This is lecture 21 in the series on Reformation Church History. In the last lecture we were looking at the Dutch Reformation and more particularly at the development of the Reformed church in the Netherlands, and a number of the issues associated with the development of the Reformed church and more particularly some of the most dramatic history of the Dutch Reformed Church in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century is associated with the name of James or Jacobus Arminius. It’s to Arminius and his life and the impact that he had on the Dutch Reformed Church that I would like to turn now.

Arminius ironically enough may well be the most famous theologian ever produced by the Dutch Reformed churches. The name of Arminius or of Arminianism is well known in evangelical Christian circles right down to this day, and the irony that Arminius would be the most famous of the Dutch Reformed theologians is that he rejected some of the doctrines that were most central to historic Reformed theology, and his name has become synonymous with an alternative evangelical theology to that of John Calvin. Often we hear of debates about the differing emphases of Calvinists versus Arminians, and so it’s appropriate that we spend a little time looking at the life and development of James Arminius and evaluate then his impact on the Dutch Reformation in the Dutch church.

Arminius was born around 1559 in the Netherlands, and his life was lived very much in the midst of the drama of the civil war against Spain and the development of Protestantism in the Netherlands. He was born to a Protestant family and raised in that context, and he experienced at relatively early age the death of many of his relatives, including his mother, at the hands of Spanish troops during the war. So he knew something of the seriousness of the issues of the Reformation and the seriousness of the issues of the political drive for independence among the Dutch.
His early university education was at the University of Leiden, that university that had been founded in the midst of the civil war, and he entered that university in October 1575, the twelfth student enrolled in the university. And so he was involved in the early life of that young Protestant university in the Netherlands and studied there as the first part of his Protestant education.

He was not limited, however, to that university, and being a student of promise, he went on to study elsewhere and spent part of his education at Geneva. He went to Geneva in the days when Theodore Beza was the leading influence there. You'll remember that Theodore Beza was the successor of John Calvin, the most prominent and influential Reformed theologian in many ways at the second half of the sixteenth century or certainly after Calvin's death. And Arminius going there in 1581 found himself then studying not only with Beza but also a number of other theologians in Geneva, and was drawn to reflect on his own attitudes toward theology.

We are not sure exactly where Arminius was theologically in those days. We don't know a great deal of his early life or the formation of his thought. We do know that he had some trouble in Geneva with the professors, but the best reconstruction seems to be that the trouble he had was not so much theological as it was philosophical and methodological. Arminius in the Netherlands had been trained in the philosophical system of Peter Ramus, Pierre de la Ramee, who lived from 1515 to 1572. Ramus had become a Protestant in 1561, and he had developed a philosophical system that challenged Aristotle and challenged the dominance of Aristotelian philosophy in a lot of theology of his day. Ramus felt that his philosophical system was more practical in its orientation than was the philosophy of Aristotle.

Beza himself in Geneva was a staunch Aristotelian, and it appears that there may have been some trouble between Arminius and Beza on that point. In any case, for a year or so, Arminius withdrew from Geneva and studied at Basel and then later returned to Geneva. The differences on philosophy, while serious and important, should not be overestimated in importance because in the first place there were divisions within the orthodox Reformed community on philosophy such as staunchly conservative and strict Calvinist William Perkins, often called the father of English Puritanism. William Perkins was a Ramist and saw no great threat to his Calvinist orthodoxy by being Ramist. Not only were there Ramists in the Calvinist movement generally, but Theodore Beza
himself gave Arminius a glowing letter of recommendation when he returned to the Netherlands to enter the ministry, so whatever differences of opinion may have existed in Geneva between Arminius and Beza, they seemed to have been of a second rank and seem to have been solved rather well.

Arminius had studied in Geneva with help from the government in the Netherlands, and when the government asked him to return to the Netherlands to take up his pastoral work in 1586 he did that, although he took short trip down in to Italy before he returned to the Netherlands. He no doubt, as many young people in the sixteenth century, was eager to see some of the great sites of the Renaissance as well as classical antiquity, and so he traveled in Italy. There doesn’t seem to be in fact anything strange or suspicious about this trip, but much later in his life when he was being criticized and attacked in the Netherlands, some made much of this trip and claimed that he had entered into secret negotiations with the papacy to betray the Reformation. I don’t think there’s any basis for those sorts of charges at all.

He did, then, in the year 1587 return to the Netherlands and entered the ministry of the Dutch Reformed Church there and served as a pastor for some fifteen years in the Dutch Reformed Church of Amsterdam. Amsterdam was one of the leading cities of the Netherlands at the time. It was particularly a city of growing commercial importance. Before the outbreak of the war with Spain, the most important commercial city in the Netherlands had been Antwerp, but with the war, the harbor of Antwerp had been blockaded and then later the harbor began to silt up so that it became increasingly difficult for ships to enter the harbor. Gradually then commerce and trade began to shift somewhat north to the port of Amsterdam, and so Amsterdam became increasingly important in economic life of the Netherlands. And serving as one of a number of pastors there, Arminius entered the important social and cultural and political life of the Netherlands, as well as the religious life there.

He married into a very good family there, a prosperous merchant family with strong connections to the central government, and that may well have had some influence on Arminius’s own thinking, particularly on his thinking of the relationship of church and state. In the last lecture we talked something about the conflict between the Erastian view of church-state relations which held that ultimately the state was in charge of the church and the more Genevean or Calvinist view of church relations that held that
the church had its own independent realm of responsibility and that in a sense the state ought to keep hands off the church as it pursued its own discipline.

Whether because of previous convictions or perhaps also in part, at least, because of his marriage into the important governmental circles of the Netherlands, Arminius came out staunchly in favor of the Erastian position, and in that regard he was holding to a minority view among the Dutch clergy. Most of the clergy of the Dutch Reformed Church seemed to agree with Calvin that the church ought to have a measure of independence and right to discipline its own members. In any case, that led to a number of confrontations, not all of them bitter, among the clergy, and several different church orders adopted according to which influence in the government was dominant, but it was clear that Arminius was in favor an Erastian settlement, whereas most of the leaders of the church were in favor of more independence and a more Genevan settlement.

That was one issue, then, that emerged during the years of Arminius’s pastorate. Other issues were theological in character and raised some questions in some lines of the character of Arminius’s theology and thought. Those questions were raised first in 1591, that is, after Arminius had been a pastor for about four years. He was preaching a series of sermons through the book of Romans, and he had come to the seventh chapter of Romans where Paul speaks of his sinfulness and about his being a bond slave to sin. He concludes that, you remember, with the great anguished cry, “The good that I would, that I do not; the evil that I would not, that I do,” and the question is in what sense is Paul speaking there in Romans 7? And there had been two primary interpretations of that passage.

The one interpretation is the one adopted by John Calvin and the one that was dominant in Reformed circles in Europe. That was the interpretation that says Paul is still speaking here as a Christian. He’s speaking as a regenerate man. He is reflecting on the continuing struggle that the Christian has, even as a Christian, with the problem of sin in his own life. The Christian is not entirely sanctified. The Christian has the remnants of the old nature, and at times he realizes that power of sin, the reality of the old nature in him so strongly. He has such strong feelings about it that he can speak in the strong language that the apostle does. And so in effect, Calvin’s position was when you think about the character of the Christian life, you have to think of it in terms of both the
Romans 7 and Romans 8. It is both a struggle, a struggle that is frustrating and sometimes represents defeat for the Christian in his struggle against sin, but it’s also a struggle that has victory and assurance and confidence, as we see in Romans 8. So as I say, that was the position of Calvin and the position that dominated among Calvinists in the sixteenth century.

But Arminius when he came to that text felt that it did not represent Paul’s speaking as a Christian and as a regenerate man, but that it represented Paul’s reflection on his life before he became a Christian. And so Arminius in effect interpreted Romans 7, particularly verses 14 and following, as Paul thinking about himself before he became a Christian, and then Romans 8 talks about the Christian experience—that’s Paul as a Christian we hear him in Romans 8. On one level, of course, this is a matter of biblical interpretation and exegesis, and there’s no reason on the surface of it that people even committed to the same theological position could not differ on the interpretation of Romans 7, and in fact that difference of interpretation has continued.

In our century, for example, a Dutch Reformed theologian, Herman Ridderbos, has agreed with the position that Arminius took, a position that has tended to be called the Arminian position down to our time, and so there are rather orthodox Calvinists who have taken a position similar to Arminius, but in Arminius’s own day there were some of his fellow ministers who were very concerned about this and were offended by the position Arminius took. They felt that it represented in effect a Christian triumphalism, too strong a sense of victory and triumph over sin, and was a bad exegesis that did not take the ongoing seriousness of sin realistically. The strict Calvinists also pointed out that in Romans 7 Paul says, “I delight in the law in the inner man,” and Calvin has said, “Surely one who has a doctrine of sin that recognizes the unregenerate as totally depraved could not interpret Paul when he says, ‘I delight in the law in the inward man,’ as being unregenerate. Someone who delights in the law in the inward man must surely be regenerate.”

So these differences developed, and there was quite a bit of tension over it. Finally even the city council had to intervene to quiet things down, and they were quieted down and so for a time, things seemed calm again. But in 1593 Arminius had reached Romans 9. He seems to have been moving rather slowly through the book of Romans and preaching very carefully and particularly on the text, but in any case, by 1593 he had reached Romans 9
and once again there was a good deal of unrest and uncertainty in
the church because his views did not seem to accord well with the
traditional Calvinist teaching on the interpretation of Romans
9. And so once again he was the object of some controversy and
some investigation, but once again the controversy seems to
have quieted down and for the next twenty years Arminius seems
to have functioned without much conflict and without much
controversy. That may be because Arminius was more carefully
keeping his views to himself. It may be also that he was not
choosing or didn’t have to speak to controversial issues, but in
any case, he did keep his views to himself and yet was recognized
as a man of talent and ability.

In 1599 the synods of North and South Holland asked Arminius
to prepare a refutation of Anabaptist doctrine, and he agreed
to that commission. The Anabaptists, you remember, had been
a significant movement in the Netherlands and continue to be,
and the Reformed church felt it was important to have a carefully
worked out theological refutation of Anabaptism, and it certain
shows some regard for Arminius’s ability that this charge was
given to him. It was a charge that Arminius never fulfilled, and
that’s led to a lot of speculation—whether he was somewhat
sympathetic to the Anabaptist position at least on predestination.
They also did not adopt a strong Calvinistic view there. He doesn’t
seem to have been drawn to their view of baptism, but in any case,
whatever the reasons he never did finish that project.

In 1603 the plague hit the theological faculty at Leiden, and two
of its three members died. This led to important considerations in
the university as to what ought to be done to replace the members
who had died, and there was a strong sense that since Leiden had
become an important university, had become a highly regarded
university among the Reformed and many students from many
parts of Europe were coming to study there, there was a sense
that there needed to be a good, strong appointment to that
faculty, and the only surviving member, Gomarus, was a staunch
Calvinist He too thought that there needed to be a strong addition
to that faculty to aid in his work. One of the people appointed was
another strong Calvinist. He succeeded his father in that role, and
the other member, the third member then, that was appointed
was Arminius.

The appointment of Arminius immediately raised concern in
orthodox Calvinist circles because of the controversies that had
surrounded him twenty years earlier. There were people who felt
that the University of Leiden must be an absolutely orthodox institution, its faithfulness in teaching needed to be protected at all costs, and therefore they felt anyone who had even a slight indication of heterodoxy should be eliminated. It may also have been that some of the church leaders were unhappy at the advancement of one who had such strong Erastian feelings and such strong connections with the merchant/oligarch class in the Netherlands.

In any case, the government seemed insistent that they would pursue the appointment of Arminius, and an interview was arranged with Gomarus. Gomarus interviewed Arminius and declared on the result of that interview that he was perfectly content to have Arminius as a colleague at the university. This too is interesting. Gomarus was a strict Calvinist. He would later become a very heated critic of Arminius, and yet in 1603, the two of them met and talked and Gomarus was willing to give Arminius quite a favorable reaction from the interview. How can that be? Here again we just don’t know if Gomarus failed to ask the right questions, whether Arminius was not entirely candid in his answers, or whether Arminius’s position wasn’t solid and developed after he took office. This latter option doesn’t seem the most likely one, because Arminius very shortly before his appointment at Leiden had written a treatise that enables us to get some sense of his own views right on the eve of his appointment.

It was a treatise that he wrote in reaction to a work of William Perkins. William Perkins, the strict Calvinist Puritan from England, in 1598 had written a pamphlet on the order and mode of predestination, and in that pamphlet Perkins had presented a very strong Calvinist view of predestination. Arminius had responded by writing a work, his only really large work as a pastor, entitled “The Examination of Perkins’ Pamphlet on the Order and Mode of Predestination.” This work was completed in 1602, but 1602 is also the year of Perkins’s death, and Arminius apparently decided since the protagonist was now dead not to publish the work, and indeed the work was not published until 1617, seven years after Arminius’s death, and therefore it was not a document generally available so that people in Arminius’s own day might know his views, but it gives us now in retrospect an opportunity to evaluate Arminius’s views. And although the tone of the examination is largely questioning, it’s more an argument that often says, Perkins isn’t really convincing at this point. I’m not persuaded that Perkins is right here. The argument doesn’t hold up here. Arminius doesn’t spend a lot of time presenting positively
his own points of view, and yet at the places where he does, it’s rather clear that his views on predestination are not those of the Calvinist tradition and not those in accord with the majority view in the Dutch Reformed Church. In any case, Arminius did receive the appointment, and Arminius did begin to teach at the university.

Soon questions began to circulate. Students began to say that he was saying strange things in his lectures, rumors began to circulate that he was holding private sessions with certain students, complaints were heard that he was assigning readings from authors that were unreliable, and all sorts of controversy by 1605 and thereafter began to circle around Arminius’s head. What was really going on? What kind of teaching was he presenting to the students? And increasingly the debate began to become public. Increasingly the issue of predestination was at the very heart and focus of the discussion.

Arminius responded to criticism by saying that he was being attacked by supralapsarians. Now this gets us into one of the subtle and complex issues of Calvinism in Arminius’s day. There were debates among Calvinists on the order of the decrees of God in eternity; that is, there were debates about how one could best try to think the thoughts of God after Him and to try to understand what kind of logical order or relationship existed in God’s eternal planning of human history and particularly His planning of predestination.

And by Arminius’s day in the early seventeenth century, two views had emerged in Calvinist circles. The one view was known as supralapsarianism and the other as infralapsarianism. The two views related to the exact role of the fall in relation to the other decrees. _Lapsa_ in Latin means “fall,” and so the supralapsarians and the infralapsarians were talking about the relative place of the fall in God’s eternal decree. Remember we are not talking about what happens in history. We’re talking about what goes on in God’s mind in eternity. And the majority opinion was the infralapsarian opinion that said that God decrees to create mankind and then He decrees to permit the fall, and on the basis of the fall, then, He decrees to divide mankind into the predestined and the reprobate, into those who are elected unto life and those who are reprobated unto death. And so the final division of mankind into the saved and the lost is based on the eternal predestinating decree of God which takes into account the reality of a fall. That’s the infralapsarian view, a view that says
in effect the divine discrimination between elect and reprobate takes place in light of the reality of the fall.

The supralapsarians took the opposite point of view and said that the decision of God to divide mankind into the elect and the reprobate precedes any permission or decree of the fall, and that therefore the discrimination between men is before any realization of the fall as a reality and that the fall then is one of the means by which God accomplishes that division and discrimination.

These alternative points of view led to great debate and discussion among the Calvinists, but they always agreed to disagree. They always agreed that the differences on this issue should not be raised to confessional status and should not divide churches, but they were differences that were held rather strongly. The infralapsarians felt their view accorded better with the Bible's revelation and with the prominent place that the fall had in the history of mankind’s relationship with God, and the infralapsarians felt that to say that God had intended to divide mankind into elect and reprobate without taking into account the fall, therefore without taking into account sin, seemed unjust and made God seem arbitrary and perhaps even tyrannical.

On the other hand, the supralapsarians felt that if God was sovereign, then the fall could not be a factor which somehow surprised God or got in His way, and therefore the majesty of God, the sovereignty of God required that He intend to divide mankind even before any historical reality of the fall might be contemplated and that the fall then would only serve His purposes. The supralapsarians also felt that such a view accorded better with their Aristotelian philosophy. Not all of the supralapsarians were Aristotelian, but many of the early ones were, and they took the Aristotelian philosophical notion very seriously that what is last in action must be first in intention on God’s part. What is last in action must be first in intention, and what is last in God's action? It's to be the judge. It’s to divide the saved from the lost. And if that’s the last action that God performs, then it must be His first intention. It must be the plan that He had from the very beginning, and therefore the supralapsarians argued that their view protected better the sovereignty of God and made theology more consistent and logical.

As I say, there were these tensions within orthodox Calvinism, and Arminius’s reaction was that he was simply being attacked by the supralapsarians, he was being criticized by supralapsarians, and
he felt that this was unfair and resisted this with might and main, and he pointed out that Gomarus was a supralapsarian, and so he said that this attack from Gomarus reflected the supralapsarian position that Gomarus held. Gomarus responded very strongly to this. He said that this was an unfair attack on Arminius, that it had nothing to do with supralapsarianism and, indeed, the real issue was justification by faith. And that’s an interesting response on Gomarus’s part. Why justification by faith? Gomarus reasoned this way: that the historic Protestant position was that we are saved by faith, by trusting in the righteousness of Christ, and recognizing that we have no good works of our own, and that we cannot hope to earn God’s favor in any way by any good work, and that faith is not a good work. Faith is a gift of God. And since it is a gift of God from beginning to end, it is God’s work and man contributes nothing to it.

And so Gomarus argued if God’s predestination isn’t behind the work of redemption, if predestination doesn’t determine to whom the gift of faith is given, then the doctrine of justification by faith itself is undermined and faith somehow becomes a good work that man accomplishes, and Gomarus feared that Arminius was doing precisely that. He was making faith in some sense a good work, and so Gomarus said it has nothing to do with the intricacies of supralapsarianism versus infralapsarianism; rather it has everything to do with the doctrine of justification. And as those two points of view were debated, more and more of the church was drawn into this issue, and many infralapsarians joined Gomarus saying that Gomarus was right and that the issue was not at all supralapsarian versus infralapsarian, but it was a matter of basic theological issues about faith and grace and salvation.

The strict Calvinists, because of their notions of the independence of the church, thought that they ought be able to investigate Arminius and subject him to discipline. Arminius, being an Erastian, appealed to the board of trustees of the University of Leiden, and the board of trustees in turn with government support ruled that the church could not investigate Arminius’s views. And this led to growing tension and growing unhappiness in both the church and state.

Late in 1608 Arminius read a document entitled “The Declaration of Sentiments” to the government, and this he declared that he agreed with the confession, the Belgian Confession—the Heidelberg Catechism—even though he felt they needed to be revised, and he said that he was being attacked for his rejection
of supralapsarianism. In this “Declaration of Sentiments,” he then goes on to talk about his own doctrinal position, and that statement caused a number of concerns even further among orthodox Calvinists, because it became rather clear that Arminius was not holding to a notion that God had sovereignly from eternity chosen some to life and left others to death, but he was giving a role for man’s will in the process. Now he tried to restrict the role of man very much. He stressed the necessity of grace and the priority of grace. He said that man could do nothing as a sinner on his own; that God must initiate the process of salvation, but Arminius did say that in the process of salvation, man with grace can resist and reject grace and so be lost. And for the strict Calvinists that was an unacceptable limitation on God, that was rendering of the process of salvation uncertain, and so they attacked Arminius even more heatedly. But the government continued to protect Arminius, and soon Arminius was removed from the stage by his death in October 1609.

With Arminius’s death, there were some who thought that the issues and tensions in the church would now at last be removed, but that was clearly a point of view which was unduly optimistic and failed to recognize that there were others in the church, although only a minority, who agreed with Arminius and thought his views were correct.

1609 then became a very important year in the history of the Netherlands. It was the year, as we said, that Arminius died. It was also the year in which a truce was signed with Spain, and that was important because the Dutch had been devoting tremendous energies to the war, it had sapped a lot of the strength of the nation, and there were many in the Netherlands who wanted a peace treaty, who wanted the war ended. And this peace party had worked hard to try to accomplish that, but they had two problems to face.

The first problem the peace party had was that there were some in the Netherlands who felt that no peace should ever be made with Spain until the southern part of the Netherlands was liberated, and these people who wanted to continue the war were particularly some of the strict Calvinist clergy as well as Prince Maurice, the great general, the son of William of Orange and others in the society who saw a continuation of the war as a basic patriotic duty to liberate the southern part of the Netherlands, what we know today as Belgium. Many of the leaders in government, however, and especially those who were merchants felt that the war had
caused far too much trouble for the Dutch economy and that it was now time for peace.

Not only was there resistance to the notion of peace in the Netherlands; there was also resistance in Spain, and many in Spain felt that it was wrong to conduct a peace treaty with heretics, that the North ought to be captured and be won both to Spanish control and to the Roman Catholic Church. And so with so much resistance to the idea of a formal peace, what was signed in 1609 was a twelve-year truce, and that twelve-year truce then gave everybody some breathing room. The war had been hard on the Spanish as well as on the Dutch, and everyone was eager for some relief, and so a twelve-year truce was signed.

But one of the perhaps unexpected results of the twelve-year truce was that it allowed tensions within the Netherlands that had long been suppressed because of the war and the threat of the Spanish now to surface, and those tension took several forms. One of the tensions that surfaced was the tension between Maurice and Oldenbarnevelt as to who was going to be the dominant influence in the politics and government of the Netherlands, but it also allowed this theological tension between the Arminians and the Calvinists to become more prominent and more explosive in Dutch society. In other words, the external Spanish threat that had held Dutch society together was now removed, and it allowed some of the internal pressures to manifest themselves and to become very serious.

The first evidence of that I suppose we could say was the preparation of a document in 1610 called “The Remonstrance of 1610.” Remonstrance was a word that had been used in Dutch politics for a long time to refer to a petition, we might almost call it—an appeal, a written appeal to the government. And in 1610 forty-two ministers had prepared a remonstrance on theological issues that was presented to the States of Holland and particularly to Oldenbarnevelt as the prime representative of the States of Holland. And this remonstrance, while a lengthy document, summarized their theological concerns in five points. And so “The Remonstrance of 1610” became the kind of banner later of the Remonstrants as they were known—the Arminians—and the Arminians, then, had presented to the States of Holland a five-point summary of their theological position and asked the States of Holland to declare that their theological position was to be tolerated in the church, that it was a legitimate theological point of view.
Oldenbarnevelt was a very clever diplomat, and he took one look at this remonstrance and decided that it was bound to be explosive and to cause a great deal of trouble, and for a time he tried to keep it a secret. But we all know what tends to happen with government secrets: they leak out eventually, and the remonstrance leaked out and caused [dismay] among the strict Calvinist clergy when it got well-known, and they felt the views expressed in this remonstrance were utterly unacceptable and needed to be condemned, not tolerated by the church.

Now I’d like to read to you from “The Remonstrance.” I’d like to read to you the original five points of Arminianism so you can get a sense of the way in which they expressed their own theological point of view, and as I go through I’ll comment on the reactions of the strict Calvinists to these five points. The first point of “The Remonstrance” reads like this: “We believe that God by an eternal and immutable decree has in Jesus Christ, His Son, 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, and persevere in this faith and obedience of faith to the end. And on the other hand to leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath and condemn them as alienated from Christ, according to the word of the holy Gospel in John 3:36: ‘He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; and whosoever is disobedient to the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him,’ and also other passages of Scripture.”

So the Arminians in this first point are saying, Yes, God has a predestinating decree. The Arminians recognized after all that Paul in Romans 9 and Ephesians 1 talks about predestination; therefore, every Bible-believing Christians has to have some doctrine of predestination, and the Arminians said, Our doctrine of predestination is that God has a decree by which He’s determined to save (to save who?) those who believe in Christ.” So the decree according to Arminius is (or to these Arminians) is a decree to save who will believe and persevere in faith. And so predestination for these Arminians is not the predestination of individuals sovereignly called by God, but it is the predestination of a class of people who meet the conditions of belief. And so God doesn’t predestine anyone individually to be saved, but in his predestinated decree declares that anyone who will believe will be saved.
Now, of course, the strict Calvinists believe that anyone who believed would be saved, but they said predestination is the determination of God to give the gift of faith to some so that they might be saved. And they felt, therefore, that Arminius and his followers had missed the reality of predestination as a sovereign act of God and that they had made predestination conditional. You see, it is conditioned on belief. Only those who meet the condition of belief are elect. And the Calvinist response then was to insist that predestination is unconditional, and so in this first point of “The Remonstrance” we can see the disagreement between the Calvinists and the Arminians—the Arminians holding to conditional election and the Calvinists to unconditional election.

The second point of “The Remonstrance” reads this way, “We believe in agreement with this, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, 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, according to the word of the Gospel John 3:16, ‘God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life,’ and in then 1 John 2:2, ‘He is the propitiation for our sins and not only for ours, but for the sins of the whole world.’” The Arminians here in the second point are saying Christ dies for everyone; for all men and for every man, and therefore He merited reconciliation and forgiveness of all men, although that forgiveness is only enjoyed or received by faith, and this then is a statement of a universal atonement—Christ died for all men. He merited forgiveness for all men.

The strict Calvinists rejected this view and said, Christ did not die for all men; He died for the elect alone. Calvinists felt that to hold to a universal atonement as the Arminians did undermined the substitutionary theory of the atonement. How can Christ substitute for some people who aren’t really saved? Did Christ really bear their sins or not? Are they really forgiven or not? If Christ bore their sin, then God cannot punish them for their sins, and so the Calvinists insisted that Christ had died only for the elect and that all of the elect were saved by the merit of His death. But the Arminians held that Christ had died for all men and for every man and that death also was conditional—conditional on faith and receiving the merits of His death. So here again a
difference—the Arminians holding to a universal atonement and the Calvinists holding to a limited or a definite atonement.

We’ll go on looking at the other points of remonstrance next time.