

# DAILY MEDITATIONS ON THE BELGIC CONFESSION

by pastors of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America

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**MAY**  
**Articles 15-16**

## Article 15: Original Sin.

*We believe that, through the disobedience of Adam, original sin is extended to all mankind; which is a corruption of the whole nature and an hereditary disease, wherewith infants themselves are infected even in their mother's womb, and which produceth in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof, and therefore is so vile and abominable in the sight of God that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind. Nor is it by any means abolished or done away by baptism, since sin always issues forth from this woeful source, as water from a fountain; notwithstanding, it is not imputed to the children of God unto condemnation, but by His grace and mercy is forgiven them. Not that they should rest securely in sin, but that a sense of this corruption should make believers often to sigh, desiring to be delivered from this body of death.*

*Wherefore we reject the error of the Pelagians, who assert that sin proceeds only from imitation.*

May 7 – Our Misery: Sinners by Nature.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

John 3:6: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh ...”

In Art. 15, we continue to look at the humbling truth of our sinfulness. The Bible teaches that we have sinned, which means that by committing acts of disobedience against God, we have transgressed His Law and are guilty before Him. But that, to use a figure, is only the tip of the iceberg. Our sinful deeds are the bitter fruit of an even more bitter root. We are sinners *by nature*.

Some men today try to excuse their sins by appealing to their nature. “It is natural for me to have lustful thoughts,” they say; “I am just naturally bad tempered; I am a habitual liar, blasphemer, thief, etc. Therefore I cannot be blamed.” In today’s increasingly liberal legal system, a judge can be convinced to be lenient because a criminal “could not help” doing what he did. There are even calls to recognise certain sinful dispositions as natural and therefore good and acceptable.

But that is not what the Bible teaches. It is true that we are sinners by nature—fallen nature—but that in no way *excuses* our sin. It makes it worse! Habitual, incorrigible thieves belong in prison! Habitual, incorrigible sinners belong in hell! And that is humbling. As sinners, we are always trying to excuse ourselves, but God never does. God forgives sinners, not by excusing their sin, but by making satisfaction to His own justice for sin. Only when we understand how sinfully corrupt we are, will we seek God’s mercy in Jesus Christ.

According to Art. 15 “original sin is extended to all mankind.” Sin began with an unlawful bite of a fruit. That one sin has produced thousands of years of misery, death and destruction; and it has completely ravaged the entire human race. The presence of pain, disease and suffering; the cruelty of mankind in violence, murder and war; the corruption of every good ordinance of God; and even the overturning of the whole creation can be traced back to that one terrible act of rebellion against God by Adam. When God said, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17), He meant exactly that!

The explanation for our sinful nature is our fall in Adam with the original corruption of our nature. Quite simply, we are born sinners because our parents pass on to us a sinful nature, which their parents passed on to them. That corrupt line goes all the way back to Adam, our first father.

But even that does not answer the question: Why does the sin of Adam, which he committed in the Garden of Eden, affect us, so that every child is born into the world with “original sin”? Why do we have death working in us from the moment we are conceived in our mother’s womb? How is that *fair*? How can God punish us for something Adam did, and in which we had no part? These are important and perplexing questions. And we will answer them next time.

May 8 – Adam Our Federal Head.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

Romans 5:14: “[Adam] who is the figure of Him that was to come ...”

Original sin is the corruption of our nature with which we are born. Yesterday, we asked the question of how Adam's sin could have such a devastating effect on us. The answer is federal headship.

A federal head is a legal representative who acts on our behalf and whose actions have a direct impact on us. If your father squanders your inheritance, you are poor because of him. If you give someone “power of attorney” over your legal affairs, that person has the right to act as your legal representative. He may sign cheques, make investments and enter into legal contracts in your name. If he makes poor investment choices, you suffer; if he is an astute investor, you benefit. That is why it is foolish to give power of attorney to an untrustworthy man. Or take the example of world leaders. When the President of a country declares war, he plunges the whole country into war, and every man, woman and child under him suffers the consequences of that decision. Similarly, everyone reaps the benefits of a good decision by the President.

God has appointed two, and only two, federal heads. The first is Adam. He represented all mankind in the Garden of Eden. As a head, he failed. He fell into sin and brought everyone down into death with himself. But, says Paul in Rom 5:14, Adam is “a figure of Him that was to come.” That second head (also called the last Adam in I Cor 15:45) is Jesus Christ. He represents all the elect. His obedience has a direct effect upon us.

If we do not understand federal headship, we will never understand original sin.

Adam was not a private person when he acted in the Garden. He was our representative. Adam did not volunteer for the position of federal head. God created him as federal head. Nor did God ask our permission before He appointed Adam to represent us. He was appointed without our consent. In the same way, Christ became our representative on the cross without our consent. If we do not complain about the latter, why should we complain about the former? Besides, we have no right to complain about God's dealings with us, which are always just: “O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?” (Rom 9:20).

But consider the representative God gave us. Adam was made in the image of God—endowed with true knowledge of God, righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). Adam was created in a covenant of friendship with God. God loved Adam and showered His love upon him. Adam delighted to serve God and enjoyed sweet fellowship with his Creator. God gave Adam every reason to obey and fair warning on what would happen if he did not obey. But Adam disobeyed. And because Adam represented us, his disobedience had immediate—and devastating—consequences for us. We became sinners in him!

May 9 – Guilty of Adam’s Sin.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

Romans 5:19: “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many by made righteous”

Because Adam was our federal head or legal representative, we are guilty of his sin of taking the forbidden fruit. This is not because we were physically there in the Garden—we were not even born—but because Adam sinned “for” us or on our behalf. Art. 15 has this in mind when it says, “through the disobedience of Adam, original sin is extended to all mankind ...” The disobedience of Adam is that one act of disobedience in the Garden, where Adam, acting on behalf of himself and of all mankind, willfully transgressed God’s holy commandment. That act is imputed to us; we are guilty of that one act; and we are liable to punishment for that one act.

That explains, also, why we are not guilty of all of Adam’s other sins. Adam lived for 930 years, and, like us, he sinned every day of his life from the point of eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. But God does not impute those sins to us. That is because Adam ceased to be our representative when he fell. Adam’s fall meant his deposition from his glorious position as head of the earthly creation; his dismissal as God’s officebearer and image bearer; and the end of his covenant relationship with God. Only by the grace of God in Christ was Adam not entirely cast off and his covenant relationship with God, although greatly marred, was restored (Gen 3:15).

As soon as Adam sinned, he became guilty. And God, as He had threatened, punished Adam with death. We think of death so often in very narrow terms. Death is the end of earthly life. But Adam lived for 930 years *after he sinned*. Death means more. Adam began to die as soon as he became guilty of sin. Sin and death immediately were at work in his body; and some 930 years later he finally succumbed to death and returned to the dust. But worse than physical death is spiritual death. With that death God punished Adam, and us. That death was the loss of the image of God and the corruption of Adam’s own nature. In other words, Adam became corrupt as a punishment for the guilt of his first sin! He was no longer worthy to bear the image of his Creator. And because we are guilty in Adam, we are punished with corruption too. Therefore, God is *just* in bringing us into the world *already totally depraved*.

That is Paul’s meaning in Rom 5:19, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners...” That word “made” means legally constituted, placed into the category of, sinners. But that is only the bad news. The opposite is true, because Paul goes on to write, “so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” Christ’s obedience becomes ours in the same way in which Adam’s disobedience becomes ours—by imputation! No wonder Paul can conclude, “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound!” (Rom 5:20)

May 10 – Original Guilt and Original Corruption.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death..."

Reformed theology distinguishes between original guilt and original corruption. Strictly speaking, original corruption is what we, and Art. 15, mean by original sin. However, there is no original corruption (original sin) without original guilt.

Guilt, remember, is liability to punishment. When a court of law finds a person guilty, the next step is sentencing. How will the guilty person be punished? With a fine? With a prison sentence? Imprisoned for how long? With the death penalty even? Guilt and punishment go together. There can be no punishment without guilt; and there can be no guilt without punishment. At least, that is the case when justice prevails. God is just. Therefore, He only ever punishes the guilty, never the innocent.

Perhaps you say: but did God not punish Christ, who was innocent, and forgive us, who are guilty? It is not as simple as that. In fact, what happened was this: God imputed our guilt to Christ so that He *was* legally (although not personally) guilty of our sins, and then (and only then) He punished His Son in our place. On the basis of what Christ did, God then imputes to us the perfect righteousness and innocence of Christ, and forgives us. All guilt is punished, one way or another. Either Christ bears the punishment on the cross, or the sinner bears the punishment in hell forever.

Adam was no exception.

Adam would never have become corrupt unless he was first guilty. When Adam became guilty, God in righteous judgment took away from him the gifts with which he was created. The knowledge of love which Adam had was turned into horrible blindness of heart; the uprightness of Adam's character was twisted into an awful perversion; and the holiness of Adam's being was changed into corruption, impurity and vileness. As a result, Adam became totally depraved, unable to do anything good and inclined to all wickedness. In the words of Gen 6:5, "God saw that the wickedness of [Adam] was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of [Adam's] heart was only evil continually."

What a dreadful fall from such a great height!

The point we make with original guilt is this: God was *perfectly just* in inflicting such punishment on Adam. Adam's original guilt in eating the forbidden fruit earned for him the punishment of original corruption. Adam forfeited all God's good gifts and richly deserved the misery that came upon him. That is one of God's most dreadful punishments: to punish sin with more sin, to give sinners over to sin. That is how God dealt with Adam.

Adam's guilt earned for him corruption. The same is true for us. Adam's guilt is *our* guilt. Therefore, we too deserve original corruption. That is why every human being who comes into this world is already guilty and already corrupt before he or she takes his or her first breath. That is why salvation is utterly impossible for man. We are, quite literally, dead upon arrival, *spiritually* dead upon arrival!

May 11 – The Proud Error of the Pelagians.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

Proverbs 30:12-13: “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes; and yet is not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up.”

At the end of Art. 15 our creed declares, “we reject the error of the Pelagians, who assert that sin proceeds only from imitation.” Before we proceed in our discussion of original sin, it is good for us to defend the truth against this heresy. Pelagianism, named after a fourth-century British monk named Pelagius, is an ancient heresy, but a deeply rooted heresy which has plagued the church almost from the very beginning. In the middle ages, Pelagianism morphed into a less radical Semi-Pelagianism, and our *Canons of Dordt* charge the Arminians with “bring[ing] again out of hell the Pelagian error” (*Canons* II, Rejection of Error 3).

Pelagianism is an outright rejection of the truth of original sin. Pelagius taught that Adam’s sin has *no effect whatsoever* upon the nature of man; that man did not in any sense lose the image of God; that neither Adam’s own nature nor the nature of any of his descendants was corrupted by the fall; and that every person born into the world enters it as morally neutral. In fact, taught Pelagius, every person not only must, but *can*, if he strives hard enough and uses the light of nature, the law of God and the good example of Christ, lead a sinless life and merit heaven for himself.

What explains the universal prevalence of sin then? Pelagius taught that men sin because Adam gave his descendants a bad example. He argued that children sin only because they see others sin. Pelagianism is the underlying theory of many unbelievers today: they argue that if only we could make man’s environment better, he would be a better person. They argue, therefore, that education, urban regeneration and other social programs are the answer to man’s moral problems. Man, they say, is basically good! Not so, says the Word of God! Man is not basically good. Man is totally depraved, utterly corrupted, vile and polluted. Sin is not a matter of the environment; it is a matter of the heart. Jesus said, “make the tree good, and his fruit good” (Matt 12:33). It is foolish, wishful thinking to expect good fruit from a corrupt tree. Only God, by the powerful work of regenerating grace, can and does make evil trees good.

Semi-Pelagianism modified this view. Pelagianism was so obviously unbiblical that very few could hold to it, especially after Augustine had fought this heresy so vigorously. Semi-Pelagianism concedes that man’s nature has been affected by Adam’s sin—man is very far gone from original righteousness. However, Semi-Pelagianism contends that man is only sick, not dead in sin; and that man still retains the power of free will with the ability to do good. Where Pelagianism taught that grace is useful but not necessary, Semi-Pelagianism teaches that grace is necessary but not irresistible. To be saved, say the Semi-Pelagians, man must cooperate with the grace of God, which is given to everyone as a *help* towards salvation. Final salvation, however, depends on man. Pelagianism teaches that salvation is entirely the work of man; Semi-Pelagianism teaches that salvation is the work of God working with man; the Bible teaches that salvation is entirely the work of God. How important it is for us to understand, and rightly to confess, our sinful nature!

May 12 – Original Sin Extended to All Mankind.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

Romans 5:12: "...and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"

All human beings born into this world enter it already in the state of original guilt and with original pollution (or original sin). This is because, as we have seen, Adam represented us all in the Garden of Eden when he ate the forbidden fruit. To this universal rule there is one, and only one, exception. Although this will be treated in Art. 18 on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, it is necessary that we mention it here also.

Christ was not guilty of Adam's original transgression. That guilt was not imputed to Him; and He was not punished with original pollution. There are various important reasons for the sinlessness of Christ. First, as to His Person Christ is the Eternal Son of God. It is unthinkable that the Eternal Son of God could be stained with sin. Second, in the virgin conception and birth Jesus Christ was shielded by the Holy Spirit and preserved from sin. Therefore, explains the angel Gabriel, "that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). These are good reasons why Jesus must be an exception to the rule of original sin.

But there is another more important reason, which is fundamental to the doctrine of original sin. Christ was not under the headship of Adam. When Adam sinned as our representative, he did not act as Christ's representative. Adam represented only human persons, and Christ is not a human person. He is a divine person. Therefore God could not impute the guilt of Adam's sin to Christ and then punish Christ with original pollution. In fact, Christ was *Adam's* Representative or Federal Head.

But all other persons—being human persons—were represented by Adam, and therefore all other persons are implicated in Adam's guilt and are consequently born totally depraved with original pollution (or original sin). No human person can escape this. Some of the details of this are difficult to understand. How does sin pass from mother or father to child? In what way exactly is this a "hereditary disease"? Suffice to say that all those who are born of a woman—except Jesus Christ—come forth from the womb already unclean. How humbling!

In 1854, pope Pius IX issued a decree declaring Mary, the mother of Jesus, to be another exception. This Roman Catholic dogma is called "The Immaculate Conception of Mary." However, such a dogma is impossible: the Bible does not teach it; the Bible allows for only one exception, not two; and, since Mary was represented under the federal headship of Adam, she *must* also have both original guilt and original corruption (original sin). Mary confessed that Jesus was her Saviour, not (as Rome contends) because God, by a singular grace, kept her from falling into sin in the first place, but because God forgave her sins in the blood of Jesus Christ. Thus we do not look to Mary as a sinless fountain of grace but we look to the sinless Son of God, "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14) who of all mankind alone is exempt from the pollution of original sin.

The good news is that Mary's original and actual sins—and ours—are forgiven through the atoning work of the only sinless Saviour, Jesus Christ.



May 13 – A Corruption of the Whole Nature.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

Isaiah 1:5-6: "...the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment."

Having seen the basis for our original sin—Adam's federal headship—and its universality (Christ only excepted), we consider its extent. Art. 15 teaches that original sin is a "corruption of the whole nature." One of the most graphic figures of corruption in the Bible is that of a leper. A leper is a mass of walking, putrid flesh. Leprosy is a disease that eats the flesh, making the leper vile. In fact, God sets forth leprosy as a picture of the vileness of sin—it makes a man unclean, unfit for fellowship with God or His church; it causes him to stink as from his wounds oozes the putrefaction of his own flesh. No wonder a leper had to stand afar off and cry out in dreadful anguish, "Unclean! Unclean!" Isa 1 describes Israel as a leper: from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores. Spiritually, that describes us. Every faculty of our being is corrupted by sin—totally corrupted by sin. Our heart is deceitful and desperately wicked; our mind is darkened, blinded and hardened by sin; our will is stubbornly opposed to God and to all that is good; our affections are directed toward evil; and we flee from the light because we hate the light and love darkness. Moreover, we defile everything we touch and spread corruption everywhere we go.

And this is all true before we even *do* anything! Sin is not simply in the deed. Before the sinner begins to conceive a sinful thought; before the sinner's lips begin to frame a sinful word; before the sinner's hand or foot begins to move in the direction of performing an evil deed, sin is already in the nature. To put it very bluntly, we sin in our sleep; we even sin if we are in a coma! We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.

Sometimes we are tempted to think highly of ourselves, usually because we compare ourselves against the wrong standard. When we compare ourselves with others we think that we are pretty good. But compare yourself against God's Law; compare yourself against Adam before the fall; compare yourself against Jesus Christ!

Original sin, if rightly understood, is the end of all free will theology. How can a man have free will when his entire nature has been corrupted? How can a man choose good, when he will not come to the light because his deeds are evil (John 3:19-20)? The answer of the one who clings to the notion of free will is that there remains some good in man even after the fall, some inclination in man toward God. Then he is like a leper who says, "Oh, but I am still a little bit clean." Such a leper dresses himself in a white robe and for a moment appears to be respectable, but before long, corruption begins to ooze out of him and the beautiful pure white robe is ruined. That is the folly of the sinner who denies his own corruption and dresses himself in his own works—only to discover that he corrupts even his best works.

A corruption of the whole nature makes salvation by human works or even by free will utterly impossible. The answer to our depravity is not our works and not our supposed free will, but grace: sovereign, particular, saving grace found only in Jesus Christ.

May 14 – A Hereditary Disease Infecting Even Infants.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

Psalms 51:5: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Probably one of the most controversial aspects of the doctrine of original sin is that it affects even infants, newborns, even unborn children in the womb. There is no such thing, therefore, as an "innocent child." A child may be innocent relatively speaking—he is not guilty of any crime recognisable by the state—but he is not innocent with respect to God. Reformed parents confess this when they present their children for baptism. The *Form for the Administration of Baptism* puts these words into the mouth of Reformed parents as they carry their infant children in their arms: "Our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea, to condemnation itself." We might not like to think of our children this way but this is exactly what the Bible explicitly teaches: "in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa 51:5); "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies" (Psa 58:3).

There are many mysteries about children. How does God knit a child together in its mother's womb; how does God create a new person with a body and soul; how does God breathe a soul into the body of a new person? These are mysteries we cannot fathom. We confess, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psa 139:14). We know that a child is a human person from the very moment of conception—and that therefore abortion is a horrible crime, the taking of a real, defenceless human life. We also know that God imputes the guilt of Adam's sin to each human person from the moment of his conception, on the basis of which God causes the child to be born totally depraved with original sin.

Therefore, we reject the notion of 'an age of accountability'. Every child is accountable for the sin of Adam and for his own original corruption not at the age of seven, eight, nine or ten years, but from the moment of conception.

There is one very compelling proof of this: babies die. Children, even unborn children, are subject to death. And if babies die, they must be guilty, because a just God could never cause the guiltless to die. Writes Paul, "death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (Rom 5:14).

Reformed believers have hope, however, not in the "innocence" of their children, but in God's covenant promise to save us and our elect children by His grace and mercy: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." (Gen 17:7) That is why we have comfort as our *Canons of Dordt* I, Art 17 teach us, "godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children, whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy."

Our children are not exempt from original sin. They receive nothing but sin from us. From God alone they receive grace.

May 15 – The Spread of Sin.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

Matthew 23:32: “Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.”

From tiny acorns mighty oak trees grow. A seed, which starts small, gradually develops over a long period of time into something much greater. The seed has *in principle* the entire oak tree contained within it—to speak in terms of modern science, the DNA for the trunk, bark, leaves and every other part of the tree is already inside the acorn when it is planted into the ground. Something very similar is the case with original sin: the one transgression of Adam contained within it in principle all sins and transgressions committed in the history of the world; and human history is the record of the sad development of that first principle of sin.

Sin develops throughout history and even in the lives of individuals. God's purpose with sin is that man fills up the cup of his iniquity: man must develop his sin to its full potential, so that sin can be manifested as exceedingly wicked and God can be seen as just in punishing sin. There are three cups which are being filled up. The first is the cup of iniquity. In Abraham's day, the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full (Gen 15:16). The second is the cup of the sufferings of God's people, which is filled as the wicked fill their cup of iniquity (Col 1:24; Rev 6:11). The third is the cup of God's wrath which will finally overflow the wicked in terrifying intensity (Rev 14:10).

It is the folly of unbelieving evolutionary philosophy to imagine that man is improving. He may be becoming more technologically advanced, but morally he is degenerating. He was always totally depraved—ever since Adam sinned and plunged all mankind into ruin—but that depravity unfolds and expresses itself in new ways in every generation. Quite simply, humanity is developing in sin; it ripens the fruits of iniquity. Men can commit sin today in ways in which sinners of former generations never thought possible. As man develops in his technology, science and culture; and as he explores and subdues the creation under him, he does so in the service of sin. God commanded man to do this—to be fruitful and multiply and to subdue the earth (Gen 1:28), the so-called cultural mandate—but originally man was called to do so to the glory of God. Instead, man takes the good gifts of creation and presses them into the service of sin to build for himself a kingdom in defiance to God. That defiance was first seen at the Tower of Babel and will culminate in the coming kingdom of Antichrist.

Sin is a destructive force which has infected mankind. And yet the devil promised fulfillment, satisfaction, even happiness, in sin. Eve was deceived; Adam rebelled, and we have been developing in sin ever since. But what about “common grace”? Many teach today that God curbs sin by means of a non-saving, “common grace” which works in the hearts of men so that they do not sin as much as they could or would, and even gives them the ability to do some good in the development of a godly culture. This view is wrong: there is only one grace of God, and that is the saving, particular, efficacious, irresistible grace, rooted in election and displayed on the cross. God's restraint of sin is merely outward—it never improves man's nature; it is never grace to the reprobate; it simply acts as a muzzle upon a rabid dog or a straitjacket upon a serial killer. Men do not commit every possible sin because of fear of punishment or lack of opportunity, not because of any operation of so-called “common grace.” Without the grace of regeneration, all we do—and all we can do, and all we want to do—is sin!

May 16 – Original Sin Sufficient to Condemn All Mankind.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

Ephesians 2:3: "... by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

How many sins must we commit before we are worthy of hell? The answer, surprisingly, is none! We come into the world *already* worthy of hell. We are, as Eph 2:3 expresses, "by nature the children of wrath." That is a very difficult confession, and we would not dare confess that unless we knew the forgiveness of sins. One of the great sins of the unbeliever is his refusal to confess that he is a sinner—a sinner according to the Scripture's definition of a sinner.

But how can that be true? How can we all from birth and even from conception already be worthy of hell? The answer is that we come into the world burdened with the original guilt of Adam and infected with the "hereditary disease" of original pollution or original sin. Art. 15 warns us that God does not take our original sin lightly. On the contrary, it is "so vile and abominable in the sight of God that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind." God created man upright in our first father and representative; He warned Adam about sin and sin's terrible consequences; and He was angry when Adam sinned. Sin, even original sin, is vile and abominable in God's sight. Words can scarcely express God's abhorrence of sin. God speaks of it in terms of loathsomeness, of depravity, of filth; He uses some incredibly offensive words to describe it ("dung" is one of the milder words!). And for Adam—who had been created as God's friend—to sin against God was base treachery. Had God opened up the earth to swallow Adam and Eve into hell, He would have been perfectly just.

All of us come into this world guilty of Adam's sin. Therefore, all of us come into this world under the wrath of God with a vile and abominable nature. Our very nature is a swirling whirlpool of iniquity. The *Canons of Dordt* speak of "the propagation of a *vicious* nature" (*Canons III/IV, Art. 2*). Therefore we ought not expect anything good to proceed from our nature. Nor should we be surprised—we should be saddened but not surprised—to see our little children sinning as soon as they are born. And as our children grow, they simply develop in sin: in selfishness, in envy, in hatred, in malice and in pride. Especially humbling for parents is when our little children develop in our own particular ways of sinning. The *Form for the Administration of Baptism* expresses it in these words: "And although our young children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, for as *they are without their knowledge, partakers of the condemnation in Adam*, so are they again received unto grace in Christ..."

Original sin alone, without any actual sins of our own, is enough to condemn us all!

May 17 – By No Means Abolished Or Done Away By Baptism.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

Psalm 51:7: “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

The *Catechism of the (Roman) Catholic Church*, published in 1994, says the following about original sin and baptism: “[Original sin] is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin—an inclination to evil that is called ‘concupiscence.’ Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ’s grace, erases original sin and turns a man back towards God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle” (paragraph 405).

Several days ago we looked at the Pelagian error. Clearly, the Roman Catholic Church is Semi-Pelagian: it teaches, not that human nature is totally corrupted by sin, but that it is “wounded” and “deprived” of some of its powers. In the same paragraph the *Catechism* says, “Original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam’s descendants.” Thus Rome denies both original guilt and original pollution, and, although Rome speaks of “original sin,” she denies the Scripture’s teaching on the subject.

Not surprisingly, Rome, who misdiagnoses the condition of fallen man, errs grievously in understanding the cure. Semi-Pelagian Roman Catholicism teaches salvation by the cooperation of man’s free will with God’s grace. This grace is especially dispensed through the sacraments of the church—in particular, baptism.

According to Rome, baptism “erases original sin.” For an adult, baptism also removes all actual sins. A baptised person, then, according to Rome is basically innocent and pure before God. Total depravity is a concept utterly foreign to the Roman Catholic mind. If you have this basic view of yourself you will never see the urgency of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. In fact, the average Roman Catholic believes that (by virtue of his baptism and membership of the church which supposedly has all the means of grace) he is not good enough to go to heaven, nor bad enough to go to hell. Why? Because baptism has dealt with his sin, but he still has weaknesses and tendencies toward sin. That’s all! That is the tragic blindness caused by Semi-Pelagianism.

Art. 15 vehemently rejects this error: “Nor is [original sin] by any means abolished or done away by baptism.” Astutely, the *Confession* proves this from the fact that the baptised continue to sin. If baptism really removed original sin, then surely the sinful, depraved, corrupt nature of man would be gone, and man would no longer sin. Both Scripture and our own experience tell us that the opposite is true. A baptised person has the same sinful nature as one who is not baptised. He too is inclined to all kinds of evil. He too is by nature proud, selfish and malicious. Watch a group of children, some baptised and others not baptised, and you will see no essential difference. They are all sinners by nature and very quickly show that nature in their practice. None can deny that baptised children—even the children of Christian parents who are rightly baptised—still sin *after* baptism.

Baptism has no effect whatsoever on our nature. Sin is too deeply rooted in us to be removed by a few drops of water. That’s why we need the blood of Jesus Christ.

May 18 – The Ever Flowing Fountain of Corruption.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

Isaiah 57:20: “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.”

We have within us a bubbling fountain of corruption, a spring of pollution that continually casts up filth. This means that sin is not only—or even primarily—in the deed. This is true even of Christians, for those are in mind when Art. 15 states that “sin always issues forth from this woeful source, as water from a fountain.” Since we are corrupt at our very source, all our works are defiled. If the source has polluted water, the streams from that fountain must also be corrupted. Even if we passed pure water through such a stream, the pure water would be defiled by the pollution of the stream. In the book of Job, Eliphaz asks, “What is man, that he should be clean? and he that is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? ... How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water? (Job 15:14,16).

It is true, of course, that Christians are regenerated by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, but that does not mean that our sinful nature is gone; or even that it has been improved. Our sinful nature (also called the “flesh” or the “old man”) coexists with the new life of Jesus Christ (also called the “Spirit” or the “new man”) in the one person of the believer. But there can be no peaceful coexistence between these two principles. Instead, there is war. The old man of the sinful flesh struggles against the new man of Jesus Christ. This truth concerning our sinful nature explains why we are so easily attracted to wickedness; why it is a struggle for us to do good, to pray, to worship God, to read Scripture, while we find sinful pleasure well-nigh irresistible. Paul explains it this way: “I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind...” (Rom 7:22-23) and “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal 5:17). “The things that ye would” are the things that you want to do. We want to keep God’s commandments, but our flesh resists; and our flesh even pollutes our best works.

Therefore, since we have an active sinful nature, we must never underestimate our capacity for sin. Sinners, fallen in Adam and totally depraved by nature, are capable of every sin, even the vilest and most abominable of transgressions. And Christians, because that sinful nature remains, are *still* capable of the vilest of sins. Sin is deceitful. We must be constantly on our guard, watching and praying as Christ commands us.

The good news for Christians is that the old man is crucified—not eradicated but crucified—with the result that sin is no longer a ruling principle in our lives. It is an active principle; it is the source in us of all our sins; but by the grace of God, sin shall not have dominion over us.

May 19 – Sighing Over Our Corruption.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

Romans 7:24: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

Both believers and unbelievers are sinners. Both believers and unbelievers are sinful by nature. Both believers and unbelievers have original guilt and original pollution. About believers Paul writes, we “were by nature children of wrath, *even as others*” (Eph 2:3). The difference, by the grace of God, is in their attitude to their sin. Unbelievers deny, seek to minimise or excuse their sins, or give themselves over to enjoy their sins. An unbeliever loves sin as a pig loves mud! We must never think that unbelievers are forced to sin against their will. They love sin; they are attracted to sin; sin is their delight; and they hate all righteousness. Paul writes about the unbelieving Gentiles, that they “have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness *with greediness*” (Eph 4:19).

But sinners do not like the evil consequences of sin. If there was a way in which sinners could sin with impunity—without a guilty conscience; without the sense of the wrath of God; without diseases and other judgments of God; without shame or civil penalties by the state; without death; and without hell—they would gladly accept it. Those considerations restrain many unbelievers in their sin without making them one whit better in the depravity of their nature.

But it is different with the believer. By the grace of God, the believer is sorry for his sin and desires to be rid of it. Sincerely, the believer desires to serve God according to the new man, but he finds himself hindered by his sinful nature. His attitude is to be humbled over his sin, over his remaining depravity and to cry out to God for grace to subdue his iniquities under him. Paul describes his own experience vividly in Rom 7, and every Christian echoes Paul’s cry because every Christian experiences the same thing. We all know the wretchedness of our own inner corruption. All of us struggle with that nature. We all have our own particular sinful inclinations—for some, it is a bad temper; for others, it is lust; for others, it is greed. Paul did not do what he wanted to do, but did what he did not want to do (v15). Paul was willing to do good but he did not find the strength (v18). The good that Paul wanted to do, he did not do; the evil he did not want to do—and even hated—he did do! (v19). Wherever he turned to do good, evil was present with him (v21).

Paul’s attitude was the same as ours, as outlined in Art. 15: he did not “rest securely in sin.” Instead, a sense of corruption made him “often to sigh, desiring to be delivered from this body of death.”

Is that your experience? Do you sometimes despair that you never seem to have victory over sin? Do not think that you are abnormal. The fact that you are truly sorry for your sins—which is nothing more than poverty of spirit, spiritual mourning, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and a broken and contrite spirit—shows that you are a child of God. Then believe Paul’s triumphant conclusion: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (v25)!

May 20 – Our Original Sin Graciously Pardoned.  
by Rev Martyn McGeown

Romans 5:20: "...where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:"

Perhaps two weeks of meditations on the corruption of our nature is a bit depressing for some. The subject of original sin is hardly uplifting or heart-warming, is it? Go to most Christian bookstores and look at the devotional works and sin will hardly be mentioned. Certainly, no one would think of spending two weeks concentrating on the subject! But such an attitude is shortsighted and wrong. Remember our *Heidelberg Catechism*: it says that a knowledge of how great our sins and miseries are—and that certainly includes our original sin—is necessary if we are "to live and die happily" (Q&A 2). The subject of sin, and of original guilt and pollution in particular, is not a pleasant topic, but it is the necessary background to the Gospel.

Art. 15 does not tell us about our sin so that we can wallow in misery and self-pity. We insist as Reformed Christians on a thorough knowledge of sin, so that we understand our need for God's grace and are deeply thankful for it. As Jesus said, "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). The doctrine of original sin, when rightly understood, drives us to despair of ourselves. We see that we are a mass of corruption; dead in sin from birth; guilty and depraved by nature; unable to do anything good and wholly inclined to all evil. We see that God is just in condemning us to eternal damnation in hell, not only for the evil deeds which we have performed but even for the very loathsomeness of our nature. And then we are ready to hear the good news of Christ.

"Notwithstanding," says Art. 15, "it is not imputed to the children of God unto condemnation, but by His grace and mercy is forgiven them." God would be just to lay our original and actual sins to our charge—but He does not. God does not hold our sins against us so as to punish us for them. God, our merciful Father, does not treat us as guilty offenders and loathsome creatures in light of our sin. But neither does God sweep our sins under the carpet, as it were, and pretend that we have never sinned and have no sin. God does not hold our sins—and even our sinful nature, the source in us of all our transgressions—against us: He held them against Jesus Christ.

The Son of God came into this world laden with the guilt of our sins; burdened under the heavy weight of our iniquities. He knew the oppressive sense of God's wrath bearing down upon Him as He walked the long and difficult way that His Father had mapped out for Him—a way which led to the cross on Calvary's hill. Christ's entire life, including His death, is summed up in one word by the apostle Paul in Rom 5:19, "obedience". Adam sinned; he disobeyed—and we are condemned. Christ never sinned; He obeyed for us—and we are justified and forgiven. But, remember, you cannot have Christ without Adam. That was God's good and wise purpose. When Adam fell, he did not fall into hell, as he deserved. He fell into the arms of Christ, whom God had mercifully prepared and provided to be the Saviour (Gen 3:15). And we fall into Christ's arms too, we who believe on Him!



Article 16: Eternal Election.

*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 any respect to their works: just, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.*

May 21 – Time and Eternity  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: Psalm 90

In Art. 16, our Confession leaps backward from time into eternity. So far we have confessed our faith in the one, true God revealed in Holy Scripture, who of nothing created heaven, earth, and all things, governs them by His providence, and made man in His own image. We have confessed that man willfully subjected himself to sin and death; became wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways; and this corruption has extended to all mankind. These things have taken place in time. But now we leap backward into eternity to the truth of God's "eternal and unchangeable counsel."

Time and eternity: Scripture does not define them, but does speak of them. It speaks of eternity as "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4, I Pet 1:20). We often think of eternity as time before time, as the period of time stretching from the beginning of our world infinitely backward, as the era that had no beginning but always was. Thus, we think of eternity not as qualitatively but only quantitatively different from time. That is, we think of it as an infinite amount of time. Nor is it surprising that we think of it that way, because we are bound by time. We exist, and can only exist, in time. We think, and can only think, in terms of time. We cannot imagine anything outside of time. Therefore, we assume that eternity is the infinite time stretching backward and forward before and after earth's history.

Yet this is a mistake.

Scripture does speak of eternity as "*before* the foundation of the world," which seems to imply a period of time, but Scripture only speaks this way because we cannot think in any other way. But eternity is not infinite time. It is fundamentally different from time. Time is a creature. Time was created by God "in the beginning." "Before" the beginning there was no time. "Before" the beginning there was only God. Therefore, eternity is not infinite time before time, but it is an attribute of GOD. Scripture testifies that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (II Pet. 3:8) because God is not bound by days and years, but He creates days and years. God names Himself I AM THAT I AM (Exo 3:14), the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and ending, the first and last (Rev 1:8, 11).

We confess that as God is eternal, so His counsel is eternal. God carries out His eternal counsel in time. All history flows from Him and to Him. All people enter history by Him and for Him. We too who have lived only a few years; who will live only threescore years and ten, or perhaps fourscore; who will soon be cut off and fly away, exist by Him and for the glory of Him who "hath made every thing beautiful in his time" (Ecc 3:11).

May 22 – God’s Counsel  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: Isaiah 46

According to Art. 16, we believe that the one true God who is revealed in Scripture has an eternal and unchangeable counsel.

Many deny this. Process theism (panentheism) believes in a god who is in the world, but not above the world; a god who cannot control the world, but can only attempt to lure it along in a never-ending process of becoming. Open theism believes in a god who does not know or control the future, but is open to endless possibilities. Others believe that blind fate has determined the destiny of every man. Arminians believe God has an eternal counsel, but it is changeable and dependent on the will of man.

But all these are mistaken. We believe the Bible, which reveals the one true God and His “eternal and unchangeable counsel.” “The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations” (Psa 33:11). “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa 46:9-10). God “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11).

God has a will. He is not a blind power. He is a living, personal, volitional Being. He has a purpose regarding all things. God’s counsel is His will, purpose, and good pleasure determining all things that exist in time. It is the perfect idea in His infinite mind, and the eternal will to realize it outside Himself. It includes absolutely all things, persons, and events that have existed, do exist, and will exist. It aims at the highest and greatest glory of God. It purposes to accomplish this by manifesting God “such as He is; that is to say, merciful and just,” and to do so in the highest way, the antithetical way of sin and grace. Therefore, the death and resurrection of Christ, which most clearly manifest the justice and mercy of God, stand at the very heart of God’s counsel.

God’s counsel includes you. God willed your existence. God determined to create you for His glory. God has a purpose for your life. God intends to reveal and glorify Himself through you and to you. God has determined the exact way to do that through you. And His counsel shall stand!

May 23 – The Eternity and Immutability of God’s Counsel  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: Hebrews 6:13-20

God’s counsel, according to our Confession, is eternal and unchangeable.

God’s counsel is *eternal*, not temporal like ours. We too make plans and set goals, but we do so in time. There was a time when our plans did not exist and when our goals were not yet formed. When we were children, we did not yet have a comprehensive life-plan. But when we grew older, such a plan gradually emerged in our minds. Today we might not have a plan for tomorrow. But when tomorrow comes we will form our plan for the day. Not so with God. His counsel is above time. It exists as an eternal reality outside of time. It is eternal because God Himself is eternal. There was never a time when His plan did not exist. There was never a time when His goal was not in place.

God’s counsel is also *unchangeable*. It cannot be altered or amended. Our plans can be changed, and they often are. Children plan to be policemen or firefighters or doctors, but when they grow up their plans may change and they may pursue some other career. We might plan to take a vacation, but then a loved one dies and our plan changes. We might plan to go to work tomorrow, but then we get sick and our plan changes. Not so with God. His counsel is unchangeable. He does not and will not change it, because it is His perfect idea. Nor can anything or anyone stand in His way or thwart His plan, for He is almighty. God does not have any plan B or C. He only has a plan A. It is unchangeable because God Himself is unchangeable: “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal 3:6).

To some, this makes God cold and aloof. It makes Him unsympathetic to our cries. It implies that our prayers cannot change Him. He is rigid. He is set in stone. He is immovable. But to us, this view of God is a source of great comfort and encouragement. It means God is faithful. It means He will never change His love toward us. He will never change His mind about us. He will never turn His back on us. He does indeed hear our prayers, and He always answers them.

God’s counsel is eternal and unchangeable! Be thankful!

May 24 – Predestination  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: Romans 8: 28-39

How vast is the sea of humanity that fills the earth! Consider this for a moment. As I write this, I see scores of people through my window driving by and going about their daily routines. If I fly across the country in an airplane, I see thousands of homes containing thousands of people below me. If I look at statistics, I learn that the world is home to billions of men, women, and children. If I consider all who have lived in the past and all who will yet be born, I am astonished at the vastness of humanity. Now consider this too: each one has a destiny, either heaven or hell, which was determined before the foundation of the world and is eternally and unchangeably fixed in the counsel of Almighty God.

This is the decree of predestination which we confess in Art. 16 on the basis of Holy Scripture. Almighty God has, before the foundation of the world, determined the eternal destiny of every rational-moral creature, of men and angels. He determined the existence of each one, the place of each one in His perfect plan, and the final destiny of each one, whether eternal life or death. He determined the time, place, nation, and culture in which each one would be born and live. He determined all the relationships each one would sustain toward others and all the influences each one would exert upon and receive from others. He determined whether or not one would be born and live in the sphere of the covenant or in the world; whether one would be faithful in the covenant or forsake his covenantal training; whether one would remain in darkness and unbelief or be called into His marvelous light; whether one would believe in Christ and be saved or reject Him and be damned.

That is the eternal and unchangeable decree of predestination.

This decree, according to Scripture and our Confession, is twofold. On the one hand, some men “were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). That is the aspect of the decree known as reprobation. But on the other hand, some whom God “did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). That is the aspect of predestination known as election.

For us who believe in Jesus Christ, this decree is a tremendous comfort! We too have a destiny. Our destiny is that we should be conformed to the image of God’s Son! Our destiny is that we should be called, justified, and glorified! Our destiny is that all things in this life must work together for our good! Our destiny is not condemnation, but everlasting life! Nothing can separate us from that destiny. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. We who seem to be but a handful of people in the vast sea of humanity are the objects of the predestinating love of God!

May 25 – The Importance of the Doctrine of Predestination  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: Titus 1

The doctrine of predestination is a central doctrine of Holy Scripture.

It is no minor doctrine. It is not one we may simply ignore.

And this makes it difficult to explain why our Confession is so incredibly brief in its treatment of predestination in Art. 16. It is even more difficult to explain when we recall that the author of the Confession, Guido de Brès, was a disciple of Calvin who strongly maintained and defended this truth. But although the Confession is certainly brief on this matter, we must remember that the Lord in His providence also gave to the Reformed Churches the Canons of Dordt, in which the doctrine of predestination is much more fully explained. Therefore, we must not be misled by the brevity of the Confession. We must not think that this doctrine is a minor one. On the contrary, the doctrine of predestination is revealed throughout sacred Scripture.

It was revealed in the Old Testament in God's choice of Abraham out of those living in Ur of the Chaldees (Neh 9:7); His choice of Isaac over Ishmael as the one with whom He would continue His covenant (Gen 21:12, Rom 9:7); His choice of Jacob whom He loved over Esau whom He hated (Rom 9:10-13); His choice of Israel over Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, and all the other nations of the earth (Deut 7:6). Throughout the Old Testament, God revealed that He did not choose or love all men and nations, but that He chose and loved Israel alone, and that He rejected and hated the heathen nations. In the New Testament God revealed the truth of predestination more deeply and fully. Our Lord Jesus Christ preached this doctrine repeatedly. He told certain Jews that they did not believe on Him because they were not of His sheep, the ones whom the Father had given Him, who would never perish but have eternal life (John 10:25-28). He told His disciples that it was not given to some men to know the mysteries of the kingdom, and that He taught in parables so that seeing they would see not and hearing they would hear not (Matt 13:11ff). He also said that "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt 22:14). Moreover, Jesus' apostles also taught this doctrine repeatedly in their epistles. The apostle Paul taught it especially in that clearest and most avoided chapter of Scripture, Rom 9. He also assumes it in his other epistles, as in Titus 1:1, where he speaks of the "faith of God's elect."

The importance of this doctrine must be emphasized today because many, if not most, Reformed people de-emphasize it practically into non-existence. It is not preached from their pulpits. It is not discussed at their Bible studies. It is not taught in their seminaries. It is not part of their theological or devotional thinking. We must beware, and take care, that this does not happen in our circles. We must preach this doctrine and love to hear it preached! We must study this doctrine and devote ourselves to understanding it! We must embrace this doctrine for the great comfort it gives to us and for the great glory of God! May we hold fast to sound doctrine. May we be able to exhort and convince the gainsayers. May we not have itching ears longing for something new. May we love and stand fast in the truth!

May 26 – The Primacy of Predestination in God’s Counsel  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: Colossians 1:12-20

Predestination is the primary purpose of God with all things.

God’s one all-encompassing purpose, of course, is the glory of His name, or in the words of Art. 16 of our Confession, to “manifest Himself such as He is...merciful and just.” But there is one central way in which God determined to manifest Himself unto His glory.

Some, such as Abraham Kuypers and Herman Bavinck, claim that God has two or more distinct and equally significant purposes for the realization of His glory. They deny that predestination is God’s central purpose to realize the glory of His name. They claim that God purposes to realize His glory through election and reprobation *and* through creation and providence; through particular grace *and* through common grace; through Christ *and* through human culture. They condemn as “one-sided” the view that makes predestination the central purpose of God. But in so doing they make the counsel of God “two-sided.” They introduce dualism into the mind of God by teaching that God has two utterly distinct and equally significant purposes with this world. They deny that God’s counsel focuses on one purpose in Christ. They imagine two purposes in the counsel of God which run like two railroad tracks side by side, never joining together as far as the eye can see. They exclude Christ from one of the two great purposes of God (as they say) with all things: namely, the development of culture through common grace. You see, this gives them a theological basis for bridging the gap between the church and the world, so that they may cross over that bridge, enter the world, and enjoy the ungodly, Christless, man-centered culture of the world.

But this is not Scriptural.

Rather, according to Scripture, predestination is the central and primary purpose of God in His eternal counsel. God has “made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory...” (Eph 1:9-12). And by Christ “were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col 1:16-18).

God gathers together *in one* all things *in Christ*, in whom we have been *predestinated*. All things were created by Christ and *for Christ*. In all things Christ has the *preeminence*. God clearly has one great purpose with all things, and it revolves around Christ and His salvation of His people in Christ, and thus the decree of predestination. All things serve that one great purpose: the stars in the sky and the sand of the seashore, the beasts of the field and the fowl in the air, and also the development of human culture. All things serve God’s one great purpose to glorify Himself in Christ through the salvation of His elect and the damnation of the reprobate.

“For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell” (Col 1:19).

May 27 – Election  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: Ephesians 1: 1-8

God chose us! How often, beloved, do you meditate on that wondrous reality? How often do you ponder that beautiful truth? Does that truth shape your whole life, your behavior, your choices?

How often is it not the case that others do not choose us? Perhaps as a child or young person you were not chosen to play on the sports team or to go to a birthday party, but left out. Perhaps a young man or young woman to whom you were attracted has chosen to date someone else and not you. Perhaps a company to which you have applied for a job has selected another applicant and passed you by. Perhaps you and another man were nominated to the office of elder, but the congregation elected the other and not you. Often we are not chosen. And that can hurt at times.

But God chose us!

How wondrous! How joyful! For He chose us to everlasting life!

He chose us before the foundation of the world to be the recipients of life eternal! He chose us as the ones whom He would bless with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. He predestinated us unto the adoption of children. He chose to lead us through this life, bestow upon us the gift of faith, shower us with His grace, and take us into heavenly places. He chose us as the Bride of Christ, loved us and gave Himself for us (Eph 5:25). He determined to bring us to Christ our Bridegroom to dwell with Him in perfect fellowship at the marriage supper of eternity. He chose us as the Body of Christ (Eph 1:23). He did not choose a disordered and chaotic horde of individuals, but a body with a Head and members who each have a place and role. He gave us spiritual gifts and appointed us to our own unique offices in that body. God chose us!

Let that, fellow believer, encourage you in the midst of the pain of being rejected by men. You may not be chosen by men. You might be left out or passed by. You may even be fiercely rejected, hated, and condemned. But as a child of God, you have been chosen. God chose you! God has not left you out in the cold, in the darkness. God has taken you into His church. God has not passed you by in favor of others, but has determined to choose you. God has elected you in Christ! Your destiny is bound up with Christ's! You are crucified with Christ! You are raised up with Christ! You are united to Christ even now by His Spirit! You shall never be separated from Christ!

Because God chose us.



May 28 – The Order of God’s Decrees  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: Isaiah 55

Did God choose us in His eternal counsel as fallen and sinful people or totally apart from sin and the fall? Oh, do not misunderstand the question. I do not ask whether God chose us in time, after He created man, after man fell into sin. Oh no, God surely chose us before time in His eternal counsel. But did God choose us in His counsel *as* people or as *sinful* people? Did God first determine to create mankind, then determine that mankind would fall, and only then determine to choose us in Christ out of that fallen mass of mankind? Or did God first determine to choose us in Christ, then determine that we and all mankind would fall into sin, and only then determine to create mankind and the world itself as the arena in which to carry this all out? This is the debate between infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism. Our Confession of Faith evidently takes the former view, as do our Canons of Dort. Notice: The Confession does not treat election in the first articles in the section on theology, but much later, after treating creation and the fall. By this placement it shows its preference that election follows the fall in the counsel of God.

Both views have commendable features, and neither has ever been condemned as heretical. According to the *infra* view, God chose us *as* fallen, sinful people. This magnifies the electing grace of God as favor to undeserving sinners. God then did not choose us merely as men and women, but as wicked, rebellious, and corrupt men and women with no right to live, worthy of death and hell. That is indeed an “election of grace” (Rom 11:5). But according to the *supra* view, God chose us in Christ in distinction from other men, totally apart from sin and the fall, and determined the latter only as a means of glorifying Himself in the highest possible way by delivering us from it. This magnifies the sovereign freedom of God to choose one man as a “vessel of mercy” and to determine that another would be a “vessel of wrath” (Rom 9:20-23). He chose us and not others. He could have chosen others and not us. He is absolutely free to do as He pleases. What gratitude must we then have that He chose *us*!

Which view is correct? Although I admit that I favor the *supra* view, and was even taught it in the home, I also see truth in the *infra* view which I cannot discard. I do not usually like to sit on the fence, but in this regard I find myself lingering there, hesitant to leap fully to one side or the other. I sometimes wonder whether this debate should be viewed as an either-or proposition at all. Is it not possible that both views contain truth and both a bit of error? This we may know with certainty: God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways, but His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). God’s counsel is one idea and has one purpose concerning all things. He determines the order and relations of all the parts. He sees it all in one eternal present. He does not first determine one thing, and then another. But He conceives and determines everything at once with all the causes and effects, ends and means, and perfectly glorifies Himself in Christ through all things. What an incredible privilege we have to be included in His perfect plan, and to be the objects of His eternal and sovereign election!

May 29 – Unconditional Election  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: Deuteronomy 7:6-8, John 15:16, Romans 9:11, Ephesians 1:3-5

Of His mere goodness He chose us in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Without any respect to our works!

Do you ever wonder why God chose you of all people in the world? If you were an Arminian, you would not wonder. You would feel quite confident that you know why you were chosen. You would simply point out that you are a believer, that you have accepted Christ into your heart, that you have chosen Christ by your own free will, and therefore you are elect. If you were an Arminian theologian, you would probably say that your election is a conditional thing, that it all hinges on your faith and obedience, and that only God knows if you will still be elect at the end of your life. You are elect now because now you choose Christ. But in the future...who knows? Maybe you will forsake Christ. Then you will no longer be elect. It all depends on you! Your choice is first. God's choice is second. You choose your own fate. Therefore, you would never wonder why God chose you. You would believe that He chose you because you have made yourself to differ, because you have shown yourself morally superior to other men, because you have chosen Christ.

But you, beloved saints, are not Arminians. You are Reformed.

Therefore, you might wonder why God chose you. After all, you know that God did not choose you because you chose Christ. But you confess in Art. 16 that God chose you "without any respect to [your] works." God did not gaze from His eternal viewpoint into the future and take notice of the fact that you believe in Christ and then choose you because of it. God does not choose anyone on the basis of foreseen faith and obedience. God did not choose us on the basis of our works! God chose us without any respect to our works! God's election is *unconditional*. And thank God that it is! For if it was not, we could have no assurance of our salvation. We could never be sure that we would persevere in faith to the end of our lives. Thank God that He did not consider our works when He chose us!

Thus, we wonder: Why *did* God choose us? Our Confession tells us very simply that He chose us "of mere goodness." We could say, "of mere grace," or "of mere love." God chose us because He *loved* us! He longed to be gracious to us. He longed to do good to us. He longed to deliver us from sin and perdition and to give us eternal life.

But why *us*? That question always seems to return unanswered! Why did God love *us*? Why did God long to do good to *us*? Our Confession does not go any further in answering that question. But our Canons of Dordt do (Head I, Art. 10). God chose us according to the good pleasure of His will (Eph 1:5). God chose us merely because He was pleased to do so. Beyond that we cannot go. Scripture bars us from intruding any farther into the mind and will of God. But we do not need to go any farther! This is far enough. It is enough for us to know that He chose us and loved us because He was pleased to do so. Thus we continue to stand amazed at the love and goodness of our God to us, and to say until our dying day, "To God be the glory!"

May 30 – Election of a Certain and Great Number  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: Genesis 13:14-18 & 15:1-6

The number of God's elect is certain and limited, but it is more than we can count, a multitude which no man can number.

Have you numbered the grains of sand on the seashore? Take just a handful of sand next time you are by the seashore and try to count all the grains. There is no doubt that the number of grains is definite and limited. But what that exact number is, you will never know. It is too great to count. God promised that Abraham's seed would be not just as many as a handful of sand, but as many as the sand of the seashore!

Have you seen the stars in the sky on a clear evening, far away from the bright city lights which drown them out? Try to count the stars. They too are a definite and limited number. But there are millions, or perhaps billions, or even more, so we could never count them all. Even if you could count every star in the night sky, you still would not have counted all the stars, for faraway galaxies which appear as only a speck of light contain billions more! And God promised to make Abraham's seed as many as those stars! And who are Abraham's seed? The Jews? No, not just the Jews, but all who belong to Christ, all who are chosen in Him, all who believe in Him (Gal 3:29). The number of God's elect is great!

It is true that the number of the elect is often small. Many are called, but *few* are chosen, says our Lord (Matt 22:14). Many walk the broad path which leads to destruction, but *few* follow the narrow way that leads to life (Matt 7:13-14). Most often in the world, including today, the wicked seem to be an overwhelming horde, while there is only a *remnant* according to the election of grace (Rom 11:5).

Nevertheless, Scripture also emphasizes that the total number of the elect is very great. God saves the whole world in the elect. God saves all men in the elect. That is, God chose a great throng from all nations, tribes, and tongues, throughout all history. We will never see this vast multitude as long as we walk by faith in this world. We will always see the elect as a little flock, hated, persecuted, and oppressed. But we believe God's promise. And soon our faith will become sight. Soon we will pass from this world into heaven and see that great multitude which no man can number worshiping God and the Lamb (Rev 7:9-10). Soon afterward we will witness the full ingathering of the whole body of the elect, as many as the sand and stars, in the new heavens and earth. Soon and very soon we will see that God's elect are indeed a very great number. What a day that will be!

May 31 – Reprobation  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: Romans 9:1-24

God did not choose all men, but determined to leave some in the fall and perdition wherein they involved themselves. We believe the doctrine of reprobation too on the basis of Scripture.

We admit that from our human viewpoint this is a hard doctrine to accept. Even Calvin called the decree of reprobation “horrible” or “dreadful” (cf. Institutes III.23.7). It is not hard to accept because Scripture is unclear about it. Scripture is crystal clear about it! But it is hard to accept because of the horrible implications for a vast number of human beings. We shudder at the awful reality that multitudes will perish eternally in hell. We shrink from the thought that our God determined this from eternity. We struggle to understand why He did so. We find it difficult to answer the deep questions that arise: If God is love, then why does God also hate (Rom. 9:13)? If God wanted to reveal His justice, why was it not sufficient to do so through the cross of Christ? Why would God create some men intending to destroy them? We admit that this is a hard doctrine.

Perhaps this explains why our Confession presents the doctrine in a manner that seems less harsh. For it does not say, as the Bible does, that God “hardens” the wicked in their sin and unbelief unto their destruction (Exo 4:21, Rom 9:18). Nor does it make the biblical confession that the wicked were appointed unto disobedience (1 Pet 2:8) or that heretics were “before of old ordained to this condemnation” (Jude 4). But it says only that God “leaves” some men in the fall and perdition in which they have involved themselves. It attempts to present reprobation in a softer light: God *leaves* some sinners in their sins and lets them go their own way, which ends in hell (cf. Canons, Head I, Art. 15). God determined to do so in His eternal counsel. This is an attempt to soften a hard doctrine. It seeks to emphasize that people go to hell because of their own willful sins. People willfully involve themselves in sin, and deserve to perish in hell, and God merely leaves them on that path to hell. God is passive. He does not *do* anything. He just leaves them alone to their own destruction.

Now the motive for presenting reprobation this way is admirable: the desire to guard against the lie that God arbitrarily throws men into hell, or that God forces people to sin against their will and then damns them for it. God does nothing of the sort. God puts sinners into hell, people who love sin and hate God. We must always take care to maintain that all who go to hell go there on account of their own sins.

Nevertheless, although God *does* leave some men in their sin and perdition, He does more. God is active in all His works and decrees. God is no mere onlooker at the lives of the reprobate. But God is active in realizing His decree of reprobation. He hardens them. He gives them over to sin (Rom 1:24ff). Yet He is not the author of their sin. God determined some men to be vessels of wrath, and He carries out that decree in time. He is God. He does His own good pleasure. We shudder at it. We struggle with it. But we do not deny it. “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” (Rom 9:20).

June 1 – Why Reprobation?  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: Genesis 25:19-34, Romans 9:10-13

Why did God decree some men to be vessels of wrath? Why did He determine not to save all men from sin and hell? Why did He decide to create some to be enemies of Him and His people? Why Esau? Why Pharaoh? Why reprobation?

The simple Scriptural answer, of course, is that “The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil” (Prov 16:4). He made the wicked for His own glory. He raised up Pharaoh for the glorification of His power (Exo 9:16, Rom 9:17). He wills to show His wrath and to make His power known, and therefore He endures the vessels of wrath (Rom 9:22). And as our Confession points out, He leaves some in their sins to manifest Himself such as He is, that is, *just*. He manifests His justice very clearly through the reprobate. He shows that He is a God who hates sin and punishes it with everlasting damnation. He makes known to all that He is holy and that He maintains Himself as such over against the sinner. He would have been perfectly just to leave us in our sins too, but He also willed to manifest His mercy, which He has done in Christ.

But that does not exhaust the answer to this question. After all, did not God manifest His justice in Christ at the cross by punishing our sins in Him? Of course! That is exactly what we confess in Art. 20 of this same Confession! But why did God determine to manifest His justice also through reprobation? Why reprobation? Does Scripture say anything more about this? Yes, for God told Rebekah concerning her twins that “the elder shall serve the younger” (Gen 25:23, cf. Rom 9:12). The reprobate Esau would *serve* the elect Jacob. Reprobation *serves* election.

Let this be understood properly. God determined to glorify Himself in the highest way, the antithetical way of election and reprobation, sin and grace, life and death, salvation and condemnation, heaven and hell. God decreed the existence of the reprobate, sin, death, judgment, and hell to *serve* the realization of election and salvation through Christ to the highest glory of His name. For the grace of election stands out in the greatest glory only against the background of reprobation. Only when I realize that not all men were chosen do I appreciate the grace of God to me and my profound debt of gratitude to Him. Only then do I truly stand in awe before Him who possesses absolute freedom and who does all things for His own glory. Only then do I truly marvel at the depths of the mystery of His unsearchable will (Rom 11:33).

Thus, God willed reprobation to *serve* election, and the reprobate to *serve* the elect, Esau to *serve* Jacob, Pharaoh to *serve* Israel. He decreed that there would be two peoples in the earth, one seed of the woman and one of the serpent (Gen 3:15), which would exist in spiritual contrast and opposition to each other. He willed that the one people would follow Satan and would have enmity toward His people. He willed this conflict of all ages as the means of showing His sovereign grace in His people by their endurance to the end, and as the means of showing His power over the wicked in His judgment upon them.

This is a comfort to us as God’s people when we find ourselves viciously attacked and persecuted by the reprobate men of the world. We may be assured that they are unwittingly serving our higher glory and salvation! Why reprobation? For the highest glory of God and the greatest salvation of His people.

June 2 – Predestination and the Covenant  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: Genesis 17:1-8, Galatians 3:15-18

Although Art. 16 does not discuss the relation between election and the covenant, this is such an important subject that we ought to devote at least one meditation to it.

In Reformed and Presbyterian churches today, there is fierce debate over this fundamental question: With whom does God establish His covenant? Is it with those chosen in Christ before time or with all those baptized into the Christian church in time? Is it with the elect alone or with all who profess faith in Christ and all their baptized children?

Let us see what Scripture teaches: God established His covenant with Abraham and his seed after him in their generations (Gen 17:7). Who is Abraham's seed? Is it all of Abraham's physical offspring, or all who were circumcised? Many say yes. They say God establishes His covenant with all of the physical, baptized offspring of believers, but only those who fulfill the conditions of faith and faithfulness till the end of their lives are saved. But we say no. Scripture says, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is *CHRIST*" (Gal 3:16). Abraham's Seed is Christ! God established His covenant first of all with *Christ*. But not only with Christ: Abraham's seed includes all who *belong to Christ*. "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (v29). God established His covenant with Christ and all those in Christ, that is, the elect (Eph 1:4). God did not establish His covenant with *every individual* in Israel of old at Mt. Sinai (Deut 5:2-3). For Scripture tells us, "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children...They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (Rom 9:6-8). God establishes His covenant with Christ and with all the elect in Christ.

Generally, God establishes His covenant with the elect in the lines of believers and their seed. Sometimes the children of believers show that they are reprobate, like Esau, by abandoning Christ. They never were members of the covenant, though they grew up in the sphere of the covenant. They are the tares in the wheat field, the chaff of the grain, those who are not Israel, though "of Israel." They will be separated from the wheat at the end of time and cast into hell (Matt 13:41-42). But generally, God establishes His covenant with His elect in the lines of the continued generations of believers.

Therefore, we view the faithful congregation of Jesus Christ, of believers and their seed, as the covenant people of God. We know that election and reprobation cut right through the visible church on earth, and that the antithesis exists even within her walls. Yet we also know that God promises to make His covenant with believers and their seed. Therefore, we do not suspiciously eye our fellow members and try to find the reprobate chaff. Rather, we view each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. And we look forward to the day when all God's people will be brought into His everlasting covenant, when His tabernacle will be with us, and we will dwell with Him and each other forevermore!

June 3 – Delivered and Preserved!  
by Rev. Daniel Holstege

Read: John 10:22-31

God delivers and preserves us!

In my first meditation on Art. 16, I pointed out that in this article, our Confession leaps backward from time into eternity and considers God's eternal and unchangeable counsel. In this same article, however, we confess that God carries out His decree of predestination in time. He does so, according to Art. 16, by leaving some in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves, but by delivering and preserving us His elect from that fall and perdition.

God delivers us! We fell into sin in Adam. We fell thereby into perdition and ruin, because the wages of sin is death and hell. We were born into this world as sinners, dead in trespasses, and we add more and more sins every day. But God has delivered us! He sent His Son to die on the cross and make atonement for our sins! Christ died for us! Christ endured God's wrath against our sins! Christ has delivered us (Gal 1:4)! Therefore, God delivers us now in our present experience. He sends His Spirit into our hearts to unite us with Christ and bestow on us all the blessings of salvation! The Spirit regenerates us, translating us in principle out of darkness into God's marvelous light, implanting in our hearts the seed of the new life of Christ! The Spirit quickens faith in us, whereby we experience justification and deliverance from our sins! But that is not all.

God also preserves us! We would surely go lost again if He did not preserve us. We are like foolish sheep, because we constantly go astray. We love sin by nature. We love the pleasures of this world according to our flesh. We sometimes wish we could have the lifestyle of the world. We sometimes long to enjoy the pleasures of sin. But God preserves us! He never entirely forsakes us to our carnal lusts. He never lets the seed of regeneration in our hearts perish. He never wholly withdraws His grace and Holy Spirit from us. He preserves us even when we fall into enormous, heinous sins, as David and Peter did, and as we might have done. Even when we are seduced by the temptations of Satan, beguiled by unbelief or doubt, and enticed by the powerful allurements of sin, God preserves us. He will not let us go. He will not give us over to Satan. He holds us in the palm of His hand, and Jesus assures us that "no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:29). He guards us as the apple of His eye (Deut 32:10). He finishes the good work which He has begun in us (Phil 1:6). He keeps us from ultimate apostasy. He preserves us by His irresistible grace so that we persevere, so that we continue in faith, so that we cleave to Christ throughout our lives until we are finally taken out of this world into glory!

What a comfort, beloved, in the midst of a world of fierce spiritual warfare! We do not need to fear. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Rom 8:37). We can never be separated from His love (v. 39). Unto all eternity!

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