

“Limited Atonement—Definite Redemption”

Canons of Dort多特信经: Second Head, articles 3, 5, 8-9. Bible illustration: John 10:11-18, 25-30;  
17:1-9

By Pastor Rand Lankheet, at New Horizon URC, Second sermon, on March 25, 2018

Introduction: [1. A Revolution.]

For most of human history, people thought that the sun revolved ( 旋转 ) around the earth. The earth was thought to be a fixed point. And all the other planets and the sun revolved around it. That was the thinking. And it still seems that way, doesn't it? It seems that the sun rises in the morning. It seems to move across the sky. And it goes down in the west, in the evening. It seems that the earth is standing still, and that the sun is moving.

But a Polish mathematician ( 数学家 ) and astronomer ( 天文学家 ), named Copernicus ( 哥白尼 ), changed that opinion.

Copernicus confirmed that THE SUN is a fixed point in our solar system ( 太阳系 ). And the earth moves around the sun. In scientific literature this is known as the “Copernican Revolution.”

It was a “revolution” in understanding.

A complete overturning ( 颠覆 , 反转 ) of what had been accepted for thousands of years.

Something like that happens when Christians come to understand the “Doctrines of Grace.” ( 恩典的教义 ) The doctrines also known as the “Five Points of Calvinism.” ( 加尔文五点 )

When Christians come to understand the doctrines of grace, they undergo a kind of “revolution”

in their thinking. Everything is turned upside down. You see, many Christians start by thinking that they as Christians are at the center of things. They read their Bible with this thought: what is in the Bible FOR ME? What does God promise to do FOR ME? How can God help ME? Like the ancient people thinking about the earth, these Christians think of themselves as the center of everything.

When Christians come to understand the doctrine of grace, everything is turned upside down.

God is rightly understood at the center. The Bible speaks of God at the center of everything. God is at the center of creation. God is at the center of history. God is at the center of all reality. And we, as people? Well, the Bible says things like this: we are like dust. We are like dead grass. Our lives are like the mist, a vapor ( 雾气 ) that quickly vanishes ( 消散 ).

It is a complete revolution.

Just as the earth revolves around the sun, so we as people revolve around God.

He is at the center. / For many Christians, this is a complete revolution in thinking!

2. We now come to the second doctrine of grace, at least as it is listed in the Canons of Dort.

It is sometimes called “Limited Atonement.” ( 有限的代赎 )

But that is a misleading label. In some ways, it is a wrong label.

The word “atonement” ( 代赎 ) refers to the work of Jesus, particularly his suffering and dying as the Substitute ( 代替者 ), as the Sacrifice ( 献祭 , 祭物 ), for our sins. Jesus died in our place. That's the main idea of “atonement.” So we speak of Jesus' “atoning” death, or the “atoning sacrifice” of Jesus.

The problem is with the adjective, “limited.” As in “limited atonement.”

The Synod of Dort never refers to the atonement of Jesus as being “limited.”

Now, as we noted last week, the five points of Dort were in response to that Arminian ( 阿民念主义的 ) group. Those who followed the teachings of Professor Arminius. The Arminians said that Jesus died on the cross for every single person, past, present and future. Jesus sacrificed himself, they said, for every man, woman, and child who has lived and who would ever live.

Everyone's sins were theoretically ( 理论上地 ) paid for, by the atoning death of Jesus.

It's up to each person to claim that payment. So said the Arminians.

Probably the majority of Christians take the Arminian viewpoint today. We see it in the bumper sticker which pronounces, to everyone: "Jesus died for you." Maybe people don't think it through. But it seems like they think that Jesus died for the forgiveness of everyone's sins, believer and unbeliever alike.

The delegates ( 代表团成员 ) of Dort studied the Bible. They examined the Bible verses put forward by the Arminian group. And they studied other Bible verses. And they concluded this: First of all, they affirmed that Jesus' death on the cross is SUFFICIENT to pay for everyone's sin.

Jesus' sacrifice is of sufficient power, of sufficient worth and value. [Read Second Head, article 3--see the word "sufficient." The delegates at Dort said that there is no limit on the power of Jesus' blood.

Jesus' sacrifice is "of infinite worth and value." Therefore, Jesus could have paid for the sins of the whole world, of every man, woman, and child.

But DID the blood of Jesus ACTUALLY pay for the sins of every man, woman, and child?

Studying the Scriptures, the delegates at Dort said, "no."

Some of the verses quoted by the Synod of Dort are from John 10. The verses we read earlier.

Let's look at some of those verses.

In context, Jesus is contrasting those who truly belong to him, and those who do not belong to him. Jesus refers to "his sheep." Those who are in the "sheepfold" as our Bible version calls it. [Read 10:1-3. These sheep are put in this safe place by the shepherd. That usually happened at night...after the shepherd had led his flock to graze ( 吃草 ) in the pasturelands.

At night, the shepherd would bring them into a safe, protected place. They would be protected from wolves and bears, any animal that might attack the sheep. There would be a gate or door, for entrance into that sheepfold. So the sheep must go in through that door. Jesus says in vs. 9 that he is that Door. The only way for someone to be saved.

The symbolism ( 象征 ) changes in vs. 11. There Jesus compares himself to the SHEPHERD of the sheep.

[Read vs. 11, then read vs. 14-15.

Notice carefully: Jesus calls those who know his voice, as "my sheep." [Look again at vs. 14.

His own sheep "know" him.

But it is clear in these verses, that some will never hear Jesus' voice. Some people will remain deaf to the outward calling of the Saviour, Jesus. Some people will not respond to the gospel, the good news.

So it was of many of the Jewish leaders, the teachers, in Jesus' own day. [Read vs. 25-28.

Those Jewish leaders were not of Jesus' sheep. They have not heard his voice. They have refused to believe in him, refusing to trust in Him as Messiah and Saviour ( 救主 ) .

So it is to this present day. Many people are not Jesus' sheep.

They are not part of his flock because they refuse to trust in him, as their Saviour.

And here comes the doctrine, over against the Arminian group: though Jesus' blood is SUFFICIENT for everyone, Jesus blood is applied ONLY TO THOSE WHO ARE HIS SHEEP.

The language used in Dort is this: Jesus blood is SUFFICIENT for everyone in the world, but it is "EFFICIENT" or "effective" ( 有效的 ) only for those who will follow Jesus. Only those are Jesus' sheep. Only those have the atoning work of Jesus applied to them.

[Read vs. 28. And look also at vs. 29. [Read vs/29. God the Father has "given" these sheep, and only these sheep, those who will believe, to Jesus.

Another way to refer to these are "the elect." Which we discussed the past two Sundays.

The sheep of Jesus, are those whom God has chosen from eternity ( 永恒 ) . Those whom God has predestined ( 预定 ) to be saved. They are the ones God the Father "gave" to

Jesus. Therefore only the elect have the blood of Jesus applied to them in that effective way. To be saved.

So you see, really, this teaching is really about the ACTUAL application ( 应用 , 适用 ) of the work of Jesus. To actually save people. To truly pay for their sins. That's why many theologians prefer to call this "effective" redemption ( 有效的救赎 ) . Or "particular" redemption. The blood of Jesus is particularly ( 特别地 ) applied only to the elect. And the blood of Jesus effectively saves them.

### 3. Some have used THIS ILLUSTRATION ( 比喻 ) :

The Arminian group pictures the work of Jesus as a wide bridge. A wide bridge which goes over a deep valley. A wide bridge on which everyone, theoretically, is walking across. But, in the end, this bridge does not actually bring people to the other side! It is a wide, wide bridge, with everyone theoretically walking on it. But it is as if the bridge stops halfway across the valley. Because in the Arminian viewpoint no one is actually saved by Jesus. They are only theoretically or potentially saved.

The biblical view of this bridge is as a more narrow bridge. Not as wide as the Arminian version.

But this bridge actually goes all the way across the valley. It actually brings God's elect people ( 选民 ) to the other side...to full and complete salvation. The blood of Jesus is truly applied to each one of them.

[Read John 17:1-9. As in John 10, Jesus speaks here about those people whom God the Father has "given" to Him. In fact, Jesus says, "I am not praying for the entire world." Those who will always be unbelievers. [Read vs. 9. Jesus is praying specifically for those whom God the Father had given to Him. For these and these only, Jesus blood has been applied.

### 4. Two closing points of application.

4.1. First of all, some have said this. Particularly those who become extreme about this teaching of election. They say: "Why waste our time preaching the gospel to everyone in the world? If only some are chosen, only some will trust in Jesus. Therefore, we should not preach to everyone."

Others might say this: "Because God has not elected everyone,  
therefore we should not invite everyone to come to Jesus."

The delegates to Dort were very biblical ( 恪守圣经的 ) and very wise. They looked at all the Bible verses. And they said this: there are many Bible verses which command ( 命令 ) us to go into all the world. To preach the good news of Jesus to everyone. To every man, woman, and child. Therefore, they said, though we know that God has only elected some, we still have to preach to everyone. Why? Well, because God commands us to go to everyone.

And, obviously, we are not God. We do not know who is elect! In fact, in my own experience as a pastor I can tell you that some of the most hardened ( 刚硬的 ) people have ultimately been saved. Some of the most hardened people have come to faith in Jesus. Humanly speaking, we would never expect it. But, as we read last week from Romans 9, God will have mercy on whomever He decides to have mercy. There is no pre-condition upon people. God's election is "unconditional." And some of the most impossible people have become Christians.

[Read article 5. Note on "promiscuously." ( 杂乱地 ) Literally ( 字面上说 ) , that word means, "without any distinction""without any bias偏见."

We must preach the gospel to everyone. Everyone. No matter what race, what country, what intelligence level ( 知识水平 ) , what economic level. We preach to everyone and anyone. It's a good reminder to all of us. We sometimes only think of inviting to our church, those who we think "might fit in." Or we tend to give up on those who have some very bad habits or have very hardened hearts. But this is a good reminder, a biblical reminder, to talk to everyone. And to invite anyone to come to church.

4.2. Dort gives another very practical application to this doctrine of "effective redemption" or

“particular redemption.”

It is this: though by nature, people are so sinful, so spiritually blind and deaf, God has his plan for some of these people. God has chosen some of these people. So that, when we go out preaching and teaching, and when we invite people to come to church, we can have confidence that some people indeed will be saved. That around the world, therefore,

God will always have His church. He will always and forever have His church.

Because that is according to His plan. From eternity. [Read article 9.

So let us go out from here, into the world around us. Be continual witnesses for Jesus.

Even to those you might have given up on. Invite people to come with you to church. Don't give up. And keep on befriending those who come here, as visitors. Even if some people seem confused, or have some wrong thinking. Or have hardened hearts. Don't give up.

Why not? Because you and I will always be surprised by those whom God will call to himself.

Don't think of anyone as “impossible” for God to change. God does the impossible, again and again.

And God will grow His church here in Canada and around the world. AMEN.

