

The Reformed Witness

of the Protestant Reformed Churches

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PREDESTINATION: A SCRIPTURAL AND CONFSSIONAL TRUTH

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I would like to begin this article by stating that without reservation I am a Reformed Scripture-believing child of God.

I am a child of God whom God through Jesus Christ has "chosen to everlasting life", and that graciously. I am a child of God whom God has graciously chosen to everlasting life, and that apart from any merit or worth of my own whatsoever. I did not deserve that. I simply am that by the grace of my God.

And as I am that, I am a Scripture-believing child of God. I do not tamper with the Scriptures by adding to them or subtracting from them as is so often done today. God forbid that I should do that.

And as I am that, I am a Reformed Scripture-believing child of God. By that I mean that I stand in the heritage of the Reformed faith as that Reformed faith has been set forth and preserved for us in our beautiful confessions. I am not ashamed to be Reformed. It is simply a fact that there are many today who are ashamed to be Reformed. But I am not. I stand upon the truth of the Word of God as that truth is set forth in our Reformed Confessions.

Now, you may say to yourself: why is this writer saying all of this? Why does he have to point out to us that he is a Reformed

Scripture-believing child of God? Why? The answer to those questions, esteemed reader, is this. I have emphasized that because I want to assure you that what I have to say in this article is based upon Scripture and is based upon our Reformed Confessions. I do not come to you with my own words. But rather, I come to you with what Scripture and our confessions have to say. But most of all, I have emphasized that to impress upon you that what I have to say in this article I believe.

What is it that I believe? I believe in the Scriptural and confessional truth of predestination, and predestination as that consists in God's sovereign decree of election and reprobation. I believe in the truth of election. But I also believe in the truth of reprobation. Yes, reprobation also. For you understand, esteemed reader, that to deny reprobation is to deny election. And to deny election is to deny predestination. And to deny predestination is to deny what Scripture and what our confessions say.

I believe in predestination. To understand what I mean by that I would ask you to listen with me to our confessions. What do our confessions have to say about predestination? In the first place we read in our Belgic or Netherlands Confession in

Article XVI the following:

We believe that all the posterity of Adam being thus fallen into perdition and ruin, by the sin of our first parents, God then did manifest Himself such as He is; that is to say, merciful and just: merciful, since He delivers and preserves from this perdition all, whom He, in His eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness, hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without respect to their works: just, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.

Predestination consists in this, that God "delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom He, in His eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord." And toò, that it consists in this that God leaves "others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves." I believe what our Belgic Confession says.

I also believe what our Canons of Dordt have to say. In Head I, Article 6 we read:

That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree, "For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world", Acts 15:18. "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his will," Eph. 1:11. According to which decree, he graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while he leaves the non-elect in his just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy. And herein is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men, equally involved in ruin; or that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of God, which though men of perverse, impure, and unstable minds wrest to their own destruction, yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation.

Or again, consider, if you will, what our Reformed fathers have to say in Article 15 of that same Head of Doctrine:

What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election, is the express testimony of sacred Scripture, that not all, but some only are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God, out of his sovereign, most just, irreprehensible

and unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have wilfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but permitting them in his just judgment to follow their own ways, at last for the declaration of his justice, to condemn and perish them forever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins. And this is the decree of reprobation which by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought of which is blasphemy), but declares him to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous judge and avenger thereof.

Strong language, is it not? Indeed it is. Predestination, our Reformed fathers say consists in this, that God in His decree "graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy." I, A, 6 Election and reprobation (predestination) our Reformed fathers say consists in this, "that not all, but some only are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree...to condemn and perish them forever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins." I, A, 15. Strong language! Language which causes many would be "Reformed" theologians to become filled with disdain and hatred at what our Reformed fathers say. Oh yes, there are many would be "Reformed" theologians who hate what our Reformed fathers say in our Canons of Dordt.

But I do not. And neither may any Scripture-believing child of God because what our Reformed fathers say in our Canons of Dordt is Scriptural. Their explanation of the truth of predestination is Scriptural. In this connection, I call your attention to one very profound passage of Scripture. I refer specifically to Romans 9:10-13. "And not only this; but when

Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac: For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." If you want to know what predestination is, that is Scripture's, no, that is God's explanation of predestination. God's explanation of predestination is so very plain and easy to understand. These words are so plain that even our little children can understand them. Learned would be "Reformed" theologians cannot. But I assure you, our little children can. What our Reformed fathers have to say in our Canons of Dort is Scriptural.

Our Heidelberg Catechism also says much with respect to the truth of predestination. That that is true is abundantly evident from Lord's Day XXI, question and answer 54. There we read:

What believest thou concerning the 'holy catholic church' of Christ? That the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to himself by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and forever shall remain, a living member thereof.

Now, the question is: where in this question and answer is the truth of predestination, including both election and reprobation to be found? It is to be found in that one brief, but at the same time, very important phrase. And that phrase is this, "chosen to everlasting life". The Church is that body of Christ which the Lord our God through the Son of God and by His Word and Spirit gathers unto Himself, and that too, we must notice, "out of the whole human race from the beginning to the end of the world". But the point is that that church

is "chosen to everlasting life". And the emphasis, esteemed reader, falls most emphatically upon that one word "chosen". The Church, the body of Christ, is a "chosen" Church. It is an elect Church which the Lord our God has chosen sovereignly and according to His own good pleasure from all eternity. And that is nothing other than the truth of predestination.

Our Reformed fathers are very Scriptural when they write what they do in this question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism. They do not come with their own words, but rather they come with words that are thoroughly based upon God's Word. We read in Ephesians 1:3-6, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world...Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will..." How similar those words are to the words which you find in our Heidelberg Catechism. In complete harmony with the Scriptures our Reformed fathers in question and answer 54 of the Heidelberg Catechism teach the truth of predestination.

But you say: yes, our Reformed fathers in this question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism certainly teach the truth of election. But where then in this question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism do you find the whole idea of reprobation? The answer to that question is that our Reformed fathers do teach the truth of reprobation. But they do so by way of implication. The negative implication of Lord's Day 21 is that the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world does not gather, and He does not defend, and He does not preserve to himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a people who have not been chosen to everlasting life. God does not gather and preserve and defend those who have not been chosen unto eternal life. And that,

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esteemed reader, is the truth of reprobation.

Do you believe that? I believe that. I believe that because our time-honored Confessions tell us that. But, most of all, I believe that because our God tells us that in His Word. Before our God we must bow. It is my prayer that you who take the time to read this article will also bow before Him, and in so doing, believe in the truth of predestination.