

Canons of Dort 3&4th Head of Doctrine – Article 16-17 Man’s “will” and God’s “Means” in your Salvation

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ: God called you. God called you by his Holy Spirit. God called you in an irresistible way. God called you and gave you faith to respond. You then respond by singing praises to him, serving him, making supplications for others, stirring others to do good work, and supporting his kingdom work by your giving. Of course none of your responses caused your salvation. None of your responses even help cause your salvation. Salvation is of the Lord alone! You were totally unable to come to Christ...and he had to pull you to himself!

We need to conclude our study of effectual call by studying 2 more things, which are our headings.

If salvation is solely of the Lord, does a man still have free will?

If salvation is solely of the Lord, why do we need other things to be saved?

Our goals are: That you will see how God needed to bend your will through his designated means to save you, and that you will therefore be all the more passionate in serving him.

If salvation is solely of the Lord, does man still have free will?

Article 16: Regeneration’s Effect on man’s will: However, just as by the fall humanity did not cease to be human, endowed with intellect and will, and just as sin, which has spread through the whole human race, did not abolish the nature of the human race but distorted and spiritually killed it, so also this divine grace of regeneration does not act in people as if they were blocks and stones; nor does it abolish the will and its properties or coerce a reluctant will by force, but spiritually revives, heals, reforms, and—in a manner at once pleasing and powerful—bends it back. As a result, a ready and sincere obedience of the Spirit now begins to prevail, where before the rebellion and resistance of the flesh were completely dominant. In this consists the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will. Thus, if the marvelous Maker of every good thing were not dealing with us, humanity would have no hope of getting up from its fall by its free choice, by which it plunged itself into ruin when still standing upright.

1. God saved many by electing him, calling, him, and giving him faith to receive what Jesus did for him on the cross.

But this does not mean man is a robot or a puppet that has to be dragged to salvation and dragged to heaven. However, after the fall, man’s will became so corrupted and twisted, man was only able to choose evil; he lost the ability to choose good.

Instead of wanting to work, man became lazy. Instead of taking care of this family, man chose to please himself. Instead of worshipping God, man worshipped pleasures. Man wanted to be an enemy of God and fought against God. Man could not become God’s friend again because he did not have the ability to desire it. He opposed God.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Romans 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

So we may say man has free will, but because of his corruption, he lost the ability and desire to choose rightly. He always chooses wrongly. Man would never choose to submit to the Lord Jesus. Man is unable to choose to submit to Jesus.

Yet everything, including man's rebellious will, is under the control of God, so God is pleased to work in man so his will to choose good is restored.

Thank God he did this...or not one...not a single person would be saved!

2. So how does God work in man so that he would believe, without making man a robot?

a. God does not use brute force but renews man from the inside; he renews man's soul.

With a renewed will, man then begins to conform his thoughts, words, and actions to the image of God again.

Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

If God did not work, man would continue to pursue his own will. In this process, man is pleased to go along. After God works, man smoothly accepts and holds on to his Savior. Man then begins to obey the Holy Spirit willingly.

b. Even as a child of God, God continues to help man conform to his will and man grows in grace. Look at David's plea!

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

God renewed David and he returned and served the Lord.

3. You can see this gradual renewal of man's will illustrated in the life of a child: After a child is born, parents have to teach that child what is acceptable behavior or not and when the child is rebellious, some degree of force has to be applied.

God slowly bends man's will to himself – often slowly. We don't get this easily in our society today because if we want something, we want it done yesterday. If we want lose weight, we prefer a quick pill instead of a steady diet and exercise. But man's will is transformed more and more over time.

Even regeneration usually takes place in a subtle slow way. You bring your children to

church. They hear the Gospel day after day, and then one day they get the awareness they believe. (Bowman: This is like how a child is unaware of his conception, but is thankful for it. **The fact that one does not know when something happens doesn't mean that it is not true.**) You do not become perfect at regeneration. You only begin to obey. The Devil, the world, and your flesh continue to attack you.

4. But our Arminians friends argue they are able of their own free choice, to choose God, without God bending their wills.

They believe a Christian who has fallen into sin (backslidden) can get up by himself without the call from God. In doing this, they assert they have power to change in themselves! In doing this they rob God of the glory of his work.

This is why you might hear expressions like: “If it's got to be, it's up to me,” or “God has done all he can, his hands are tied, it is now up to you,” or “God has no hands but mine.” **This is a corruption of the Bible.**

If salvation is solely of God, why do we need other things to be saved?

Article 17: God's Use of Means in Regeneration: Just as the almighty work by which God brings forth and sustains our natural life does not rule out but requires the use of means, by which God, according to God's own infinite wisdom and goodness, has wished to exercise divine power, so also the aforementioned supernatural work by which God regenerates us in no way rules out or cancels the use of the gospel, which God with great wisdom has appointed to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul. For this reason, the Apostles and the teachers who followed them taught the people in a godly manner about this grace of God, to give God the glory and to humble all pride, and yet did not neglect meanwhile to keep the people, by means of the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and discipline. So even today it is out of the question that the teachers or those taught in the church should presume to test God by separating what God in good pleasure has wished to be closely joined together. For grace is bestowed through admonitions, and the more readily we perform our duty, the more lustrous the benefit of God working in us usually is and the better God's work advances. To God alone, both for the means and for their saving fruit and effectiveness, all glory is owed forever. Amen.

1. God does not only use man's will to play a role in his salvation, God also uses “means” (instruments) to accomplish his purposes!

In order to live, you have to have food, water, and air. These are the means God uses to preserve your life. God doesn't have to use these means, but he is pleased to do so. This shows God is the one who preserves your life...not your food, not your water, or not your air!

2. So what “means” (in addition to man's will) does God use for man's salvation (save &

sanctify)?

a. He uses the Gospel.

Romans 10:14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" 17 **So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**

1Peter 1:23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but **incorruptible, through the word of God which lives** and abides forever,

And then you see the result.

Acts 13:48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, **they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord.** And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

b. He uses the sacraments. Both sacraments are used to draw your mind to Christ's work on the cross.

c. He uses Christian discipline. This makes sure you are **making use of the means of grace.**

3. God uses personal human effort (continuing to bend the will) to help you grow as a Christian.

Ephesians 4:20 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that **you put off**, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that **you put on** the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

This requires thought and work. Keep in mind these words and directions were written to the church of God in Ephesus, not to pagans. This is continual work.

4. There are some who ignore "means" of salvation:

a. Some ignore Christian discipline and often think it is more loving to let the unrepentant go free. They ignore holding people's feet to the fire. How can Christians be brought to conformity to God's will if the church will not teach and enforce it? Which child loves to be rebuked? But it is essential, isn't it?

b. Some assume because God is sovereign and effectually calls people to himself, they don't need to submit to the marks of the church. But preaching, sacraments, and discipline are "means" God has appointed to guide the Christian. Don't ignore them. Ignore them and hurt yourself.

c. Some spend more time learning fluff or a maybe a few favorite Bible passages rather than the whole will of God in Scripture! Which soldier can fight in battle on only dessert or on one meal a day? Yet, when you talk to some Christians you hear a goofy, simplistic Gospel. (“I just love Jesus.”) They speak this way because they are malnourished. They need to know Jesus to love him...DOCTRINES!

d. Some don't faithfully exegete God's Word to ensure people conform their wills to the will of God.

Ezekiel 33:6 'But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.' ⁸ "When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and **you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way**, that **wicked man shall die in his iniquity**; but his blood I will require at your hand.

Preaching should be clear, consistent, and applicable, with no ambiguity. God's honor is at stake!

Conclusion:

God bends man's will so he receives God's salvation and grow in submission to the Lord. God does this by using the marks of the church to lead men to Christ and to disciple them once there!

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Now that God has worked in you and bent your will, be busy with the Bible. Memorize it. In doing this, you will be more conformed to the Lord's will! Get into the Word of God. Listen to good preaching. God's sovereignty does not take away your responsibility to diligent study his Word! **Feed on the sacraments** – not in a superstitious way, but to nourish your soul! **Submit to Christian discipline!**

2. Use God's Word to call the lost to God. Tell them the story of Jesus! Tell them about his love and judgment.

Finally: If you are not a Christian, you can't please God without his working in you. Why not call upon him today and say: Lord, change me! Change my will so it will conform more to Jesus Christ. Change me today!