

# GRACE\*

DEFINED & DEFENDED

*\* What a 400-Year-Old Confession  
Teaches Us about Sin, Salvation,  
and the Sovereignty of God*

KEVIN DEYOUNG



“Though many Reformed Christians talk about TULIP, too often they neglect the rich soil from which that flower springs: the Canons of Dort. Yet this historic statement of faith abounds with biblical truth wisely designed to encourage love for the triune God and evangelism of the lost. DeYoung’s brief exposition of the canons is ideal for personal study, doctrine classes, and small groups that aim to better understand the controversy over Arminianism and why the Reformed doctrine of salvation by grace alone leads us to live for the glory of God alone.”

**Joel R. Beeke**, President and Professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary; Pastor, Heritage Reformed Congregation, Grand Rapids, Michigan; author, *Reformed Preaching*

“Why would a finger-on-the-pulse, contemporary pastor-theologian like Kevin DeYoung take us on a journey four hundred years into the past to a place few of us could locate on a map to meet people whose names we are unable to pronounce? And why should we join him? I can think of at least three reasons. As twenty-first-century Christians we need to (1) remember that ‘those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it’; (2) meet believers who thought deeply and cared passionately about the glory of God in the gospel; and (3) put roots into nourishing theological soil that will give clarity to our thinking, create stability in our living, and put doxology into our serving. *Grace Defined and Defended* helps us to do all three.”

**Sinclair B. Ferguson**, Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary; Teaching Fellow, Ligonier Ministries

“DeYoung manages to bring an event from four hundred years ago right back into the present needs of the church and of theology, with clear style, solid theological insights, pastoral tone, and helpful clarification of difficult but biblical notions. This is a book that helps us understand that Dort certainly is not just history and we must keep working with its message.”

**Herman Selderhuis**, Professor of Church History, Theological University Apeldoorn; Director, Refo500

“I am so encouraged to see a book on the Canons of Dort—not only because it explores the finely tuned confession of Reformed thinking but also because it highlights the precision of biblical fidelity. DeYoung’s concise summary of this catechism’s emphasis on the doctrines of grace is so vitally needed in our late-modern culture, which tends to prioritize emotional reasoning over thoughtful reflection. This book is a clarion call for all Christians to avoid cognitive distortions and to root their lives in a historic, confessional faith that is both biblically and theologically faithful to the Scriptures.”

**Stephen T. Um**, Senior Minister, Citylife Presbyterian Church of Boston; author, *Micah For You*

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 **CROSSWAY**<sup>®</sup>  
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To my home church,  
Hager Park Reformed Church (Jenison, MI),  
where I first learned TULIP and the doctrines of grace



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# Introduction

## *In Praise of Precision*

The first car I owned was a 1995 Dodge Neon, and it was a lemon. Besides being a girly car (as my eventual wife told me when I picked her up for one of our first dates), the cute little white powder puff (the car, not my wife!) never worked properly. It had alignment problems and electrical problems and transmission problems, of the problems I can remember.

The worst problem was that it would sometimes, for no discernible reason, just stop. Like at a traffic light, or turning a corner, or when sneezed upon by hummingbirds. The car would shut down completely. The dashboard would go dark and the vehicle would slow to a halt.

Being an auto repair genius, I learned that the only thing to do in this situation was to pop the hood (if I could find that lever), walk around to the front, locate a silver-looking thingy, and bang on it five or six times with a ratchet. Sure enough, the car revved up again. Once married, I was able to pass along this valuable expertise to Trisha. She too would know the joys of hammering away at a deceased car while motioning a line of cars to pass by our Neon roadkill.

It wasn't long before my wife found this method of "dealing with the problem" to be less than satisfactory. Calling into question my mechanical acumen, she had the gall to suggest that a trip to a certified auto mechanic was in order. The mechanic was able to ascertain that the silver thingy we kept banging was actually the alternator, the invaluable piece of machinery that supplies power to the electrical system while the engine is running. It turns out that the whack-a-mole approach to auto repair is neither a long-term solution nor a particularly sophisticated diagnosis. Hitting things with a ratchet can work for a time, but after a while you need to take care of your car with a little more precision.

### **Caring Enough to Be Careful**

I'm glad there are people in the world—most people in the world, it turns out—who know more about cars than I do. I don't want good-natured well-wishers to replace my alternator. I want someone who has paid careful attention to the intricacies of auto repair. I want someone who cares about precision. I want someone who knows what he's doing. I want an expert.

To act as if no one knows more than anyone else is not only silly; it's also a serious mistake. In his book *The Death of Expertise*, Tom Nichols cites a survey from a few years ago in which enthusiasm for military intervention in Ukraine was directly proportional to the person's *lack of knowledge* about Ukraine. It seems that the dumber we are, the more confident we are in our own intellectual achievements. Nichols relays an incident where someone on Twitter was trying to do research about sarin gas. When the world's expert on sarin gas offered to help, the original tweeter (a world-class "twit" we might say) proceeded to angrily lecture the expert for acting like a know-it-all. The expert may not have known it all, but in this case, he knew exponentially more than someone crowdsourcing his research online. And when it

comes to chemical warfare, I'd like my experts to have as much expertise as possible.

We've swallowed the lie that says that if we believe in equal rights, we must believe that all opinions have equal merit. Nichols also tells the story of an undergraduate student arguing with a renowned astrophysicist who was on campus to give a lecture about missile defense. After seeing that the famous scientist was not going to change his mind after hearing the arguments from a college sophomore, the student concluded in a harrumph, "Well, your guess is as good as mine." At which point the astrophysicist quickly interjected, "No, no, no. My guesses are much, *much* better than yours."<sup>1</sup> There was nothing wrong with the student asking hard questions, or even getting into an argument. The problem was in assuming he had as much to offer on the subject after a few minutes of reflection as the scientist did after decades of training and research.

We live in an age where passion is often considered an adequate substitute for precision. Charles Spurgeon once advised young ministers that when drawn into controversy, they should "use very hard arguments and very soft words."<sup>2</sup> It's a good thing Spurgeon never used social media! Too many tweets and posts specialize in overly hard words and especially soft arguments. Many of us, even Christians, have little patience for rigorous thinking and little interest in careful definition. We emote better than we reason, and we describe our feelings better than we define our words, which is one reason we need to study old confessions written by dead people. Whatever errors of harshness or exaggerated rhetoric may have existed in earlier centuries of theological discourse, this much is wonderfully and refreshingly true: they were relentlessly

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1. Tom Nichols, *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), 82–83.

2. C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students, Complete and Unabridged* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 173.

passionate about doctrinal truth. They cared about biblical fidelity. They cared about definitions. And they cared about precision. Praise God, they cared enough to be careful.

And in no Reformation-era confession or catechism do we see this so clearly as in the Canons of Dort.

## **A Flower by Any Other Name**

If the Canons of Dort are known at all, they are usually known as the progenitor of TULIP—that catchy acronym that summarizes the “Five Points of Calvinism.” Growing up in a Dutch Reformed church, I remember learning as a child that we believed in *Total Depravity*, *Unconditional Election*, *Limited Atonement*, *Irresistible Grace*, and *Perseverance of the Saints*. I’m thankful for this handy summary of key soteriological themes. Like any good Dutchman, I’ve been in many Tulip Time parades and have no desire to banish the TULIP from our theological vocabulary.

And yet for all that TULIP gets right in terms of biblical truth, there are several things that the acronym—or at least the use of it—can get wrong.

First, TULIP is not an adequate summary of Calvinism. Calvinism was never limited to predestination. In fact, it’s not even fair to say predestination was at the heart of Calvin’s theology. Clearly, we know from Dort itself that the doctrine is important to Reformed theology, but we should not limit Calvinism to soteriological concerns alone. Reformed theology is not less than the doctrine of salvation and the so-called doctrines of grace, but it is much more.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Although the term *Calvinism* is not, from the historian’s perspective, the best short-hand description for a broad movement of theologians and centuries of theological development, it has become virtually synonymous with the Reformed confessional tradition and thus will be used in this work interchangeably with the word *Reformed*. Whether those who affirm Dort’s soteriology but reject important parts of the Reformed tradition can still be called Calvinists is an issue that continues to divide both academic historians and contemporary practitioners.

Second, TULIP is not a historic summary of Calvinism. Although the Canons of Dort have five points, like TULIP has five points, the latter was not used to summarize the former until the twentieth century. The acronym was popularized by David Steele and Curtis Thomas in their 1963 book *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, Documented*.<sup>4</sup> Fifty years earlier, we have the earliest known use of TULIP in a 1913 periodical called *The Outlook*. This doesn't mean we shouldn't talk about the doctrines contained in TULIP, but it does mean we shouldn't oversell the acronym as the best or the only way to talk about the Canons of Dort, let alone talk about Calvinism as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

Third, TULIP is not an entirely accurate summary of the canons themselves. As we will see in the chapters ahead, the Canons of Dort, even with five points, cannot be reduced to only five theological truths. The canons are more detailed, more comprehensive, and more nuanced than can be captured in TULIP. In short, although we don't have to get rid of the acronym, we should appreciate that there are many more flowers in the Dort garden than just the TULIP.

## What Arminius Hath Wrought

Before we explore *what* the canons say, we have to understand *why* they say what they do. In other words, we need some history before we get to theology.<sup>6</sup> And that means we have to know how people who once thought of themselves as Calvinists

4. David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, Documented* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1963).

5. See Kenneth J. Stewart, *Ten Myths about Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 75–95.

6. My historical summary is a distillation of three works: *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618–1619*, ed. Peter Y. De Jong (repr. Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2008), 17–71; Matthew Barrett, *The Grace of Godliness: An Introduction to Doctrine and Piety in the Canons of Dort* (Kitchener, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2013), 9–22; Cornelis P. Venema, *But for the Grace of God: An Exposition of the Canons of Dort* (repr. Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2016), 10–19.

came to be known as Arminians. The history can seem a little dense, what with strange Dutch places and stranger Dutch names (even though my parents always taught me “if you ain’t Dutch, you ain’t much!”). Some people get tripped up from the very beginning, misplacing the *i* in Arminian for an *e* (trust me, the historical debate has nothing to do with Armenians from Western Asia). So before setting out on this brief historical journey, perhaps it would be helpful to get a rundown of both teams. The traditional Calvinists (Reformed) are on the left and the Arminians are on the right.

**Reformed:** The Christians and churches in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe that held to one or more of the Reformed confessions. In the Netherlands this meant the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563). The Canons of Dort were later added to these two documents and together became known as the Three Forms of Unity. I sometimes refer to the Reformed in this book as traditional Calvinists.

**Counter Remonstrants:** The Reformed party in the Netherlands opposed to the Arminians.

**John Calvin** (1509–1564): Genevan Reformer and one of the most important pastors and theologians in the development of the Reformed tradition.

**Theodore Beza** (1519–1605): Scholar, Reformer, and successor to Calvin in Geneva.

**Arminians:** Initially, these were the followers of Jacob Arminius, but Arminian theology continued to develop after his death in 1609. Later Arminians like John and Charles Wesley (or your Methodist or Free Will Baptist friend next door) probably bear some theological resemblance to the Arminians at Dort, but we should not assume a one-to-one correspondence. As Arminianism developed in Europe in the seventeenth century, it became more and more heterodox.

**Remonstrants:** The Arminian party in the Netherlands, so called because of the protest document they issued called the *Remonstrance of 1610*.

**Jacobus Arminius** (1560–1609): Pastor and later professor at the University of Leiden who came to reject traditional Reformed doctrines.

**Dirk Volkertszoon Coornhert** (1522–1590): Dutch theologian who opposed the teachings of Theodore Beza.

**Francis Gomarus** (1563–1641): Professor at the University of Leiden who opposed Arminius. The Counter Remonstrants were sometimes called Gomarists.

**Prince Maurice** (1567–1625): Son of William of Orange; organized successful Dutch rebellion against Spain; national leader in the Netherlands who sided with the Gomarists.

**Gisbertus Voetius** (1589–1676): Studied theology under Gomarus; delegate at Dort; later professor at the University of Utrecht for forty-two years; leading Dutch theologian of the seventeenth century.

**Johannes Bogerman** (1576–1637): Pastor and scholar who served as president of the Synod of Dort and helped translate the Scriptures into Dutch.

**Canons of Dort** (1619): The doctrinal pronouncements from the Synod of Dort, organized under five main points of doctrine.

**Johannes Uytenbogaert** (1557–1644): Preacher at The Hague; assumed leadership of the Remonstrants after Arminius's death.

**Johan van Oldenbarneveldt** (1547–1619): Longtime political leader in the Netherlands who sided with the Remonstrants; was executed on May 13, 1619.

**Conrad Vorstius** (1569–1622): Professor at the University of Leiden whose Arminian views veered off into heterodoxy; was banished from the Netherlands when he refused to recant.

**Simon Episcopius** (1583–1643): Professor at the University of Leiden; chief spokesman for the Remonstrants; argued that Christianity was more a life than a doctrine.

**Opinions of the Remonstrants** (1618): The opinions (sometimes called the *Sententia*) offered by the Arminians at the Synod of Dort.

Those are some of the most important names in the story. So how exactly did the story unfold?

Jacobus Arminius lived from 1560–1609, just barely overlapping with John Calvin, who died in 1564. Arminius began his teaching career thoroughly Calvinistic. After studying for a time in Geneva (1582–1587) under Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza, Arminius moved to Amsterdam to pastor a prominent church. As a pastor, Arminius was called upon to defend the views of his former teacher against the attacks of a Dutch theologian named Dirk Volkertszoon Coornhert (1522–1590). In preparing

his defense of traditional Calvinist doctrine, Arminius became convinced of his opponent's teaching. Later, Arminius preached a series of sermons on Romans in which he emphasized free will and stressed the government's authority in ecclesiastical and religious matters. Many began to doubt whether Arminius was really in line with the doctrinal standards of the Dutch church: the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession (especially Article 16 on the doctrine of election).

In 1603 Arminius was appointed professor of theology at the University of Leiden, where he was strongly opposed by his colleague Francis Gomarus. Both Arminius and Gomarus believed in predestination, but they differed over the meaning of the word. At the heart of the disagreement was whether predestination is based solely on the will of God (traditional Calvinism) or on foreseen knowledge of belief. In 1608 Arminius and Gomarus met for a public debate, but the issue was no closer to being settled. Both men thought of themselves as Reformed, but they were not saying the same thing.

Following Arminius's death in 1609, the movement continued under the leadership of Johannes Uytenbogaert, a court preacher at The Hague. In 1610, the Arminians met at Gouda (sort of a cheesy place for a theological convocation) and issued a document called the *Remonstrance*, setting forth "The Five Arminian Articles."<sup>7</sup> A remonstrance is a protestation, or the reasons given for a statement of opposition. Because of this document, and because the Arminians disagreed with Reformed theology as it was understood and practiced in the Netherlands, they became known as the Remonstrants. The only reason we have the five points of Calvinism is that the Arminians first had their five points. Because the points are at times deliberately ambiguous, and other times

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7. I will be using the Remonstrance of 1610 as found in De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 243–45.

highly nuanced, it can be difficult to see what the fuss was all about. In fact, most people reading the Remonstrance of 1610 today would be hard pressed to spot the subtle but important distinctions between the Arminians and the traditional Calvinists.

- Point 1 affirms that God “determined before the foundation of the world to save out of the fallen sinful human race those in Christ, for Christ’s sake, and through Christ who by the grace of the Holy Spirit shall believe in this his Son Jesus Christ.” That sounds like Ephesians 1, except that it’s not clear on what basis God determines the elect. Does God choose the elect so that they might believe in Jesus Christ, or does he choose the elect based on foreseen knowledge that they shall believe in Jesus Christ? We know from the arguments at the Synod of Dort that the Arminians clearly meant the latter.
- According to point 2, Jesus Christ “died for all men and for every man, so that he merited reconciliation and forgiveness of sins for all through the death of the cross; yet so that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except the believer.” Here we can see the conflict with what Dort would teach concerning “limited atonement.” The Arminians believed that Christ merited forgiveness for every human being, but that this procured salvation is only effective in those who believe.
- At first glance, point 3 sounds a lot like total depravity, with the Arminians affirming that “man does not have saving faith of himself nor by the power of his own free will.” Moreover, they teach that we cannot do anything truly good without first being regenerated through the Holy Spirit and renewed in all powers. The rub is that the Remonstrance does not make clear whether this spiritual

inability is a death or a sickness and whether the remedy is a monergistic (one-work-working) resurrection or a grace-filled, cooperative empowerment.

- We see in point 4 that Arminian grace was not sovereign grace as traditional Reformed theology had understood it, but rather a “prevenient or assisting, awakening, consequent and cooperating grace.” The Remonstrants certainly believed in grace. They affirmed that all our good works must be “ascribed to the grace of God in Christ.” But this was a coming-alongside grace instead of a unilaterally-bring-you-back-from-the-dead grace. Prevenient grace is the grace that comes before human decision and makes it possible (but not certain) for men and women to choose God. For this reason, the Arminians denied that saving grace is “irresistible.”
- Point 5 teaches that “those who are incorporated into Jesus Christ” have “abundant strength to strive against Satan, sin, and the world,” and that in this struggle the believers are helped by Christ and by “the assistance of the grace of the Holy Spirit.” But there is an “if” to this perseverance. Jesus Christ assists believers through his Spirit “if only they are prepared for warfare and desire his help and are not negligent.” In the end, the *Remonstrance of 1610* left the door open that believers might “through negligence fall away from the principle of their life in Christ” and “again embrace the present world.”

In response to the *Remonstrance of 1610*, Gomarus and others formed a Counter Remonstrant party (sometimes called the Gomarists) to oppose the Arminians. Representatives from both sides met in the spring of that year to see if their differences could be resolved. With the publication of the *Counter Remonstrance*

in 1611, it was increasingly clear to everyone involved that the two sides were only getting farther apart. The controversy further escalated when the University of Leiden appointed Arminius's successor—a man by the name of Conrad Vorstius, who was not only an Arminian but practically a Socinian. When the Arminian Simon Episcopius was named as Gomarus's replacement at Leiden, and the Arminians garnered further support from the statesman Johan van Oldenbarneveldt and the jurist-theologian Hugo Grotius, it looked like the tide had turned in favor of the Remonstrants.

As with many theological controversies throughout history, the disputing factions were disputing about more than just theology. The Netherlands had recently won independence from Spain. Some were still leery of the Spanish, while others welcomed a closer relationship. In general, the merchant class, for economic and trading reasons, desired improved relations with Spain. The clergy, on the other hand, feared that more contact with Catholic Spain would taint the theology of their churches. The lower class sided with the clergy for theological reasons, for national reasons (anti-Spain), and for class reasons (anti-merchants). Thus, the merchants saw Arminianism as favorable to their desire for improved relations with Spain, while the clergy and lower class sided with Gomarus.

In 1617 Oldenbarneveldt and the States General issued the "Sharp Resolution," rejecting the call for a national synod. Oldenbarneveldt was heralded by some as a champion of toleration, but the party of the Counter Remonstrant worried that without a national synod and with States General exercising control over ecclesiastical matters (including the authorization of soldiers to defend the Remonstrants) the conflict was only going to get worse.

That same year, the Reformed Prince Maurice, the son and heir of the beloved William of Orange, refused to worship in the church because Uytenbogaert was preaching. Oldenbarneveldt

threatened civil war, which led to his arrest by Maurice. In response, a number of the Remonstrants fled the country, and with Maurice now in charge, the States General finally approved the calling of a national assembly to address the conflict.

## The Synod

Although the controversy had national and political overtones, at heart it was an earnest theological disagreement. The differences centered on the doctrine of predestination, but confessional subscription was also a major part of the dispute, with the Remonstrants arguing for full doctrinal freedom and the Counter Remonstrants insisting that the Dutch church was a confessional church that ought to preserve theological unity and purity in the pulpit. So for the first time since 1586, the Dutch government called for a national synod, this time in the city of Dordrecht.<sup>8</sup>

The synod met from November 13, 1618, until May 29, 1619. Of the eighty-four members present, twenty-six were from Britain, Switzerland, and Germany, while the rest were Dutch.<sup>9</sup> The Dutch contingent was comprised of roughly an equal number of ministers, professors, laymen, and members of the States General. On Friday morning, November 16, the synod voted to call the Remonstrants to appear before the assembly within two weeks. On December 13 and 17, the Arminians presented *The Opinions of the Remonstrants* (also called the *Sententia*), which are crucial

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8. Of personal interest to me (and perhaps to no one else) is that my family descends from Dordrecht. I'd like to think I had a family member in attendance at the synod (hopefully on the right side!). The earliest ancestor that has been traced in my family tree is Pieter DeJong, who was born in Dordrecht in 1695 and married Neeltje Liesveld of neighboring Zwijndrecht on August 23, 1716. The first of my family to emigrate to America was Teunis P. DeJong, who was born in Holland in 1839, died in Edgerton, Minnesota, in 1925, and was married to Cornelia VanDeursen in Keokuk, Iowa, in 1861. According to family tradition, "DeJong" became "DeYoung" when Teunis (or one of his relatives?) registered to fight for the Union in the Civil War and his name was recorded with the Anglicized spelling.

9. Two delegates, Johannes Bergius and Christoph Storch from Brandenburg, were unable to come because of Lutheran opposition. An additional four delegates from France were never granted permission to leave the country. Their four seats were left open during the synod in their honor.

for understanding what Dort was aiming to criticize and correct (see Appendix 3).

By January, the Arminians were dismissed from the synod by president Johannes Bogerman for their failure to cooperate with the proceedings. Around the same time, the States General granted the synod official status as an ecclesiastical court, and by the end of March all the written opinions of the delegates had been reviewed. On April 22, 1619, the synod adopted the canons and settled, for the Netherlands and for all subsequent churches that would adopt the canons as their own, what constituted authentic Reformed faith on the points of disputed theology. The Canons of Dort were published in an official Latin edition on May 6, 1619, with approved translations into Dutch and French. In addition to the Canons, the synod also approved an official edition of the Belgic Confession, adopted a church order, and commissioned a new Dutch translation of the Bible.

The Canons of Dort, in rejecting the five points of Arminianism, outlined five points of their own. The first concerned divine election and reprobation; the second was on Christ's death and human redemption through it; the third and fourth points were on human corruption and how we convert to God; and a final point focused on the perseverance of the saints. The canons do not pretend to explain everything about Reformed theology, let alone about the entire Bible. Dort simply sought to declare what was "in agreement with the Word of God and accepted till now in the Reformed churches" concerning "Divine Predestination." And in this they are worthy to be commemorated and (more importantly) deserving of careful study and consideration.

### **Letting Grace Be Grace**

It's easy to think that the two sides in the Netherlands should have found a way to work out their differences. Oldenbarneveldt was

ready to go to civil war over the religious dispute, while Maurice, sadly, ended up condemning Oldenbarneveldt to death and had some Arminian pastors imprisoned. We cringe to see political meddling in the name of theology, not to mention the threat of violence and imprisonment that marked both sides as people of their time. But if we don't care about theological precision and definition, it's not because we are so wonderfully inclusive and loving, as much as it is that we too are people of our own time. We settle for generalities and ambiguities and wonder why anyone should demand anything more.

The stereotype of old confessions like the Canons of Dort is that they take the theology of God's Word and make it shrink-wrapped, freeze-dried, and boxed-up. Or, if we can mix our metaphors, theologizing becomes nothing more than dissecting a dead frog.

But what if another analogy is more appropriate? What if the truth we are talking about is not cold and dead, but very much alive? What if, instead of thinking about dissecting a frog, you think about defining or defending your child? If someone mistook your child for someone else, or if someone ran off with your child, you would care very much about definitions. You would want people to know the name of your child. It wouldn't be enough to just say, "I'm looking for a cute kid out there. Just bring me one." You would be precise about her name, her height, her hair, her eyes, and her voice. You would provide a careful definition of your child. Likewise, if someone misunderstood your child or attacked your child, wouldn't you do everything in your power to defend him? Of course you would, because your child is *precious*.

And so it is with the truth of God's Word. Before the Synod of Dort conducted its business, each member took a solemn oath saying that "I will only aim at the glory of God, the peace of the Church, and especially the preservation of the purity of doctrine."

They ended with a prayer: “So help me, my Savior, Jesus Christ! I beseech him to assist me by his Holy Spirit.”<sup>10</sup> The delegates at Dort were joyfully serious about the doctrine of the church.

Do we care as much about defining and defending grace?

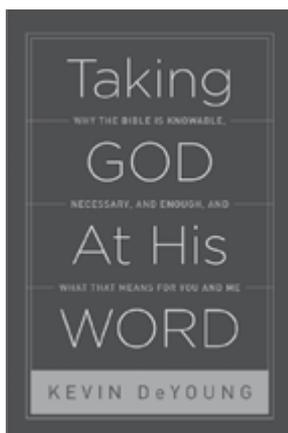
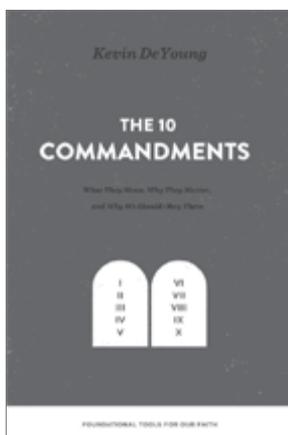
In Romans 11, Paul argues that there is a “remnant, chosen by grace” (v. 5). He then moves to defend and define this grace, maintaining that “if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace” (v. 6). Words mattered to Paul. He was never content to casually speak the same vocabulary as his opponents, if he knew they were using different dictionaries. He understood that people can champion grace, laud grace, and celebrate grace, while still losing all that makes grace grace.

At their very heart, the Canons of Dort are about the nature of grace—supernatural, unilateral, sovereign, effecting, redeeming, resurrecting grace, with all of its angularity, all of its offense to human pride, and all of its comfort for the weary soul. That’s what Dort wanted to settle. That’s what they were jealous to protect. Some words are worth the most careful definitions, just as some truths are too precious not to defend.

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10. Quoted by Fred Klooster, “Doctrinal Deliverances of Dort,” in DeJong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 79. In the rest of the oath, the members of the synod promise before God to settle the dispute over the five points using only the Bible.

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