

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 51 THE CANONS OF DORT

Jacob Arminius “was born in Oudewater, the Netherlands, in 1560.” When he “was very young the Spaniards came and destroyed his native town, depriving him of parents and relatives. A number of kind hearted Dutch people took him under their care and later had him educated at the University of Leyden, where he showed unusual ability” (Kuiper, *Church in History*, 267).

“After completing a university degree, Arminius went to Geneva, Switzerland, to study with Theodore Beza, who had taken John Calvin’s place. Although he was very smart, Arminius was soon dismissed from Geneva for privately teaching students to disagree with their professors.

“After leaving Geneva and becoming a popular minister in the Netherlands, Arminius began to preach against predestination, the teaching that God plans and guides all things. Instead of being disciplined for teaching against Scripture, Arminius was chosen to be a professor” of theology in the University of Leyden. “While he promised not to teach against Reformed doctrine, it soon became clear that Arminius taught one thing in public and another in private” (W. Boekestein, *The Glory of Grace*).

Arminius “denied the total inability and depravity of man.” He “taught that God had elected those who He had foreseen would believe.... He made God’s election depend on the action of man.... He also taught that Christ died for all men, and that it is possible to fall from grace. He denied that the work of the Holy Spirit is irresistible.

“The young ministers whom Arminius had trained brought his teachings into the churches. Before long the whole country resounded with theological controversy. In 1609, in the midst of the uproar which he had caused, Arminius died” (Kuiper, 267).

The next year, the followers of Arminius published the *Remonstrance*, a statement that outlined the five points of Arminianism: “I. God elects (or chooses to save) people simply because He knows ahead of time they will decide to repent and believe. II. Christ died to save everyone, even though not everyone gets saved. III. Sinners must cooperate with God in order to be saved. IV. God’s grace cannot overpower man’s unbelief. V. Christians can lose their salvation” (*Glory of Grace*).

“To settle the questions in dispute a synod was held in Dort from November 13, 1618 to May 9, 1619. The Synod of Dort was the greatest synod of Reformed churches ever held. Present were delegates not only from the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, but also from the Reformed churches in England; in the Palatinate, Hesse, and Bremen in Germany; and in Switzerland” (Kuiper, 267-68). “Each delegate swore an oath to conduct their business ‘using no human writing, but only the Word of God, which is an infallible rule of faith’.” (*Glory of Grace*).

The Synod unanimously condemned the teachings of the Arminians, and “issued five statements called ‘canons,’ which have become known as the five points of Calvinism [Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints]. These Canons of Dort became a statement of the Reformed church’s beliefs, like the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism [together they are called the Three Forms of Unity]” (*Glory of Grace*).

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REFORMATION 500 WEEK 51: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QA 126

Question 126: WHAT IS THE FIFTH PETITION? “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;” that is, be pleased, for the sake of Christ’s blood, not to impute to us miserable sinners our manifold transgressions, nor the evil which always cleaves to us; as we also find this witness of Your grace in us, that it is our full purpose heartily to forgive our neighbor.

To forgive a debt is to not demand the payment that is owed (Matt. 18:27). When God forgives our sins He no longer demands the eternal punishment we owe Him. And the only reason why God can forgive the punishment we owe Him is because Jesus Christ suffered that punishment on the cross. *God cannot forgive sin without sin being punished*: “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22). We must pray that our heavenly Father would be pleased, for the sake of Christ’s blood, not to *impute* to us our many sins. To *impute* is to charge to one’s account (Philemon 1:18). Our sins were charged to Christ’s account, and He was punished for them; which is why God will not charge them to our account and punish us for them. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, *not imputing their trespasses to them*” (2 Cor. 5:19). God grants forgiveness only to those who desire and ask for it for the sake of Christ’s shed-blood on the cross (1 John 1:7). “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

“Forgive us our debts” is a prayer we must pray every day, for even as Christians we sin every day. Sanctification does not remove all the evil in our hearts. Jesus said to His disciples, “If you being *evil*, know how to give good gifts to your children” (Matt. 7:11). Paul said, “*evil* is present with, the one who desires to do good” (Rom. 7:21). This does not mean that every time we sin we are in danger of going to hell unless we ask for forgiveness. Since Jesus Christ endured the eternal punishment of our sins, we will never suffer that punishment! But it does mean that every time we sin we need to realize that the only reason why we are not in danger of going to hell is because of Christ’s blood. We must always pray with humility: not confident of our own righteousness, but pleading the blood of Jesus (Psalm 51:1-2; 143:2; Luke 18:13).

We receive assurance that God has forgiven our debts as we forgive our debtors (those who sin against us). “Forgive us our debts, *as we* forgive our debtors.” God commands us to forgive one another as He has forgiven us. “If your brother sins against you, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32). “To forgive another person’s sins means not to hold them against him any longer. And though we cannot forget injuries done to us, we should try not to think about them and not talk about them. We must also assure the forgiven person that we have forgiven them” (Jones, *Study Helps*, 326). “This willingness to forgive others is caused by the grace of God in our own heart. It is this same grace that causes us to beg of God His forgiveness.... Refusal to forgive indicates that the grace of God is lacking in the heart” (Ibid.). “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will Your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14-15; cf. 18:21-35).

Thus, “Forgive us for Christ’s sake and make us willing to forgive others.”

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