

Contents

- 1** Background to the Canons of Dort
 - 2** Historical Background
 - 7** Is the Issue Relevant Today?
 - 17** So Who Was Jacob Arminius?
 - 20** The National Government
 - 23** What's the Real Issue?
 - 28** The Arminian Articles
- 33** Chapter One
 - Divine Election and Reprobation
- 101** Chapter Two
 - Christ's Death and Man's Redemption Through It
- 141** Chapter Three/Four
 - The Corruption of Man, His Conversion to God, and the Manner in Which It Occurs
- 227** Chapter Five
 - The Perseverance of the Saints



ARTICLE 6

God's Eternal Decree

That God in time confers the gift of faith on some, and not on others, proceeds from his eternal decree. For he knows all his works from eternity, and he works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph 1:11). According to this decree he graciously softens the hearts of the elect, no matter how hard they may be, and inclines them to believe; those not elected, however, he leaves in their own wickedness and hardness by a just judgment. And here especially is disclosed to us the profound, merciful, and at the same time just distinction between men equally worthy of condemnation, or that decree of election and reprobation which has been revealed in God’s Word. Although perverse, impure, and unstable men twist this decree to their own destruction, it provides unspeakable comfort for holy and God-fearing souls.

The first five articles of Chapter 1 of the Canons of Dort stressed very much the deeds of the Lord God, as Table 1.1 makes clear. *God* sent a Saviour to the lost, and God lets his Word be preached to the lost, and God works faith in the lost. Article 6

tells us now that all these deeds are rooted in God’s *decree* of election, with the subsequent articles drawing out further details about this decree.

TABLE 1.1	
Art 1	• God is not compelled to save any
Art 2	• God sends a Saviour
Art 3	• God sends preachers of the gospel
Art 4/5	• God works faith

God’s decree concerning the salvation of sinners reflects God’s total *sovereignty*. By a word of command, Almighty God called this world into existence, and by this same power he keeps this world existing and directs all that happens in it, past, present, and future. Consider the following bits of biblical data:

- After Joseph revealed himself to his brothers in Egypt, he told them, “*And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life*” (Gen. 45:5).

Joseph was of course very aware that his brothers had cast him into that pit and sold him to the Midianite traders so many years ago. But he acknowledged that behind their misdeed was God's mighty hand; this God sovereignly controlled even the jealousies between brothers and the activities of slave traders.

- God says concerning Assyria (the world power of the day) and its king, Sennacherib, "*Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my fury! Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. But he does not so intend, and his heart does not so think; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few*" (Isa. 10:5–7). The Lord's point is that Sennacherib together with his army were but tools in God's sovereign hands to do only what he determined for them to do. Undoubtedly this angle would not have received coverage in the news reports of the day, but God would want Israel to know that the media's perspective does not constitute ultimate reality.
- The apostle Peter says to the Jews concerning Jesus, "*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men*" (Acts 2:22, 23). His point is clear: behind the Jews' decision to crucify Jesus was the mighty hand of God.

If God, now, decreed what would happen at slave markets and in world politics and even in kangaroo courts, would he not also have determined who would be saved? I cannot on the one hand embrace the confession of Lord's Day 10 of the Heidelberg Catechism about God's providence (see sidebar), and on the other hand insist that salvation is in the final analysis up to me. It's one or the other: all things are in God's hand, or they are not. The Bible's insistence is that all things are in his sovereign control, and by definition that includes the determination of who shall receive eternal life. The doctrine of divine election is part and parcel of the doctrine of God's providence.

In fact, God is very clear in Holy Scripture that he decides who shall be saved. The apostle Paul writes about "*having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will*" (Eph. 1:11). The apostle clarifies that God's decree of predestination

*Lord's Day 10***What do you understand by the providence of God?**

God's providence is his almighty and ever present power, whereby, as with his hand, he still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, and so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed all things, come not by chance but by his fatherly hand.

What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by his providence?

We can be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and with a view to the future we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from his love; for all creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they cannot so much as move.

was established already before the creation of the world: “*even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world*” (1:4). We find it hard to grasp: before he created this world God had determined which lost sinners he would take back to his side. How amazing! That means that before God created the world he already had his eye on my generation, and determined that I should be among those who are saved! That's astounding! What majesty characterizes this God!

Article 6 echoes those words from Ephesians 1:11 when it confesses, “*That God in time confers the gift of faith on some, and not on others, proceeds from his eternal decree.*” That's where salvation begins: God has determined whom he would save, and so as the years go by, he causes his ancient decree to become reality in this world.

Sovereignly he softens the hearts of some, but others he rightly leaves in their hardness—and he does that on the basis of his eternal decree. That's Article 6: “*According to this decree he graciously softens the hearts of the elect, no matter how hard they may be, and inclines them to believe; those not elected, however, he leaves in their own wickedness and hardness by a just judgment.*” This article does not explain how God does this softening or this leaving, because that matter comes back in later articles.

The thought that *God* is at work makes predestination and election an exciting concept. To use the words of Article 6, “*it provides unspeakable comfort for holy and God-fearing souls.*” The point is simply that the work God has begun will necessarily come to perfect completion—for God never changes his mind or leaves a job half done. It's the conviction of the psalmist: “*The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever*” (Ps. 138:8). “Unspeakable comfort,” indeed!

I grant that we are inclined to speculate much about the doctrine of election. Let's realize, however, that the Lord did not reveal this doctrine merely for us to study or to puzzle about; he revealed it, rather, to comfort our souls. Instead of intellectualizing this doctrine, let us permit this part of God's revelation to comfort and encourage us in life's struggles and questions. Better put: instead of getting bogged down in the questions this doctrine raises, let's delight in the God who is working out our salvation.

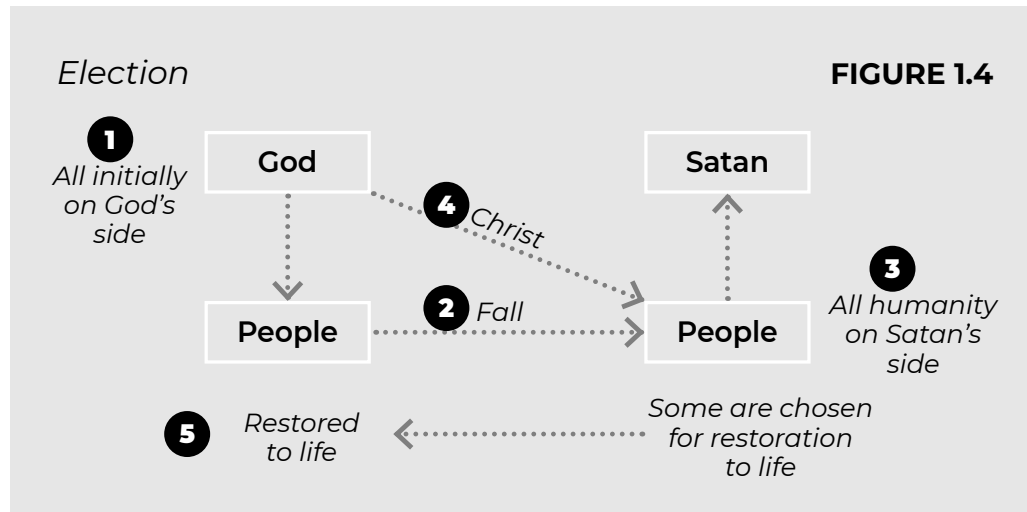
ARTICLE 7

Election Defined

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God whereby, before the foundation of the world, out of the whole human race, which had fallen by its own fault out of its original integrity into sin and perdition, he has, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his will, out of mere grace, chosen in Christ to salvation a definite number of specific persons, neither better nor more worthy than others, but involved together with them in a common misery. He has also from eternity appointed Christ to be the Mediator and Head of all the elect and the foundation of salvation and thus he decreed to give to Christ those who were to be saved, and effectually to call and draw them into his communion through his Word and Spirit. He decreed to give them true faith in him, to justify them, to sanctify them, and, after having powerfully kept them in the fellowship of his Son, finally to glorify them, for the demonstration of his mercy and the praise of the riches of his glorious grace. As it is written: God chose us in Christ, before the creation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved (Eph 1:4–6). And elsewhere, 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).

That definition of election is quite the mouthful! To get to the core of what election is, we can trim some of the descriptive verbiage from the opening sentence of this article, and then we're left with this working definition: "*Election is the unchangeable purpose of God whereby . . . he has . . . chosen in Christ to salvation a definite number of . . . persons.*"

The assumption behind this article is that the entire human population was in such a bad place that it needed “salvation,” and only those would receive it who would be “chosen” thereto. The reference, of course, is to the misery resulting from the fall into sin, when we had joined Satan and so became by nature his slaves (see Figure 1.4). Since Satan is a cruel master, we experienced on his side the holy wrath of the God against whom we sinned—and that was crushingly and eternally deadly. Altogether, being on Satan’s side is a predicament from which we certainly need salvation.



God, however, before he had created the world, had determined by an unchangeable purpose to rescue a certain fixed number of persons from Satan’s bondage. More, God determined not just precisely *how many* persons to be saved, but determined also *who* would be saved. I will not pause at this point to demonstrate from Scripture that God determined both the number of the elect and their identity, as we’ll come back to that in subsequent articles. For now it is sufficient to note that the Arminians would have the folk of the pew believe that God’s decree of salvation involved nothing more than a decision to save whoever might in the future decide to believe in Jesus Christ and persevere in that faith (see sidebar, Error 1). As we’ll see in more detail as we proceed, this was a position the fathers soundly and firmly rejected.

In Christ

Article 7 says that this choosing happened *in Christ*. God sent Christ to earth in order to pay for our sins. Although we deserved God’s wrath on account of our transgressions, God transferred his wrath from

Rejection of Errors, 1.1

Error: The will of God to save those who would believe and persevere in faith and obedience is the whole and entire decree of election to salvation. Nothing else concerning this decree has been revealed in God’s Word.

Refutation: This error is deceptive and clearly contradicts Scripture, which declares not only that God will save those who believe but also that he has chosen specific persons from eternity. Within time he grants to these elect, above others, both faith in Christ and perseverance. *I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world (Jn 17:6). And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed, (Acts 13:48). Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him (Eph 1:4).*

his elect onto Jesus Christ so that Christ might make the payment we ought to have made. Christ made this payment through his suffering and sacrifice on the cross of Calvary (see further Chapter 2, Article 2). When God received Jesus again, he also received with Jesus those elect persons for whom Jesus died, so that these people are taken back to God’s side. Jesus insists that he himself is the only possible way through whom sinners can return to God’s side, for he said, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6)*. Peter echoed that thought when he told the Sanhedrin, *“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12)*. Paul repeated it, *“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11)*.

The Bible would have us know, then, that there is no escape from Satan’s side and no restoration to the God against whom we rebelled in Paradise through, for example, Buddha or our personal efforts, but only through Jesus Christ. That may sound highly exclusive of other religions—and it is. But since this is what Almighty God has revealed the situation to be, it is for me (finite creature as I am) to cease my protest, embrace this revelation, and confess with Article 7 that God *“has . . . from eternity appointed Christ”*—and no other—*“to be the Mediator and Head of all the elect and the foundation of salvation.”* Take Christ away from God’s saving work, and the benefits of God’s electing grace collapse into wishful thinking.

Article 7 is lengthy, and provides much material for further comment. However, much of what is confessed in Article 7 receives elaboration in the following articles, and so we’ll proceed to consider them.

ARTICLE 8

One Decree of Election

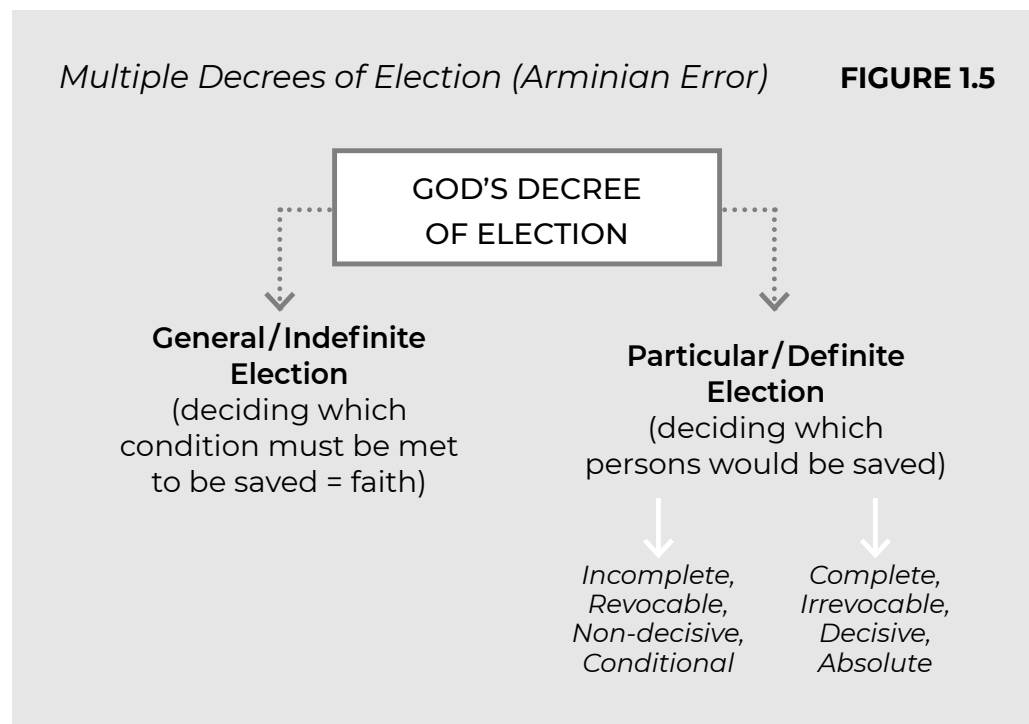
There are not various decrees of this election, but there is one and the same decree concerning all those that are to be saved under both the Old and the New Testament. For Scripture declares that the good pleasure, purpose, and counsel of the will of God is one.

According to this purpose he has chosen us from eternity both to grace and to glory, both to salvation and to the way of salvation, which he prepared for us that we should walk in it.

Why would Article 8 care to confess that “*there is one and the same decree [of election] concerning all those that are to be saved under both the Old and the New Testament*”? That’s because the Arminians insisted that there were “*various decrees of . . . election*.” God, they said, had made numerous decisions or decrees in relation to election.

The Arminians on Multiple Decrees

The Arminians insisted that “*there are various kinds of divine election to eternal life*” (see sidebar, Error 2). They spoke of two main kinds of election, namely, general (or indefinite) election and particular



Rejection of Errors, 1.2

Error: There are various kinds of divine election to eternal life. One is general and indefinite, another is particular and definite. The latter in turn is either incomplete, revocable, non-decisive, and conditional, or it is complete, irrevocable, decisive, and absolute. In the same fashion there is an election to faith and another to salvation. Therefore election can be to justifying faith, without being decisive to salvation.

Refutation: All this is an invention of the human mind without any basis in the Scriptures. The doctrine of election is thus corrupted and the golden chain of our salvation broken: *And 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).

(or definite) election. The second, particular election, they in turn subdivided into incomplete, revocable, non-decisive, and conditional election *or* complete, irrevocable, decisive, and absolute election. See Figure 1.5. What, we wonder, did they mean with all those terms?

a. General or Indefinite Election

God's eternal decree of election, the Arminians said, was not about which persons he would save, but was about which *conditions* God wanted people to meet in order to be taken from Satan's side back to God's side. As possible conditions, the Arminians said, God could have stipulated that one had to donate \$25,000 to charity, or have brown eyes, or swim across Lake Erie, or any other option of his choosing. But of all the possible conditions available

to him, they said, God in his good pleasure stipulated that the one single criterion one needed to satisfy was *faith* (see sidebar, Error 3).

This general decree of election, then, was about the *criteria* one needed to satisfy to be saved, and not about which *persons* would be saved. This election was general or indefinite, that is, all people were subject to the criteria God set. God made this decision before he made the world.

b. Particular or Definite Election

A second sort of election, said the Arminians, was about *who* would be saved. Once God had settled on *faith* as the quality one had to possess in order to be saved, God, as it were, took up his "time-binoculars" and looked into the deep future to see who would have faith. Those whom God foresaw would one day believe he chose for salvation, and so entered their names into his book of life. This (they said) is particular (or definite) election.

Rejection of Errors, 1.3

Error: The good pleasure and purpose of God of which Scripture speaks in the doctrine of election is not that he chose certain specific persons and not others, but that out of all possible conditions (such as the works of the law) he chose or selected the act of faith, which in itself is without merit, as well as the imperfect obedience of faith, to be a condition of salvation. In his grace he wished to count such faith as complete obedience and worthy of the reward of eternal life.

Refutation: This offensive error deprives God's good pleasure and Christ's merits of all efficacy, and draws people away from the truth of gracious justification and from the simplicity of Scripture. It contradicts the word of the apostle: *God saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began*" (2 Tim 1:9).

What, though, is one to think of those who meet the condition of faith for a short time only, and after a period of believing the gospel decide no longer to believe in the Lord? These short-term believers, said the Arminians, were still the object of God's election, but now it's an *incomplete, revocable* (i.e., rescinded, cancelled), *non-decisive, conditional* sort of election. When God, so to speak, adjusted his time-binoculars to look some years deeper into history and then foresaw that a believer rejected the faith, God erased that person's name from his book of life. It's a "short-term" election.

On the other hand, there are those who God foresaw would persevere in faith even till death. Concerning these people the Arminians would speak of a *complete, irrevocable, decisive, and absolute* sort of election. This sort of election was permanent; their names would never be erased from God's book of life.

Analysis

In the Arminian concept of election, does God act sovereignly and freely, or is God dependent on the decision of created people? Actually, it depends on what kind of election you're talking about.

In the so-called general (or indefinite) sort of election, where God chose faith as the condition you need to fulfil (instead of you needing to have brown eyes or pay a sum of money), the Arminians indeed acknowledged God's sovereignty. God, after all, freely chose this condition, and there's nothing people can do about that. As an aside, I do not know

of any passage in Scripture where the notion of election refers to God choosing the criteria one needs to fulfill. Let's, though, leave that little difficulty to one side. . . .

On the matter, though, of so-called particular (or indefinite) election—that's the type of election that zeroes in on *who* will be saved—it's obvious that the Arminians left no room for the sovereignty of God. After all, whether your election was complete or incomplete hinged on your own decision to persevere in your faith or not. Since sticking with the faith, or departing from it, is to Arminian thinking your own decision, it's clear that ultimately *you* decide whether or not your name stays in God's book of life. Your actions, then, become the basis of God electing you decisively, absolutely, and completely.

What Does the Bible Say?

Our fathers criticized this teaching as heresy on the basis of what Scripture says. They were strong in their words: it's "*an invention of the human mind without any basis in the Scriptures*" (see sidebar above, Error 2–Refutation). The fathers quoted from Romans 8:30 where we read, "*And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*" With that reference our fathers wished to make clear that all things begin and end with God, including being predestined (that's your election) as well as being called and justified and glorified. I should add: Paul had earlier written that God justifies those with faith (Rom. 3:22). Predestination (election) here obviously comes before calling, calling before justification (and faith), and justification before glorification; there's an order in the chain of salvation. When the Arminians, then, put faith logically before election, they did injustice to Paul's word in Romans 8:30. Sovereignly, God chooses particular persons, then in time calls them, then eventually justifies them (through their faith in Jesus Christ), and then ultimately glorifies them on the last day. It's his work from beginning to end.

One could refer also to the words of Ephesians 1:4, 5. Paul praises God for every spiritual blessing God has given, "*even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.*" According to the apostle, God had a purpose in mind when he elected particular persons to life, and that purpose was that "*we should be holy and blameless before him.*" But the Arminians held that God could elect someone, only to find out later that this person was not holy and

without blame before him because he ceased to believe. That is contrary to what Paul wrote.

So the fathers rejected the Arminian structure of multiple kinds of election as a fabric of human imagination. On the basis of Scripture they confessed just one decree of election. Since Almighty God himself made this decree concerning who would be saved, one may be confident that God will see his decree become reality. As the psalmist put it, *“The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands”* (Ps. 138:8). God is not the “wimp” the Arminians made him out to be, where God can only walk in step with what man decides to do.

ARTICLE 9

Election Not Based on Foreseen Faith

This election is not based on foreseen faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition, as a cause or condition in man required for being chosen, but men are chosen to faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, and so on. Election, therefore, is the fountain of every saving good, from which flow faith, holiness, and other saving gifts, and finally eternal life itself, as

Rejection of Errors, 1.5

Error: Incomplete and non-decisive election of specific persons to salvation took place on the ground of foreseen faith, conversion, holiness, and godliness, which either began or continued for some time. Complete and decisive election, however, occurred because of foreseen perseverance in faith, conversion, holiness, and godliness till the end. This is the gracious and evangelical worthiness because of which the person who is chosen is more worthy than the one who is not chosen. Therefore faith, obedience of faith, holiness, godliness, and perseverance are not fruits of unchangeable election to glory. Instead, they are necessary conditions and causes required and foreseen as accomplished in those who are to be fully elected.

Refutation: This error militates against all of Scripture, which constantly impresses the following upon us: *Election is not because of works but because of him who calls* (Rom 9:11); *as many as were appointed to eternal life believed* (Acts 13:48); *he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him* (Eph 1:4); *you did not choose me, but I chose you* (Jn 15:16); *But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace* (Rom 11:6); *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins* (1 Jn 4:10).

its fruits and effects. This the apostle teaches when he says, Even as he chose us (not because we were, but) that we should be holy and blameless before him (Eph. 1:4).

As we learned above, the Arminians had said that to be decisively elected, you needed to satisfy certain qualities, namely, you had to decide to believe (even though you might have faith only temporarily and consequently only be indecisively elected) and to persevere in faith (and consequently be decisively elected). In the words of Error 5 quoted in the sidebar: *“Incomplete and non-decisive election of specific persons to salvation took place on the ground of foreseen faith, conversion, holiness, and godliness, which either began or continued for some time. Complete and decisive election, however, occurred because of foreseen perseverance in faith, conversion, holiness, and godliness till the end.”*

To show that this teaching did not agree with Holy Scripture, the fathers in Article 9 quoted a portion of Ephesians 1:4. The full text reads, *“He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”* The words *“that we should be”* link the first part of the sentence (*“he chose us”*) with the last part of the sentence (*“be holy and blameless before him”*). The sentence teaches that holiness and blamelessness do not come *before* the choosing, but clearly come *after* the choosing—and are in fact the *result* of the choosing. To say it differently: we are not elected *because* we have faith but we are elected *so that* we might have faith.

Rejection of Errors, 1.4

Error: Election to faith depends on the condition that man should use the light of nature properly, and that he be pious, humble, meek, and fit for eternal life.

Refutation: If this were true, election would depend on man. This smacks of the teaching of Pelagius and is in open conflict with the teaching of the apostle: *we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 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—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph 2:3–9).*

Other texts demonstrating this point received a place in the Rejection of Errors (see sidebar, Error 5). Note, for example, the logic of Acts 13:48: “*As many as were appointed to eternal life believed.*” This text clearly places the appointment to life eternal *before* the decision to believe, not after. The flow of thought is that God first ordains persons to life and only then do they come to faith.

Once again, then, it is a matter of whether election depends on me or on God. Scripture insists that God freely elects, with no contribution on our part, and we as a result end up believing. The point is drawn out with clarity in the refutation the fathers appended to Error 4 as printed in the sidebar, to which the reader is referred.

ARTICLE 10

Election Based on God’s Good Pleasure

The cause of this gracious election is solely the good pleasure of God. This good pleasure does not consist in this, that out of all possible conditions God chose certain qualities or actions of men as a condition for salvation, but in this, that out of the common mass of sinners he adopted certain persons to be his own possession. For it is written, though they (the twins) were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, and so on, she (namely, Rebekah), was told, “The older will serve the younger.” As it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (Rom 9:11–13; cf. Gen 25:23; Mal 1:2–3). And, as many as were appointed to eternal life believed (Acts 13:48).

Why does God choose certain persons? Article 9 had insisted that the cause of our election was *not* that we have faith or were so holy as to please God. Now Article 10 says what the cause of our election actually is, namely, *God’s good pleasure*. To say in it plain English: God elected Bob (and not Bill) because he felt like it. That’s the testimony of Scripture in Ephesians 1:5: “*He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.*” God did not look for people who were the most handsome, civilized, or the richest, or conversely who were the poorest and most down trodden, but he simply chose specific persons according to his good pleasure.

Paul’s instruction in Ephesians 1 is not new. Before the Lord gave to his people Israel the land he promised them, he told them plainly that

“it was not because you were more in number than other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all the peoples” (Deut. 7:7). The word translated here as “fewest” denotes Israel’s insignificance and weakness; they were slaves in Egypt, utterly unable to rescue themselves from their oppressors. There was simply nothing attractive about that people (see also Ezek. 16:6).

Yet it was God’s good pleasure to make this undeserving nation his. He did so *“because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers”* (Deut. 7:8). The oath to the fathers refers to the fact that God claimed Abram for himself, and Isaac, and Jacob too. Concerning Jacob specifically, God said that he chose him for himself when he was yet in the womb, when he had *“done nothing either good or bad”* (Rom. 9:11, as Paul described the events of Gen. 25:23).

The fact that Almighty God sovereignly chooses whomever he wishes makes a person humble and privileged, for it leads to the very personal question: how come I actually believe? The fact that I believe has ultimately nothing to do with me but has everything to do with what the Lord was pleased to do to me and in me. He dealt with me in the years of my life according to the decree he settled on concerning me so long ago. Delightful: God considered my salvation even before he began creating this world! More, as he leads world history according to his eternal plan, he ensures that I come to faith and persevere. Though I am no better than my neighbour, I am *that* precious in his sight! How wonderful this God is!

ARTICLE 11

Election Unchangeable

As God himself is most wise, unchangeable, all-knowing and almighty, so his election can neither be undone and redone, nor changed, revoked, or annulled; neither can the elect be cast away, nor their number be diminished.

With gratitude we note that God’s decree of election is unchangeable. The Arminians had insisted that God could and would change his mind depending on whether individuals came to faith or deserted the faith (see sidebar, Error 6). God’s revelation about himself, however, teaches us that God does not change his mind. The Holy Spirit, for example, prompted Balaam to tell Balak, *“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he*

spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" (Num. 23:19) Note that Balaam's statement comes in response to pressure that Balak thought to put on God through his abundant sacrifices (Num. 23:14). But in the face of the insistence and wishes of particular persons, God's decision remains unchanged.

There is something so very comforting in this. If God were sufficiently fickle to alter his plans on the basis of my erratic preferences, I would have no security or comfort in relation to my eternal future. After all, I could not count on God's constant faithfulness in the face of my enduring weaknesses. As I struggle with doubts and failures, I could only conclude that God is watching me to see whether I'll stay in the faith or not, and if I don't, he'll erase my name from his book of life. That's hardly encouraging.

As it is, God has decreed that I am his. In step with that decree he sent his Son to die for my sins, then sent preachers of his Word to cross my path so that I might hear the Good News, and has even prompted me to embrace that gospel in faith. Will the God who has done so much for me turn around and drop me? Will this God change his mind concerning me—even if I in a moment of weakness change my mind concerning him? Here is the delightfully reassuring promise of Scripture: no matter how great and numerous my sins might be, God does not and will not change his mind concerning me. As Jesus put it, *"All that the Father gives me will come to me"* (John 6:37). Note the absoluteness of Jesus' words: *"All . . . will come"*—without exception. In another place Jesus 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. 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. I and the Father are one"* (John 10:27–30). These texts (and others too) do not speak of probabilities but

Rejection of Errors, 1.6

Error: Not every election to salvation is unchangeable. Some of the elect can and do indeed perish everlastingly, notwithstanding any decree of God.

Refutation: This gross error makes God changeable, destroys the comfort which the believers obtain from the firmness of their election, and contradicts Holy Scripture: *The elect cannot be led astray* (Mt 24:24); *And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day* (Jn 6:39); *And 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).

of certainties. That's because God ensures that his eternal decrees will most certainly actually happen.

For God's children this confession is so wonderfully comforting!

Questions for Discussion:

- 6.** Article 6 would have us know that our election is rooted in God's sovereignty.
 - a.** Is anything in today's world excluded from God's sovereign control and planning? Prove your answer from the Scriptures. What comfort is there here for you? Try to give specific examples from your own life where the doctrine of God's total sovereignty was a source of comfort.
 - b.** How does the doctrine concerning God's sovereignty connect to the subject of election?
 - c.** What criteria would you think God used to elect you to salvation?
- 7.** Article 7 provides a working definition of election.
 - a.** In your judgment, what is the key word in this definition? Give reasons for your choice.
 - b.** Do you think you are elect? Why do you think that?
- 8.** The Canons insist there is but one decree of election.
 - a.** What is that one decree? Why would the Arminians have spoken of multiple decrees?
 - b.** What comes first: election or faith? Explain how the order of these two highlights or belittles God's sovereignty. Do the same in relation to what the order says about people.
- 9.** Supply biblical evidence that God's election actually comes before our believing or being attractive to God.
- 10.** God has his own reasons for choosing particular persons to eternal life.
 - a.** On what ground(s) does God elect the one to salvation and not the other?
 - b.** Why did he choose you to salvation? How does that encourage you?
- 11.** People are fickle, moody, and changeable.
 - a.** Does God change? Prove your answer.
 - b.** Explain how the answer to this question gives you comfort.