided that God's electing some people to be saved is "unconditional." That is, God's plan of electing certain people is NOT CONDITIONED upon

how people might respond in the future. God's plan of election is NOT CONDITIONED upon any "future faith" or "foreseen faith." Rather, God's plan of election is 100% up to God. Based on His plan. All for the purpose of bringing full glory and praise to His name./
-So let us turn to the Canons of Dort, to First Head, to article 7. Page?

Before we read, let me explain the historical context. This document came out of a Synod.

A synod is a series of church meetings. Those meetings were held in the Dutch city of Dordrecht. Its name is usually shortened to "Dort." In those days there was a certain seminary professor named Arminius. Professor Arminius had some very unusual interpretations about certain biblical teachings. Things having to do with salvation, including God's plan of election.

By the time the Synod of Dort met, Professor Arminius had died. But his followers were pushing the controversial opinions of Professor Arminius. They were known as "Arminians." That is, followers of Professor Arminius. The pastors and the members of the Dutch churches became seriously divided—some followed the interpretations of Arminius, others held to older interpretations. The interpretations of men like John Calvin. So this synod, this series of church meetings, was called to study the teachings of Professor Arminius. To bring unity back to the churches, if that was possible.

The delegates at Dort decided that the followers of Arminius were teaching wrongly about election. That they were wrong in teaching God elected people on the basis of their foreseen, future, faith. I've given the main Scriptures which disagree with that interpretation. Those same Scriptures were used by the delegates at Dort. So they rejected the teachings of the Arminians.

Now let me just add this note. The majority of Christians today, evangelical Christians would disagree with Dort. Instead they would agree with Professor Arminius. Now, sadly, most evangelical Christians don't read church history. They don't know about these very important discussions in church history. And many Christians do not think about these things deeply. It's only when they start to study Ephesians chapter 1, or Romans chapter 9, that they are forced to come to some opinion. About how to interpret this biblical teaching that God has elected only some people to be saved in Jesus Christ.

But, now let's turn to a very practical question. And many Christians through the ages have struggled with this question. Maybe you have struggled with it. The question is this: How can I really know if I am one of the elect? How can I know if God has chosen me to be saved?

And some people have said: "It is impossible to know that. Therefore, you just have to live your life with a certain amount of doubt. You have to live wondering whether or not you are truly saved. Only when you die, and stand before God, then you will know if you are elect."

But, wonderfully, the delegates at the synod of Dort disagreed with that answer. Oh, they know that Christians sometimes ask the question—am I elect? Have I been chosen by God?

The delegates gave good advice, in trying to answer that question. [Read article 12.

Notice the first words of article 12. That all Christians can “attain the assurance of their ... election.” All Christians CAN ATTAIN the assurance, that God indeed has chosen them to be saved in Jesus. All Christians can KNOW that they have been elected by God.

But, the delegates to Dort added this thought: this assurance of salvation comes “in various degrees and in different measures.” In other words, not every Christian has quick assurance. Oh, some do have quick assurance. The Bible says that some Christians are given a very strong faith. They don’t struggle with doubts like other Christians might struggle.

But other Christians, maybe most Christians, struggle a bit. They have some doubts.

The delegates to Dort said this: To be assured of your election, look at your heart, look at your Christian experience. Over time, you should observe “fruits” of your election. In other words, if you are elect in Christ, then, there should be certain fruits, certain good results.

Like what? The delegates to Dort give some examples.

First of all, you should see in yourself a “true faith in Christ.” So let me ask: can you honestly say today that you have a faith in Christ as your Saviour? As I have said previously, this doesn’t have to always be a strong faith, or a full understanding of everything in the Bible.

But do you sincerely look to Jesus as the Lamb of God, who died on the cross, to sacrifice himself for your sin? To have paid the price for your sin? Do you simply trust in Jesus as the Sacrifice, as your Substitute, taking God’s wrath for your sin?

Think of it: Who, really, are the elect people in this world, today?

Well, they are those with faith in Jesus as their Saviour. Correct? No non-elect person is going to have faith in Jesus. Only the elect will have faith in Jesus—either in the present or in the future. So, ask yourself: Do I have faith in Jesus as my Saviour? And, if you do have faith, you are one of the elect!!

Some of you have studied logic. And you know about a type of logical construct known as a syllogism: Two true statements that lead to a logical conclusion. Here are the two true statements: A. Only the elect have faith in Jesus. B. I have faith in Jesus. C. The conclusion: I must be one of the elect./

And other fruits of election are also listed in Article 12: for example, having a “filial fear” of God.

That doesn’t mean being “afraid” of God, being terrified of Him. The adjective “filial” means “like a child.” As Christians, we should sense in ourselves that we are a children of God, in Jesus. That in Jesus, we are adopted children of the heavenly Father. That we love God for saving us, that we love God for providing for us, that we trust Him to take care of our needs. Do you have that sense—of God as your loving, heavenly Father? If you do, then you can be assured that indeed you are elect. You are saved by God’s grace, in Jesus.

One more fruit, and we will stop here...the list could go on. Genuine Christians, the elect, have “a

godly sorrow for sin.” Let me ask: do you feel guilty when you sin against God? Now, let me quickly add—we don’t always feel guilty when we sin. If we did feel terribly guilty just the dread of that feeling would hold us back from sinning. But we do sin. And the question is this: over time, do you become convicted about your sin? Are you able to admit your sin to God? Do you feel sad and ashamed about that sin? And if you do, then, you are indeed a genuine Christian. And as a genuine Christian, you are truly one of the elect.

The delegates to Dort added a warning.

It is not healthy to start speculating about election, about the secret plans of God from eternity.

Rather, with humility and with carefulness we simply must accept this Bible teaching. And with joy we must give all the glory, all the praise to God.

For He has shown us mercy in Jesus Christ.

How wonderful, how amazing, that from eternity, God had a plan to save us.

To chose us in Jesus. Not based on who we are, or who we will become.

But based only on His good pleasure.

To God alone be all the praise and glory. LET US PRAY.

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