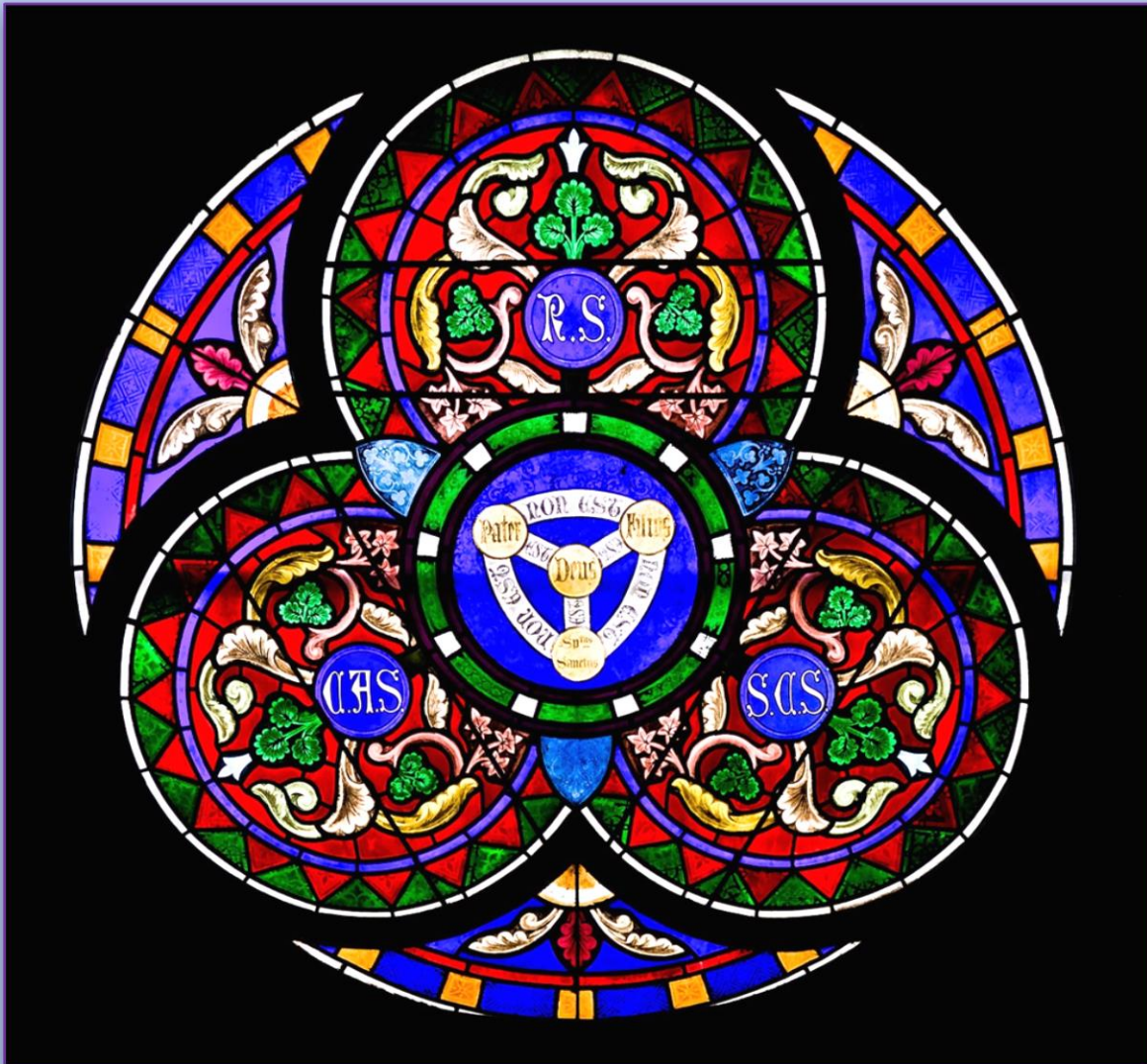


# CITC ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL



# WESTMINSTER CONFESSON OF FAITH

# **CHAPTER 1**

# **OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURE**

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **OF GOD, AND OF THE HOLY TRINITY**

## Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter Two: Of God, and of the Holy Trinity

These sections teach us:

1. THERE IS ONLY ONE LIVING AND TRUE GOD
  2. GOD IS SPIRIT
  3. GOD POSSESSES PERFECT INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES
  4. GOD POSSESSES PERFECT COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES
  5. GOD IS NOT DEPENDENT UPON ANY CREATED THING, BUT IS ABSOLUTELY INDEPENDENT FROM AND SOVEREIGN OVER ALL.
- The Doctrine of God begins with the assertion that God is, and everything testifies to this.
    - What else do the heavens declare, what else does the firmament show? [Ps 19].
  - It has been a popular (and foolish) endeavor of mankind to “prove” the existence of God, as if the evidence were hard to find, but could be proved with man’s intellect alone.
    - It would be more correct to say that the evidence is impossible to ‘find’ when one is dead in trespasses and sins, but the evidence is impossible to *escape anywhere*, when one is regenerated by God’s Holy Spirit.
    - When we get to Chapter 10 (“Of Effectual Calling”) we will unpack this further and see that Christians have no difficulty in seeing the evidences and manifestations of God everywhere.
  - This Chapter shows us that we should not try to “prove” that God exists: He is self-existent, and self-testifying.
    - As Hebrews 11:6 reminds us, we cannot come to God until after we have been able to believe that He is.
  - When we speak of God as being pure *Spirit*, we mean that He doesn’t have a body like men.
    - Even though human traits are frequently ascribed to God in Scripture as allegories, metaphors, similes, and amplifications: ears, eyes, hands, right hand, etc.
    - Because God is pure Spirit, He is not subject to limitations of ANY kind.
  - When we say that God is *omnipresent*, we mean that the whole of complete and infinite God is found everywhere at the same time.
  - When we speak of His *omnipotence*, we understand that He has unlimited (infinite) ability to do whatsoever it is His good pleasure to do.
  - God has been able to predestinate all things because He not only can, does actually work all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11).
  - He is infinite in understanding and knowledge (*omniscient*).
    - There never was a time when God did not know all.
    - He knows, and always had known, the future as He knows the past.
      - We know things *mediately* (by intuition or perception: obtained by means of inference or testimony); God knows things *immediately* (not through, or by means of the senses).
      - We know things *successively* (serially, one thing after another); God knows by one all comprehending *insight*.
      - We know only in part; God’s knowledge is exhaustively complete.
      - We know as lowly creatures; He knows as exalted creator.
  - For us then (finite creatures) to seek to “prove” the existence of God, define (literally draw a line around) the extents of His knowledge, power, presence, or abilities is the very *definition* of presumptuous arrogance.

**THE FINITE CANNOT HOPE TO CONTAIN THE INFINITE**



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**THE FINITE CANNOT HOPE TO CONTAIN THE INFINITE**

## WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, CHAPTER 2

Section III. In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.<sup>a</sup> The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father;<sup>b</sup> the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.<sup>c</sup>

*a.* Matthew 3:16-17

<sup>16</sup> And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;

<sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Matthew 28:19

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

2 Corinthians 13:14

<sup>14</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

1 John 5:7&8

<sup>7</sup> For there are three that testify:

<sup>8</sup> the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.

*b.* John 1:14, 18

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

*c.* John 15:26

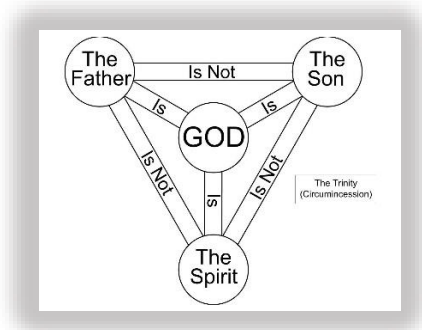
<sup>26</sup> "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

Galatians 4:6

<sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

## Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 2.3

- The previous two sections dealt primarily with the ESSENCE of God- The ONTOLOGICAL TRINITY.
- This section primarily deals with the ECONOMIC TRINITY- the manner in which God exists:
  - One God in Three (distinct) Persons
  - Each of these three Persons is entirely God (not parts of God)
  - Each of these three Persons have distinctions one from the other.
  - In Theology, we call this “circumcession”



- Frequently, Christians are accused of pushing this doctrine as solely a New Testament Concept
  - Jews and Muslims (and other monotheists) accuse us of worshiping a new and a *different* god, than the God of Abraham.
  - The rhetorical question is therefore asked, “Is the doctrine of the Trinity revealed in the Old Testament, or is it merely revealed in the New Testament?” A fair question.
  - Perhaps more germane to our discussion, it is not precisely correct to say that the “Trinity” is not clearly revealed in either testament.
    - *B.B. Warfield: “We cannot speak of the doctrine of the Trinity... if we study exactness of speech, as revealed in the New Testament, any more than we can speak of it as revealed in the Old Testament. The Old Testament was written before its revelation; the New Testament after it. The revelation itself was made not in word, but in deed. It was made in the incarnation of God the Son, and the outpouring of God the Holy Spirit. The revelation of the two Testaments to this revelation is in the one case that of preparation for it, and in the other that of the product of it.”*
  - So, merely looking for “proof texts” will not tell the entire story. It is an unfolding tale.
  - God revealed Himself by supernatural deeds, along with which He gradually gave more and more verbal interpretation. Only as redemption was fully worked out, was God Himself fully made known.
  - So, in Scripture we have the record of what God has done, and what He has said by way of interpreting His actions.
  - The summation is the recorded proof: The Father manifestly is God, Jesus is just a clearly God, as is the Holy Spirit fully God. One God in three distinct persons.
  - The statement of summary is that God the Father exists FROM eternity; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.
- Nothing in these statements should be interpreted to say that the Old Testament does not reveal a Triune God.
  - The God revealed in the Old Testament is fully God and Triune, although not fully revealed in the Old Testament, pending the full revelation of Christ.
  - Many things in the Old Testament simply CANNOT be understood EXCEPT in the light of the now fully revealed doctrine of the Trinity.

- How else can we hope to understand instances in the OT (e.g., Gen. 1:1-3) where there are distinct references to God, God the Spirit, and God the Word. These make a strictly non-trinitarian, monotheistic deity hard to understand or reconcile.
- In Gen. 1:26 God takes counsel with Himself, and speaks *with* Himself of fashioning man “in our image.”
- Gen. 11:5 & 7, speaking of the tower of Babel says, “let us go down.”
- The “Angel of Jehovah” is frequently

# **CHAPTER 3**

## **OF GOD'S ETERNAL DECREE**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 3:

### Of God's Eternal Decree

Section I. God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass<sup>a</sup>; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin<sup>b</sup>, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established<sup>c</sup>.

*a. Rom 9:15, 18; 11:33; Eph 1:11; Heb 6:17. • b. James 1:13, 17; 1 John 1:5. • c. Prov 16:33; Mat 17:12; John 19:11; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28.*

Section II. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions<sup>a</sup>, yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions<sup>b</sup>.

*a. 1 Sam 23:11-12; Mat 11:21, 23; Acts 15:18. • b. Rom 9:11, 13, 16, 18.*

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

- God has predetermined from eternity-past, everything that will happen into eternity-future.
- Nothing is hidden from His sight, or exists outside of His Sovereign Will.
- There is nothing too large or small for His scrutiny, or excluded from his predetermination.
- This does NOT make God the author of Sin.
- God does not force men to act apart from their nature, but man's nature makes him choose his sin.
- God's certain determination of a future event, works in concert with the fact that whoever performs the act will do so freely, and therefore with guilt.
- The Confession calls these "second causes."
- "Freedom of the Will" of man means that a man is free to choose to do only things he is *able* to do.... Which does not include saving himself through any act of his own will.
- The free actions of men are predestined by God. The actions are BOTH *free* AND *predestined* to occur.
  - Christians repent, believe, and seek to do the will of God because we WANT to.
  - But it is God which works in us that resolve and directs our actions by his good pleasure (Cf. Phil. 2:13).
  - There is, in our case an internal operation of the Holy Spirit, which is totally absent from the hearts of the wicked... so THEIR actions operate entirely according to their will to continue in their wickedness.
- The converted and the unconverted are equally free to do only what God has predestined that they shall do.
  - In the case of the unconverted who are not elect, the fact that they are never going to be regenerated by God makes it inevitable that they will ever do only evil... simply because they want to do so. He who is evil by nature must necessarily choose evil.
- God's predetermination of what shall come to pass in time, is not dependent upon His merely seeing what a man's "free will" will lead him of his own volition to do, then merely declaring what He sees will happen apart from His determined will... that He does not predetermine.
  - This is fundamentally Deism, or Soft Open Theism.... That God does not have the ability to control His Creation.
  - It is NOT a question of *predestination* OR *foreknowledge*;
  - It IS a question of *predestination* AND *foreknowledge*:
    - Does God know for certain what will happen before it happens? YES.
    - If God knows that a thing is certain to happen before it happens, the logical question is, "what MAKES it certain?" GOD HIMSELF MAKES IT CERTAIN
  - God foresees with certainty, because He guarantees the certainty.
  - His *predestination* of the holiness of the Elect is the cause of the holiness that He *foresees*.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 3:

### Of God's Eternal Decree

Section III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels <sup>a</sup> are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death <sup>b</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> 1 Tim. 5:21; Matt. 25:41

<sup>b</sup> Rom. 9:22-23; Eph. 1:5-6; Prov. 16:4

Section IV. These angels and men, thus predestinated, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished <sup>a</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> 2 Tim. 2:19; John 13:18

Section V. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory <sup>a</sup>, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto <sup>b</sup>; and all to the praise of His glorious grace <sup>c</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> Eph. 1:4, 9, 11; Rom. 8:30; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Thess. 5:9

<sup>b</sup> Rom. 9:11, 13, 16; Eph. 1:4, 9

<sup>c</sup> Eph. 1:6, 12

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

"The preceding sections have shown that God predetermines all events of every kind that come to pass. These sections further expound one aspect of that totality of predetermined things. Namely, the eternal destiny of men and angels. These sections teach (1) that God decrees who shall be saved and who shall be left in their lost estate, (2) that this determination is unchangeable, (3) that God's decision is not based on any condition which He foresees will be fulfilled by them, and (4) that the ultimate purpose which God has in this is the manifestation of His own glory."

- Scripture is clear, mankind's ego drives his perennial desire to have a higher opinion of his abilities than actually exists.
- God's predestinating will is not dependent upon anything that men may (or may not) 'deserve'.
- Man deserves nothing but God's wrath, damnation, and judgement.
- God gives some men what they richly deserve (damnation), but granting undeserved grace to others (salvation).
- Jacob and Esau classic Biblical example (Romans 9:11, 18, 21).
- God's sovereign determination of our souls' destinies is not conditional on anything outside His own will.
- Salvation (and Reprobation) are for God's Glory.
  - He will bring glory to Himself.
  - God will manifest His glory.
  - He will display the perfection of His holiness by wrath against sin in the destruction of the wicked.
  - He will display the same perfection of His holiness by the perfection of His mercy and love in saving the elect.
  - God has the right to do HIS WILL with HIS CREATION, whether men or angels

#### ROMANS 9:19-24

<sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" <sup>20</sup> But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" <sup>21</sup> Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? <sup>22</sup> What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, <sup>23</sup> in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— <sup>24</sup> even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 3:

### Of God's Eternal Decree

Section VI. VI. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, fore-ordained all the means thereunto<sup>a</sup>. Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ<sup>b</sup>, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified<sup>c</sup>, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation<sup>d</sup>. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only<sup>e</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> Eph 1:4-5; Eph 2:10; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2

<sup>b</sup> 1 Thess. 5:9-10; Titus 2:14

<sup>c</sup> Rom 8:30; Eph 1:5; 2 Thess. 2:13

<sup>d</sup> 1 Pet 1:5

<sup>e</sup> John 6:64-65; 8:47; 10:26; 17:9; Rom 8:28-39; 1 John 2:19

#### **OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

"This section of the Confession teaches (1) that God 'in determining the ends He intends to accomplish...at the same time determines the means by which He intends to accomplish them,' (2) that God has determined that the elect shall be saved (ordinarily) by 'effectual calling, justification, adoption, sanctification and perseverance in grace,' and (3) that those for whom the divinely appointed means of grace are lacking are not among the elect (with exceptions noted in Chapter X, Section III)\*."

- God is the God of means and provision, as well as the God of predestination and election.
- What God purposes to accomplish, He surely makes happen, often through many very complicated agencies and methods.
- There is gravity, sunshine, rain, summer, winter, etc., etc. (*ad nauseum*), without which there would be no life, growth, harvest, or sustenance. These means seem *ordinary* to us, and their outcomes predictable and expected: plant in the spring, rains provide life and growth through the summer, harvest in autumn yields sustenance through the winter. Rinse and repeat.
- It is the same with the *effecting* of our election through redemption in time. As Peter shows us:
  - [1 Peter 1:2]: We are *eternally* "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father..." but *in time* grown up "through the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for the sprinkling with His blood."
  - [2 Peter 1:10]: We are to, "be all the more diligent to *confirm* our calling and election."
  - Our diligence is *BECAUSE* of our election, not because there is no election without it.
  - Our diligence will prove to be the means whereby our divinely ordained election is revealed.
- Paul links our divine *predestination* (our end) with our *calling, justification, and glorification* (the means to our end).
  - Romans 8:30: "And those whom He predestined the also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified, He also glorified."
- The Apostles saw an inseparable link between the END decreed by God, and the STEPS He ordained leading up to that end.
  - The Plan of God is never contradicted by the works of God by which the plan is executed.
  - The Father planned to save some, Christ died to save them, and the Holy Spirit see to it that the all actually and infallibly come to possess their salvation.
- It is not possible to reverse this order (to separated foreknowledge from predestination- 'Open Theism'), nor to remove all restrictions for *calling, justification, and glorification*, from God's predetermined election of some and reprobation of others ('universal atonement' or 'unlimited atonement' of Christ - i.e., salvation *available* to all, but *certain* for none).
  - For, even though Christ's sacrifice was made a *ransom for all* "...for all time, a single sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:12), it becomes *efficacious* only for those who are led by the Holy Spirit to believe in Christ. "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." (Hebrews 10:14; see also through the end of the chapter).

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\* WCF, Chapter 10, Section 3: "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth. So also, are all other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word." [Cf., Luke 18:15-16 and John 3:3, 5 and Acts 2:38-39 and Rom 8:9 and 1 John 5:12 compared together. • John 3:8. • Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:12.



- It seems somehow 'kinder' by man's reckoning, that God should not 'limit' salvation only to those elect for whom the means of achieving heaven are provided, and to make glory available to all.
  - But this system makes Christ's atonement itself subject to the caprice of man's will: Christ's salvation *available* to all (subject only to each man's "free will"), but *certain* for none.
  - This system also would sacrifice God in order to give *some* saving grace to everyone (which ultimately is powerless to save anyone absolutely due to the same caprice). If one is free to choose the obtaining of grace, they must as well be free to reject it later (more on this in Chapter 16).
  - It also chips away at the 'Unity' of the Trinity:
    - A God in which there are Persons in sharp disagreement is not the God of Scripture.
      - If God the Father foresees all coming but the Son fails to save them....
      - If God the Father does not foresees some but the Sons saves them anyway...
      - If God the Son dies to save everyone but the Spirit leads only some of them...
      - If God the Father foresees and the Son saves but the Spirit leads none...
      - If the Spirit leads some whom the Father has not foreseen nor the Son saved.
    - It ultimately makes all Three Persons in the Godhead subject to the wills of every individual created soul.

*"How amazing the perversity and darkness of man- to sacrifice God for universal saving grace which (by their own account) does not work anyway"* G.I. Williamson, The Westminster Confession of Faith

*"It is impossible to contend that God intends the gift of his son for all men alike and equally and at the same time intends that it shall not actually save all but only a select body which he himself provides for it. The schematization of the order of decrees ... in a word, necessarily implies a chronological relation of precedence and subsequence among the decrees, the assumption of which abolishes God, and this can be escaped only by altering the nature of the atonement.... and Christianity is wounded at its very heart... A conditional substitution being an absurdity, because the condition is no condition to God, if you grant him even so much as the poor attribute of foreknowledge, (you) necessarily turn away from a substitutive atonement altogether."* B.B. Warfield, The Plan of Salvation

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 3:

### Of God's Eternal Decree

Section VII. The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice <sup>a</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> *Mat 11:25-26; Rom 9:17-18, 21-22; 2 Tim 2:19-20; 1 Pet 2:8; Jude 1:4.*

Section VIII. The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care<sup>a</sup>, that men attending the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election<sup>b</sup>. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God<sup>c</sup>; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel<sup>d</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> *Deut 29:29; Rom 9:20.*

<sup>b</sup> *2 Pet 1:10.*

<sup>c</sup> *Rom 11:33; Eph 1:6.*

<sup>d</sup> *Luke 10:20; Rom 8:33; 11:5-6, 20; 2 Pet 1:10.*

#### **OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

"These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that God has sovereignly determined to withhold His saving grace from some men, (2) that this 'withholding' or 'passing by' is wholly an effect of His own unsearchable counsel, (3) that it is for His own glory, (4) that while His decree is sovereign as respects the particular persons, it is just, because of their sin, (5) that this doctrine is to be taught, and with great care, in order that it may bring good to believers and glory to God, and (6) that this doctrine (despite the enmity it arouses in unbelievers) is full of God's blessing to those who receive it aright."

- God's Eternal Decree concerns the *reprobate*, as well as the *elect*.
- God has determined, for reasons known only by and within Himself, to 'pass-by' or 'ordain for dishonor and wrath', those individuals not granted the grace of salvation through Christ.
  - Why? Because it is His good pleasure to do so.
  - For no reasons obvious or intrinsic to the persons themselves (e.g., Jacob and Esau).
- God will have mercy on whom He chooses (Cf., Romans 9:18), and if it was somehow *required* of Him, it would not properly be *mercy* at all, and He could not be considered Sovereign, nor any of the Elect be recipients of something called *grace*.
- The 'reason' for God's hardening or reprobating some is not due to the existence of sin in any *particular* individual, for that would be reason for all men to be similarly left reprobate.
  - The elect and the reprobate are *both* then, considered within themselves, without difference in this respect.
  - Both are equally sinful, and what moves God to save one and pass over another is wholly within Himself and hidden from our view or our finite ability to determine.
  - There is nothing whatsoever in men that requires or prompts God with a reason to save some, or to damn others.

- God elects or passes-by because it pleases Him to do so.
- God has determined to treat those whom He passes-by in strict justice.
  - *“Thus we must say that, while sin is in no way the reason for passing-by the reprobate, it is the whole (or only) reason for the damnation which they receive.”* [Williamson]
  - The perversity of human nature causes great abuse of this doctrine:
    - If God has withheld saving grace from some men, passing them by (which is true), then it is God’s fault and not theirs that they receive punishment (which is false).
    - The reason for the horrible punishment of the reprobate is NOT God’s act of passing him by, but his own wickedness and sin.
  - God’s withholding grace does not make the sinner guilty and liable to punishment... it merely leaves him in the condition he was already in (under the inherited curse and stain of Adam’s sin). God’s wrath ‘merely’ remains on him.
- To our eyes then, God *is arbitrary*, but God *is not unjust*.
  - No man deserves anything but God’s wrath and curse.
  - When God “arbitrarily” decides that some shall receive that they do not deserve (grace) He cannot be considered unfair, or unjust.
  - When God “arbitrarily” decides that some shall receive what they deserve (remaining in their extant condition of sin and receiving just damnation) He cannot be considered unfair or unmerciful.
  - Romans 9:18-21 *“So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?”*
- It is important for us to study and know this doctrine (Predestination).
  - Because it is expressly a part of the Word of God, and is extensively expounded there.
  - Because fallen men hate it and find it a stumbling block, so we must study it with care and humility.
    - We have nothing (in our salvation) to boast about in ourselves- it is all of grace.
    - It is the aroma of life to those who are being saved, even while it may carry the stench of death to those who are perishing.
    - It is humility to the Believer, yet discouragement against our indolence and presumption.
    - When rightly understood, it promotes our diligence and faithful witness.

**Predestination is the wellspring of our *purest* and *truest* Testimony for Christ!**

# Chapter 4

# OF CREATION

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 4:

### Of Creation

Section I. It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost<sup>a</sup>, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness<sup>b</sup>, in the beginning, to create or make of nothing the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good<sup>c</sup>.

<sup>a</sup>Gen 1:2; Job 26:13; 33:4; John 1:2-3; Heb 1:2

<sup>b</sup>Psa 33:5-6; 104:24; Jer 10:12; Rom 1:20

<sup>c</sup>Gen 1 throughout; Acts 17:24; Col 1:16; Heb 11:3.

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This section of the Confession teaches us (1) that the world is not self-existent or eternal, (2) that it derives existence from the true God, (3) that He made all things of nothing, (4) that He then formed the universe through process until it was ‘very good’ in His sight, and (5) that He did all this for His own glory.”

- Scripture begins with the assertion that, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Gen. 1:1)”
  - The world is *created*, not self-existent.
  - The world had a *beginning* and is not eternal.
  - It is God, the *true* God (in all of the ways we have recently studied) who caused it all to be.
- “Scientific” dogma instead teaches that: (1) the universe is self-existent or eternal; (2) that it was not created out of nothing, but that the basic elements were eternally existent; (3) that the present form of the world is the result of a process controlled, not by God, but by a series of selective and progressive mutations according to a ‘principle’ of the *fittest* creatures surviving and supplanting the *weakest*; (4) that there is no *ultimate* reason for the world to exist at all
  - These “evolutionary” theories are just that: *theories*, not laws.
  - Although they may popularly be believed, they are a faith-system, and nothing more.
    - There are no ‘proofs’ for evolution.
    - There is a false presumption of a conflict between ‘genuine science’ and the Bible.
    - There is also a false presumption that ‘genuine science’ represents objective truth, which is drawn from natural revelation interpreted by man’s intellect, while the ‘creation narrative’ is merely poetic imagery or allegory.
- Truth is simply the statement of what really is, and there can be only one truth because there is only one reality.
  - If the Scriptures are true, they merely tell us what is real.
  - They tell us (in spite of popular ‘scientific’ dogma) that God is the author of all truth, all that is, and all that ever was or will be.
  - Any ‘science’ therefore, that denies the truth of God’s creating all things of nothing in the space of six days (as Genesis teaches), betrays and forfeits its own claim to ‘truth’.
- What are the ‘reasons’ for any apparent disparity in understandings of our origin?
  - There are really only three possibilities-
    - Men have erred in their investigation of the facts of the origin.
    - Men have erred in their theories about the facts of the origin.
    - Men have erred in both.
  - “Science” has noted various orders of life ‘formed’ through process, but then theorizes that all life started by itself, and then directed itself through all the various stages of life in some upward progression of complexity and intellect.
    - This is neither scientific, nor true.
    - There are no proofs to even support the hypothesis.
    - There can’t possibly even be any proofs that things caused themselves to be,
      - Because there is no objective testimony to the system-there were no witnesses. It is a faith system without witness.
      - There is testimony with our faith system- God’s witness in Scripture.
  - **Time-** The chief point of contention between ‘scientific’ theories of origins, and the creation narrative in Scripture.

- The Bible says that the process of forming the original stuff of creation into its finished state took place in six days.
- “Science” says that the fossil record (which is real) is ‘proof’ that creation in six days is not possible.
  - But there are several ‘hidden’ presumptions at play here:
    - That the production of fossils is very slow and time consuming, and not possible by some short, cataclysmic event
    - That the vast stretches of time (necessary for producing fossils in the ‘scientific’ system) cannot have come *after* the events recorded in the Genesis creation narrative.
      - That the Genesis account describes the *order* in which creation came about.
      - So, the events recorded in Genesis are precisely those events necessary for the origin of all things, but they could not possibly have occurred except over vast periods of time.
    - [In the case of “intelligent creation”] That God may be the author of creation, but that the six days of Biblical Creation probably do not represent literal 24 hour days.
- Modern ‘science’ has an agenda that we cannot deny they have: that God’s Word is not to be trusted, or is only true when it can be proved through the application of man’s reason and ‘logical inference’.
  - Their first (and foremost) attack is on the six ‘days’ of creation.
    - The Hebrew term yom in the Genesis account for ‘day’ is not universally used throughout Scripture to denote literal passage of 24 literal hours.
    - yom is used 2,282 times *outside* of Genesis 1.
    - 359 of those times with a number association (some with cardinal numbers...1,2,3, etc.).
    - All 359 cases in clear contextual references to literal 24hr. days.
    - All 19 cases of yom in Genesis 1 are contextualized with the words “morning” (boqer) and “evening” (ereb) which always refer to daily cycles and together point rather clearly the Genesis account referring to 24hr days.
    - Augustine postulated, that since one of the “days” of creation initiated solar days, then the immediate context of the entire Genesis account must also adhere to a motif of solar days.
  - Some have tried to paint other, rather too hypothetical views of what Scripture intended to convey in Genesis
    - Some suggest that the six days of creation were really literal days upon which God revealed to Moses the ‘story’ of creation.
    - None witnessed creation but God, and so (they say) if God’s words may be interpreted as allegory (rather than literal fact) then man’s ‘reason’ may interpret all kinds of things without violence to God’s true intent.
    - Issues like God’s apparent creation of Adam as an adult (they say) may also lead to a logical inference that creation of all things occurred the same way.... Apart from times ‘ordinarily’ necessary for ‘natural’ birth, growth, maturity, etc. (i.e. keeping the evolutionary model generally relevant, but ‘allowing’ God to have superseded natural laws for a miraculous creation (not unlike a *creation* version of the Immaculate Conception of Jesus).
- None of these attempts to maintain “scientific” dogma avoid the fundamental issue of God being God, and man being subject to Him even in terms of our reasoning and presumption.
- There is no good or especially compelling reason to doubt the God did create the world in six twenty-four hour days with the appearance of age (maturity) in the things created, and that things like the ‘fossil record’ were caused by subsequent cataclysmic events (like Noah’s flood) well AFTER creation was complete and the result of the First Adam’s transgression (one ever-present consequence of sin).

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 4: Of Creation

Section 2. After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female<sup>d</sup>, with reasonable and immortal souls<sup>e</sup>, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image<sup>f</sup>, having the law of God written in their hearts<sup>g</sup>, and power to fulfil it<sup>h</sup>; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change<sup>i</sup>. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil<sup>k</sup>; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures<sup>l</sup>.

<sup>d</sup> Gen. 1:27.

<sup>e</sup> Gen. 2:7 with Eccl. 12:7 and Luke 23:43 and Matt. 10:28.

<sup>f</sup> Gen. 1:26; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24.

<sup>g</sup> Rom. 2:14, 15.

<sup>h</sup> Eccl. 7:29.

<sup>i</sup> Gen. 3:6; Eccl. 7:29.

<sup>k</sup> Gen. 2:17; Gen. 3:8-11, 23

<sup>l</sup> Gen. 1:26, 28.

### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This section of the Confession teaches (1) that man was God’s crowning work of creation, (2) that the whole human race descended from one human pair, (3) that man was made in the image of God, (4) that God furnished Adam with a sufficient knowledge of his will (the law written in his heart, plus a special directive to test his obedience), and (5) that Adam was capable of due obedience but also of falling.”

- Despite the myriad contentions between Biblical Creationists and Evolutionists, there is general (albeit superficial) agreement that mankind is the highest creature on earth.
  - Both acknowledge (one by the Genesis Creation Narrative, the other by theoretical systems involving blind mechanical forces) that there was an advance from lower to higher forms.
  - Both acknowledge (at least *presently*) that man is at the top of the natural order.
  - Both acknowledge that all of mankind descended from a single original pair.
- There are two points upon which the Christian may not yield:
  - Man did not gradually emerge from the slime.
  - Man was created by an immediate divine act in which matter and spirit were fused together and given existence as a living soul.
- There may similarities among the creatures (structures, shapes, appearances, etc.), some of which (e.g., the apes) have a resemblance to man, but there never was a man until God breathed life into the dust from which He formed the receptacle for His image.
  - Man is as much *Homo Adorans*, as he is *Homo Sapien*.
  - Beyond merely being *sentient* creatures, we were created for *worship*.
- Aside from The Fall and its consequences (sin), there has been no change to man’s being.
  - We have obtained a *consequential* “sin nature” without losing our *fundamental* nature of being God’s Image Bearers, created for His Glory.
  - But we have lost the *ability* in ourselves to be obedient to the point of Adam’s original mandate.
- Man began existence with a highly imbued intelligence, NOT like the ‘cave man’ paradigm put forth in evolutionary models.
  - Man was not created on a mere ‘animal’ level
  - Man originally had a much higher moral character and more perfect knowledge than he now (intrinsically) possesses.
  - Man was made upright (Ecclesiastes 7:29).
  - Man began with the law written in his heart (Romans 2:15).
- Adam knew what God required of him, and (before the Fall) was, according to this doctrine, capable of obedience, and well as disobedience
  - Adam’s ‘will’ was not encumbered yet by sin, and was therefore ‘free’ in a way absent in mankind since the fall.
  - Adam’s unencumbered liberty of will was therefore also capable of transgression.
  - So, Adam’s will was truly free (in a way that ours is not) and subject to change; our wills (on their own) are only free to descend into deeper transgression.

- This doctrine teaches that while Adam and Eve kept God’s law/word, they remained ‘happy in their communion with God’, and maintained dominion over the creatures.
  - This has variously been called “Adam’s Probationary Period” by many theologians
    - Which view is not *explicitly* taught in Scripture, but is believed by many theologians in the Reformed Tradition to follow from logical inference.
    - This can be a virtual *mental minefield*, which is fun for the believer to run through with abandon, but which is certainly dangerous to teach as dogma.
    - It can have implications for *other* doctrines whose views are more established from Scripture:
      - Decretal Election
      - Lapsarian Views
      - “Open Theism”
      - Deism, etc.
  - We frequently overlook the consequences that Adam’s Fall had upon mankind’s dominion over the creatures.
    - Man’s relationship with creation *seems* to have started as a friendly, entirely symbiotic relationship.
    - Nature now (post-Fall) *seems* one great antagonism, enmity, danger, and menace; nature itself these days seems to be conspiring to *kill* us.
    - One possible proof of this point is the evident restoration of the original (pre-Fall) relationship to creation, which Scripture frequently seems to indicate will be a part of our idyllic future in glory

God’s ‘Covenant’ with Adam (Works, Grace, Edenic, etc.) will be more fully developed in Chapter 7: Of God’s Covenant with Man.



# Chapter 5

# OF PROVIDENCE

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 5:

### Of Providence

Section 1. God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold <sup>a</sup>, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things <sup>b</sup>, from the greatest even to the least <sup>c</sup>, by his most wise and holy providence <sup>d</sup>, according to his infallible fore-knowledge<sup>e</sup> and the free and immutable counsel of his own will <sup>f</sup>, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy <sup>g</sup>.

<sup>a</sup>. Heb 1:3

<sup>b</sup>. Psalm 135:6; Daniel 4:34-35; Acts 17:25-26, 28; Job 38-41 throughout.

<sup>c</sup>. Matthew 10:29-31.

<sup>d</sup>. Psalm 104:24; 145:17; Proverbs 15:3.

<sup>e</sup>. Psalm 94:8-11; Acts 15:18.

<sup>f</sup>. Psalm 33:10-11; Ephesians 1:11

<sup>g</sup>. Genesis 45:7; Psalm 145:7; Isaiah 63:14; Romans 9:17; Eph 3:10.

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This section of the Confession teaches (1) that God, who created all things, also sustains them in being, (2) that He exercises over them complete control, (3) that this control regards all creatures and their actions as well as events in the natural world, (4) that this absolute control effects the execution of God’s fixed plan, and (5) that all this has as its end the manifestation of the glory of God”

- Two errors are expelled by the wording of this section: Chance, and Fate
  - Nothing happens by chance (i.e., *accidentally, fortuitously, coincidentally, for no apparent reason*).
  - Nothing happens by fate (i.e., *destiny, fortune, luck, blind mechanical necessity*)
- The idea that events merely ‘happen’ without the:
  - certain necessity and purpose of a Sovereign God,
  - who is intimately involved,
  - relationally imminent,
  - and personally invested,
  - is a **fundamentally pagan concept**.
- Yet, too many professed Protestant Christians, without realizing they are doing so, capitulate to a worldview that teaches that momentous things can (and do) occur by chance, or outside the directing control of God.
  - Arminianism teaches that man’s will is greater than God’s Sovereign Will,
  - Man’s will operates without any predetermined certainty,
  - That there is no necessary reason why any particular individual will receive and accept, nor neglect and reject the gospel.
  - Williamson- “*The will of man according to this view is, so to speak, balanced on a razor’s edge between two equal ‘possibilities’. God makes no determination but leaves it up to the individual himself to decide whether or not he will be saved. And so without any predetermined or necessary reason, in some cases it just ‘happens’ that Christ is chosen, while in other cases it also just ‘happens’ that he is rejected.*”
- Our Reformed Confession of Faith teaches on the contrary that nothing just happens, especially in the case of the exercise of man’s own will. There is no such thing for us, as ‘chance’.
  - Proverbs 21:1- “*The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.*”
  - Proverbs 19:21- “*Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.*”
  - Man’s finite mind cannot fully explain how God exercises such absolute control over His genuinely free agents, we only know with assurance that He DOES.
  - We can observe also that even in God the will is not free to operate in any random or chance way.
    - The will of God is determined by the character of God.
      - God cannot lie, and there is no “chance” that He ever will
        - Hebrews 6:17,18- “*So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so*

*that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us."*

- The will of man is determined by the character of man.
  - As long as the character of man is sinful and corrupt (as received by ordinary generation from Adam) there is no "chance" that he will do that which is pleasing to God.
    - Jeremiah 13:23- *"Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil."*
  - But when God regenerates a man so that he receives a new and different character (imputed) there is no "chance" that he will **not** begin to do good.
    - Philippians 2:13- *"For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."*
- The error which teaches that things happen by a mechanical fate DOES have something in common with the true doctrine: Things ARE absolutely predetermined.
  - But the similarity of God's Sovereign Providence to the thing called "fate" is only formal.
  - Williamson- *"Mechanical fate is at the very heart meaningless, merciless, and hopeless. But the certainty of divinely ordered providence is meaningful, merciful, and hopeful."* [NOTE: PAY ATTENTION TO THE "less-es" and the "full's" HERE!].
- How can God control everything?
  - The ways of God are mysterious to us, and far above us
  - But Scripture aids us in our search for understanding:
    - God made everything. How can it then be a marvel to us that He is able to exercise control over what He has made?
    - God has perfect foreknowledge. (Cf. Acts 15:18; 1 Peter 1:12ff) It is not difficult to see that this power contributes incalculably to His effective control of things.
    - God is Omnipotent. He is able to do what He wills at any place and any time. He is free to "inject" supernatural power to drastically change existing conditions (i.e., "miracles").
    - God is Free. He is not prevented from doing all His Holy Will.
  - Infallible Scripture asserts that God actually does exercise absolute control of all things.
    - Daniel 4:35-*"All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'"*
    - Psalms 135:6- *"Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps."*
    - Ephesians 1:11- *"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,"*

Even though we cannot completely fathom the depths of how God works all things after the counsel of His own will, we know that He DOES SO.

### **In summary:**

Williamson- *"Because God controls the universe, chance is ruled out, and because it is God who controls the universe, fate is ruled out also."*

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 5:

### Of Providence

Section 2. Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; (Acts 2:23) yet, by the same providence, He ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently. (Gen. 8:22; Jer. 31:35; Exod. 21:13; Deut. 19:5; 1 Kings 22:28,34; Isa.10:6-7)

Section 3. God, in His ordinary providence, maketh use of means, (Acts 27:31,44; Isa. 55:10-11) yet is free to work without, (Hos.1:7; Matt. 4:4; Job 34:10) above, (Rom. 9:19-21) and against them, (2 Kings 6:6; Dan. 3:27) at His pleasure.

Section 4. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; (Rom.11:32-34; 2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 21:1; 1 Kings 22:22-23; 1 Chron. 10:4,13-14; 2 Sam. 16:10; Acts 2:23) and that not by a bare permission, (Acts 14:16) but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, (Ps. 76:10; 2 Kings 19:28) and otherwise ordering, and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends; (Gen. 50:20; Isa. 10:6-7,12) yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin. (James 1:13-14,17; 1 John 2:16; Ps. 50:21)

Section 5. The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave, for a season, His own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; (2 Chron. 32:25-26,31; 2 Sam. 24:1) and, to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends. (2 Cor. 12:7-9; Ps. 73; Ps. 77:1,10,12; Mark 14:66-72; John 21:15-17)

Section 6. As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as a righteous Judge, for former sins, doth blind and harden, (Rom. 1:24,26,28; Rom. 11:7-8) from them He not only withholdeth His grace whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings, and wrought upon in their hearts; (Deut. 29:4) but sometimes also withdraweth the gifts which they had, (Matt. 13:12; Matt. 25:29) and exposeth them to such objects as their corruption make occasion of sin; (Deut. 2:30; 2 Kings 8:12-13) and, withal, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan, (Ps. 81:11-12; 2 Thess. 2:10-12) whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, even under those means which God useth for the softening of others. (Exod. 7:3; Exod. 8:15,32, 2 Cor. 2:15-16; Isa. 8:14, 1 Pet. 2:7-8; Isa. 6:9-10; Acts 28:26-27)

Section 7. As the providence of God doth, in general, reach to all creatures; so, after a most special manner, it taketh care of His Church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof. (1 Tim. 4:10; Amos 9:8-9; Rom. 8:28; Isa. 43:3-5, 14)

**OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections [Sections 2-6 only. Interestingly, Williamson does not comment at all on Section 7] of the Confession are directed against certain erroneous inferences which men have drawn from the doctrine stated in Section 1 of this chapter. Here we are taught (1) that God’s absolute sovereignty does not destroy the integrity of man’s liberty, (2) nor does it deny the operation of second causes, (3) that God is, however, free to overrule these “laws” (and causes) when He pleases, (4) that God ordered even the fall of man without Himself doing any evil, and (5) that God’s sovereignty extends to the inward operations of man’s heart (in both the saved and the lost) without participation in sin.”

To which I would add (considering Section 7): *Whatever things concerning God’s providence are generally true as they pertain to all of mankind are especially true as touching His Elect, the Church of Jesus Christ*

- Whenever Biblical doctrines of God’s sovereignty are taught, objections always seem to spontaneously arise:
  - A. “If God controls everything, why am I still responsible for what I do?”
  - B. “If God controls everything, then won’t things turn out the same, no matter what I do?”
  - C. “If God controls everything, then doesn’t He have to also be the author of sin?”
  - D. “If God controls everything, then how do we account for the sins of the righteous, or the prosperity of the wicked?”
- To each of these objections, we answer:
  - A. “If God controls everything, why am I still responsible for what I do?”
    - This assumes that God’s will is coercive, and that when He ‘controls’ men’s actions He forces them to do His will against their own.
    - But Scripture plainly teaches that man is responsible precisely because man does his *own* will when he sins.
    - Because God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, He is able to allow men to do as they will within the limitations of their opportunities and abilities, but always within His predetermined plan.
    - Man does evil. He does it freely. He does *only* what he is able to do. He must do within the Sovereign will of God.
    - Man does evil. He does it freely. Yet he also does the (decretive) will of God.
  - B. “If God controls everything, then won’t things turn out the same, no matter what I do?”
    - This question contains a contradiction-
      - It presupposes that God controls everything
      - But offers the contradictory supposition that certain personal actions may *also* happen randomly or uncertainly.
    - In effect, it says that if all things are set by divine decree, then it doesn’t matter what other things first occur, the end will be the same as though the *other* things weren’t part of the *all* things decreed by God.
    - If God’s will truly controls all things, it necessarily follows that His desired *actions* will eventuate His desired *outcome*.
    - Divine foreordination does not make our actions unimportant, but makes them extremely important, and from our perspective essential... making them appear to us as first causes when they are actually secondary causes.
  - C. “If God controls everything, then doesn’t He have to also be the author of sin?”
    - Was it the will or plan of God that Adam would fall?
    - Do the wicked deeds of men only do what God has first ordained would be done? (Cf., Acts 4:27,28)
    - Scripture does not evade the question, or deny God’s absolute sovereignty, even over sinful men and their deeds of evil (Cf., Isaiah 45:7).
    - Offensive consequences of God’s sovereign control over sinful men may flow from their actions, but it does not make God responsible for what they freely do.
    - Scripture is very clear that God is NOT the *author* of sin. [“*Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.*” James 1:13].

- The contradiction has been rendered this way:
    - a) God is the author of all that is.
    - b) Sin is.
    - c) Yet God is not the author of sin?
  - But the contradiction is only an apparent one. God is not the author of all that *is*, although He has decreed it all to *be*.
  - Satan and his host (men and of angels) are the ‘authors’ of sin, although God has created them and decreed even their sin without being himself the author of it.
- D. “If God controls everything, then how do we account for the sins of the righteous, or the prosperity of the wicked?”
- It may seem from our human perspective that it would be best for God to control men in such a way that the elect (after their regeneration) are immediately made perfect in righteousness.
  - Similarly, it might seem wiser for God to permit the reprobate to a proceed immediately to their unrelieved wickedness.
  - But God’s ways are not our ways, and so we must somehow account for the sins of the saints, and the apparent ‘goodness’ of the reprobate without actually compromise what God testifies about his own character.
  - Whoever is born of God is freed from bondage to sin, yet if we say we have no sin, or that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and the truth is not in us. (Cf., 1 John 1:8-10).
  - There is then, an *actual* contradiction; but the contradiction is in the regenerate man, not in the Scriptures, or in God.
  - The regenerate man sins, but he cannot give himself to the willful and continual practice of sin, because he is born of God. (Cf., Romans 7:21ff). A regenerated person may be a ‘new man’ but vestiges of the ‘old man’ remain still remain.
  - The new man cannot ultimately lose the conflict (lest Christ’s atonement be ineffectual), but neither can the man prevail without great conflict in this life. We call them “trials” and these conflicts are how God refines and perfects us.
  - Paul speaks of his own conflict as a war within himself, between his members and his will; he concludes that he is ‘wretched’ but not that there are two Pauls. He recognizes that he is guilty of sin, and simultaneously, that he is regenerate.
  - There would be no conflict if God had not created a new man (Cf., Eph, 2:20).
    - This new creature may seem frightfully weak at first, yet where he truly exists, he will surely prevail (Hebrews 5:12-6:12).
    - But in no sense can man presume that his personal conflicts alone could accomplish his prevailing. Grace and Mercy from on-high accompany our travail.
  - Sometimes we forget that all we are in and of ourselves is sin.
  - Sometimes it seems to us that God ‘leaves us for a season’ to our manifold temptations, and to the natural corruptions of our own hearts.
  - When God chastises us, the remnants of our old nature express our natural character, and we learn all over again that we can do nothing of ourselves.
  - So, we are brought through our trials, but seek salvation wholly *in* and *by* the work of God on our behalf.
  - The reason why the reprobate so often seem flourish, and often do that which is *outwardly* good, is that they too have the remnants of their old nature.
    - But in their case, the ‘old nature’ traces back to the sinless nature possessed by Adam before the fall.
    - The human conscience still retains some ‘institutional recollection’ of the law of God written from the beginning. (Cf., Romans 2:14,15).

- But the ‘new man’ (in their case especially) is sinful, corrupt, and fallen.
- The conscience (they may call it the ‘alter-ego’) objects to what the ego wishes to do, and the two constantly fight one-another.
- The Reprobate is constantly divided against himself, and at war *within* himself, but with no mediator, redeemer, or savior.
- He may seem to do ‘good works’ but these are collateral effects of the warfare in the Reprobate’s fallen mind.
- But we know that the *conscience* of man does not so much rule over us, so much as it *testifies against* us.
- God does sometimes supernaturally cause (i.e., rule over and against what is otherwise *natural* for the man) the conscience to overrule and restrain even the reprobate.
  - God acts then, through the operation of the Holy Spirit and through such agencies as: *law and statute; civil government; social custom; desire for approval; fear of punishment; etc.*; prompting the reprobate to actually do what is “good.”
    - Note that these are all external or manipulative influences counter to the nature of the man,
    - The reprobate is NOT prompted by any intrinsic desire to please, honor, and glorify the God whom the man loves and willingly serves (having been adopted, betrothed, and indwelt by the Persons of the Godhead).
- These actions are frequently called “Common Grace” by which God restrains evil, even while seeming to confer blessing upon the reprobate.
  - They grant considerable influence to the ‘remnants’ of man’s pre-fallen nature in the case of the *reprobate* mind.
  - They help to restrain the ‘old man’ fallen tendencies in the case of the *regenerate* mind
  - These processes continue throughout the lives of all men.
    - They are not sufficient to save the reprobate apart from Christ.
    - They are essential to God’s process of sanctifying the regenerate.
  - In the end, all of this will be made plain to all mankind, and the “blessings” of “good” works done by the reprobate will be revealed as dross consumed by the punishing fires of eternal judgement. Truly, temporal ‘blessings’ for these works are as good as it will EVER be for the reprobate.

## Chapter 6

# **OF THE FALL OF MAN, OF SIN, AND OF THE PUNISHMENT THEREOF**



# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 6:

### Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof

**Section 1.** Our first parents, being seduced by the subtilty and temptation of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit<sup>1</sup>. This their sin, God was pleased, according to His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory<sup>2</sup>.

1. Gen. 3:13; 2 Cor. 11:3
2. Rom. 11:32

**Section 2.** By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion, with God<sup>1</sup>, and so became dead in sin<sup>2</sup>, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body<sup>3</sup>.

1. Gen. 3:6-8; Eccl. 7:29; Rom. 3:23
2. Gen. 2:17; Eph. 2:1
3. Tit. 1:15; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10-18

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections teach (1) that the human race stems from two (and only two) real people, (2) that the record of Genesis 3 is historical (not symbolical or mythical in character), (3) that the first sin was fore-ordained, and (4) that by this sin our first parents (a) lost communion with God, (b) fell under His wrath and curse, and (c) became totally depraved.

“*The fall of man needs as much emphasis as his creation*” [Cornelius Van Til](#).

- Why did Williamson seem to reason that these two statements require taking our discussion into the directions of discussion presuming:
  - Two real human individuals?
  - In an actual historical context, rather than one that is merely mythical?
  - Who ate actual fruit?
  - In a true garden?
- These contexts aren't immediately obvious from a simple reading of the doctrines, but Williamson makes the case that they are of paramount importance.
  - “Neo-orthodoxy”, Karl Barth, and “Barthianism”
  - Grown out of an older *rationalism*.
    - Rationalists placed human reason above Scriptural literalism.
    - Didn't stand the test of time, and eventually went down in spiritual flames.
    - Out of the wreckage of *rationalism*, came *neo-orthodoxy*.
  - Enter Karl Barth
    - He spoke loudly against rationalism, impressing many.
    - He used historic Christian theological terminology.
      - He spoke in terms of, *creation*, ‘*the fall*’, and *election*.
      - Many in his era spoke of his prophetic ministry to bring the Church back to the orthodox faith.
    - But Barth and his followers did not return the authority of man's reason under the authority of Scripture.
      - They merely exchanged an older form of reliance of reliance upon the supremacy of man's reason with a newer form of the same old evil.
      - Neo-orthodoxy affirmed the *doctrine* of the fall, but denies that there was an *actual* person, who at an *actual* time in history, in an *actual* place on earth, ate an *actual* piece of fruit.
      - Neo-orthodoxy affirmed the *doctrine* of the fall, but assigned a mythical, purely symbolic, or merely legendary interpretation of the Biblical account.
  - Why does any of this really matter?
    - Any system of theology that puts man's reason or imagination above or as the sole arbiter of God's Word or intent, is neither “orthodox” nor “Christian.”
    - Any discussion about the Doctrine of the Fall of Man, or Sin, and of the consequences of it must BEGIN with the presupposition that the Genesis account is true, accurate, and literal. Genesis is NOT an allegory.
    - We must either accept the authority of God's Word and risk loss of respect in this world, or please the world and cooperate in the sin of Adam in doubting the Word of God. We cannot do both.

- Neo-orthodoxy is merely one more repeat of Adam's first sin.
- Man's total depravity continues being reproduced in this denying the truth of the literal reality of God's word, and relegating Him to doctrines that are symbolically true and merely metaphysical (immaterial and abstract).
  - Man would have "truth" apart from subjection to the Word of God.
  - Man would place his own understanding and insight placed above God's truth.
- The consequence of Adam's sin we call "Total Depravity."
  - The comparison of corruption in *degree*, verses corruption in *extent*.
  - It is a consequence of what the actual man Adam actually did, in a real garden, in a real place, at a real time in history.
  - All men are now, by their nature wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of their souls and bodies.
    - This does not mean that man is stupid, or incapable of reason.
    - Man's intellect was not annihilated by sin, or made inoperative.
    - He may devise many intricate thoughts and schemes, but he is incapable NOT invariably committing error.
  - Man's independent will is not capable of submitting to God again (logically) because that would make his will cease to be 'independent'.
    - Romans 1:25- Man (unredeemed) worships the creature rather than the Creator.
    - Genesis 6:5- Every one of man's thoughts and intents is only evil continually.
    - John 6:44- No man can come to God except if the Father calls him.
    - Romans 3:11- None seek after God.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 6:

### Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof

**Section 3.** They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was (imputed)<sup>1</sup>; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation<sup>2</sup>.

1. Gen. 1:27–28, Gen. 2:16–17, Acts 17:26, Rom. 5:12, 15–19, 1 Cor. 15:21–22, 45, 49
2. Ps. 51:5, Gen. 5:3, Job 14:4, Job 15:14

**Section 4.** From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good<sup>1</sup>, and wholly inclined to all evil<sup>2</sup>, do proceed all actual transgressions<sup>3</sup>.

1. Rom. 5:6, Rom. 8:7, Rom. 7:18, Col. 1:21
2. Gen. 6:5, Gen. 8:21, Rom. 3:10–12
3. James 1:14–15, Eph. 2:2–3, Matt. 15:19

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) why we are totally depraved, and (2) how actual transgressions are the effect of this condition. The facts concerning our lost condition are few and simple to state: Adam sinned and fell, becoming totally depraved; In Adam we sinned and fell ourselves, becoming totally depraved [as well]; thus, we are born in sin and are evil from our youth up.”

- Death reigns by God’s decree over all mankind since Adam’s transgression.
- If we therefore ask why death reigns over all men, God answers, “Because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).
- Notably, this also applies even to tiny infants who die in their infancy.
  - If we then ask how all sinned, the answer must be, “By the sin of one man.”
  - Adam’s sin is *our* sin, and *because* it is we share the penalty with him.
- These are the facts, which are simple enough to state but which are hard to explain or understand....
- Their implications may be very painful for us to even contemplate, but they are necessarily true.
- Since the fall, man has asked one epic, rhetorical question: “How can a just God condemn me for what another man has done?”
- Or, put another way, “How can it be that I sinned in Adam when I did not even exist yet?”
- The answer(s) are:
  - God has declared it to be so, even though we may not understand how it works.
  - We know that it must be just for God to do so, because He always only does what is right.
  - Some of our difficulties in understanding stem from our fundamental failure to recognize the *corporate* aspect of human existence, and God’s *covenantal* dealings with His created image-bearers.
    - We tend to view humans only as multitudes of individuals, each separately created by God as ‘an independent, free moral agent’.
    - The Bible regards us more as an organic *unit* created (covenantally) in one man (or human pair) and having the power to beget in his own likeness and image.
    - Adam and Eve were quite literally the ‘root of all mankind’ therefore we are members one of another, whom God has made ‘of one blood all nations’ (Acts 17:26).
  - Some limit this ‘organic’ union of human beings only to the *bodies* we share. They call themselves ‘creationists’ (regarding this one doctrine, not the founding of the world generally), and they hold this doctrine to mean that:
    - Through some mysterious process not understood by man, parents are able to generate a new body from themselves,

- But that God *then* (at the moment of conception or at some later time) creates a new soul that He places within the body.
  - The error in this view is in failing to recognize that the soul, as much as the body, bears the imprint of Adam's original sin.
    - How could the soul be created sinful by God?
    - And what about the resemblance children have to the minds and souls of their parents in addition to their physical similarities?
    - How can we say that Adam begat in his own image and likeness if he did not also beget a soul as well as a body in his children?
  - Other people are known as 'traducianists' regarding this doctrine.
    - They believe that parents beget both the bodies and souls of their children by a mysterious process not understood by man.
    - They do not (as is often thought of them) believe that this requires a dividing up of the substance of the soul from the substance of the body.
    - Scripture itself (e.g., Hebrews 7:10, Genesis 47:26, etc.) speaks in terms which seem to better support the traducianist view than the creationist.
- Regardless of the particulars of these systems (*creationist* or *traducianist*), it must be recognized by all that however humans derive their nature from Adam, we do not actually become existing *persons* until the time decreed by God (Cf., our previous discussions of Creation, Providence, and Election).
  - We cannot say that we were personally present in the Garden, or that we actively participated in Adam's sin.
  - Nevertheless, Adam's act is accounted as ours, because God has ordered human life by principles of covenantal representation.
    - Covenantal Representation, means that one person may act for another in such a way that the act of the one is regarded as the act of another.
    - Families, civil governments, and corporate entities all act this way.
      - If the representative commits the entity, the entity is responsible for the outcome or consequences.
      - Contracts, warfare, estates, etc. are all examples of how covenantal representation distills to covenantal responsibility.
- So, Adam's act as the first human was the covenantal representational act to all men descended from him by ordinary generation.
- We say that Adam's guilt was imputed to his descendants.
- Notably, only Adam's first sin was performed and imputed to us all.
  - In theology, we refer to Adam's first sinful act was a probationary test.
  - Built into the text of Scripture is the condition of Adam's commanded obedience and consequence of his disobedience.
  - This was the sin that resulted in God's decree of curse and imputed consequence.
- Adam lived long enough to commit numerous additional sins,
  - But in these (after the curse) he no longer acted as a representational person.
  - His other sins were therefore laid not to the charge of other men, but solely to himself.
  - The damage was already done to us, and mankind was already wrecked.
- We became totally depraved, and our natures descended from Adam "wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body."
  - It follows then, that (as in Adam following his probationary failure) many particular, actual sins of our own flow out from our depravation.
  - These are what the Confession refers to as our "actual transgressions."
    - Adam's sins after his fall are his *actual transgressions*
    - Every sin we commit (all of them) that flow out of our depraved natures are our *actual transgressions*.
    - Our actual transgressions are natural consequences of our depraved natures,
    - And they are all, covenantally, the consequences of Adam's first sin that resulted in our depravity.
  - All actual sins are therefore the natural consequences of our imputed depravity from Adam's initial sin... our natural heart-inheritance.

"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander." Matthew 15:19

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 6:

### Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof

**Section 5.** This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated<sup>1</sup>; and although it be through Christ pardoned and mortified, yet both itself and all the motions thereof are truly and properly sin<sup>2</sup>.

1. 1. Prov 20:9; Ecc. 7:20; Rom 7:14,17-18,23; James 3:2; 1 John 1:8, 10.
2. 2. Rom 7:5, 7-8, 25; Gal 5:17.

**Section 6.** Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto<sup>1</sup>, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner<sup>2</sup>, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God<sup>3</sup> and curse of the law<sup>4</sup>, and so made subject to death<sup>5</sup>, with all miseries spiritual<sup>6</sup>, temporal<sup>7</sup>, and eternal<sup>8</sup>.

1. 1 John 3:4.
2. Rom 2:15; 3:9, 19.
3. Eph 2:3.
4. Gal 3:10.
5. Rom 6:23.
6. Eph 4:18.
7. Lam 3:39; Rom 8:20.
8. Mat 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:9.

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that depravity remains in believers in this life, (2) that it is pardoned through Christ, (3) that it is progressively destroyed in them, (4) that it and the products of it are truly sin even in the believer, and (5) that this corruption as well as what it produces are so truly sin as to rightly bring us under God’s wrath and curse (unless and until the sovereign grace of God secures our release).”

- From the outset, we seem to face a paradox:
  - In Chapter 5 (Cf. Sections 2-6) we dealt with the *Regenerate* and the *Reprobate* Mind, and this seems on the surface to contradict portions of that doctrinal distinction, as though we are dealing here with that same *old nature* vs. *new nature* distinction, although we are actually dealing with a more local and personal doctrine altogether.
  - Some notable texts of Scripture appear (on their face only) to contradict this doctrinal idea as well:
    - 2 Cor 5:17- “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*”
    - Romans 6:3,4,6- “*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.... We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.*”
    - Colossians 3:9,10- “*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*”
- But most of the misunderstanding or erroneously seeing any contradiction between this doctrinal statement and Scripture stems from two very serious and pernicious errors, which have been soft-peddled to generations of Christians.
  - The first error is Perfectionism.
    - *Perfectionism* teaches that the believer is, or in this life may become, not merely a new creature in Christ, but a new creature from whom *all* sin (some might qualify this as, “*known sin*”) is absent.
    - *Perfectionism* is contradicted uniformly and continually warned against in Scripture.
      - 1 John 1:7-10- “*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*”
      - James 3:2- “*For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.*”

- See also: Psalm 51; Romans 7:14-25
- The second error is Antinomianism.
  - Antinomianism teaches that no matter how much my old nature may cause me to sin, it makes no difference because it is not ME, but my OLD nature that *remains* within me.
  - The Antinomian does not try to claim perfection, and may actually admit to a most scandalous wickedness- he just disclaims all personal responsibility for any of it.
  - The old nature absorbs all blame. The “new man” is only responsible for the acts of his “new nature,” and in Christ he is therefore absolved.
  - “I am not to blame,” says the Antinomian.
  - Antinomianism too appears to have some scriptural backing.
    - Romans 7:17- “So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”
    - Romans 7:23- “but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.”
  - But in context, Paul clearly takes the blame for his own sin in these verses:
    - Romans 7:14- “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.”
- The true state of the case is this: In an unregenerate person, corruption rules, but in a regenerate person the Spirit of God and the law of God have the dominion. Sin no longer reigns over us.
 

Romans 8:7-14- “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

  - In the unregenerate man, sin reigns. In the regenerate man, sin does not *reign* although it does *survive*. The work of the conscience in the unregenerate man may resist sin, but it cannot challenge sin’s reign.
  - In the regenerate man, the Spirit of God comes to dwell, and he is from that moment under the sovereign control of Christ, and not of sin. (Romans 6:14- “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”)
  - But the dislocated forces of the enemy are far from being *destroyed* merely because they have been *routed*. They can, and will, carry on a prolonged resistance, and cause as much trouble as possible for the Believer.
  - Thus it is with surviving sin in the believer. He is a new creature in Christ, but he remains a wretched man who serves the law of sin with a sometime distressing frequency (Cf., Romans 7:24,25).
  - The term, “Dog-nasty Sinner” for some reason pops into my mind here. The *dog-nasty* part may be somewhat *hyperbolic* and offensive (or undeserved) to some, but the Sinner part is spot-on for all of us.
  - It is troubling to think that sin is somehow less heinous when committed by a Christian than by an unbeliever.
    - It may actually be more heinous for us, because of several aggravating factors:
      - The Christian has strength that the unbeliever does not have.
      - The Christian has knowledge that the unbeliever lacks.
      - The Christian has an awareness of the consequences of sin, because he has seen what it cost the Savior to blot sin out.
    - It would do us well to remember therefore, not only that, “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness,” [1 John 3:4] but that, “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.” [Hebrews 10:26,27].
  - “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” [Romans 6:1,2]

Sin continues to survive and live like a parasite within the believer, but it is no longer an eternal death sentence for us, and it does not reign over our very existence as it once did. It is a chronic malady, which must be dealt with and mortified daily for the duration of our lives on this side of Glory. And it is a horrible perversion of the truth stated in this doctrine to believe that the Christian may live in sin without any personal consequence.

We do not live in some sort of Perfectionist bubble, denying the efficacy of sin remaining in our mortal members and our personal, life-long struggle with it.

And, we may not blithely submit to mere existence in some Antinomian ghetto either, content to tolerate cooperation with our sin-nature, while denying any responsibility for sin’s natural consequences.

# Chapter 7

## OF GOD'S COVENANT WITH MAN

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 7:

### Of God's Covenant With Man

Section 1. The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.

Isa. 40:13–17, Job 9:32–33, 1 Sam. 2:25, Ps. 113:5–6, Ps. 100:2–3, Job 22:2–3, Job 35:7–8, Luke 17:10, Acts 17:24–25

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This section of the Confession teaches us (1) the basic distinction between the Creator and the creature, (2) that the creature (because he is the creature) owes obedience to the Creator, (3) that the Creator owes nothing to the creature, and (4) that therefore all blessing and/or reward from God can come only be way of ‘condescension’ on God’s part (that is, by grace) and so y way of sovereignly disposed covenant.”

- It isn’t enough that the sinner denies his sin.
- It isn’t enough that he denies his fallen condition.
- This section teaches even more, that being evil by his very nature, man is predisposed to deny his very creaturehood.
  - Man’s basic impiety leads him to consider himself independent of God.
  - God says to man, “Apart from me, you can do nothing.” [John 15:5]
  - To this man answers back, “I have done it by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty” [(Nebuchadnezzar)Daniel 4:30].
  - “The perennially popular doctrine of ‘man’s free will,’ which teaches that man determines destiny rather than God, is but an instance of this basic impiety.” [Williamson]
- Reformed churches have traditionally guarded against this impiety to a greater degree than most, and yet even among them it has not always come to full and proper expression of the creature/Creator distinction, or of God’s gracious voluntary condescension toward us.
  - We could NEVER find salvation and justification on OUR own
  - We could NEVER become children of the Most High by OUR choice.
  - We could NEVER cause the Spirit of God to reside within us by OUR direction.
- It has sadly become the custom in many churches (some claiming to be Reformed) to describe “Covenant” merely as “an agreement between two or more persons.”
  - This may be an apt definition of a contract, or agreement, but it does not describe a covenant.
    - Covenants are blood oaths.
    - Covenants involve sacrifice.
    - Covenants are not between ‘equal’ agents,
    - Covenants are not made ‘on a level playing field’.
  - The danger of such a minimalist understanding of a covenant, is that:
    - Suggesting that God is somehow equal to man in sovereignty
    - Suggesting that man is somehow able to bind God
- It is important to understand God’s covenant with man in the proper context of the chasm that exists between the Creator and His Creatures.
  - Man may not act as though he is equal in sovereignty as God,
  - Man may not believe that his *purpose* has the same efficacy as God’s.
- We will be discussing the so-called “Covenant of Works” and “Covenant of Grace” in coming weeks.
  - In both of these expressions of covenant, we must maintain the proper understanding of the distance between God and man, and the ability for God’s condescension *alone* to bridge that gap.
  - Adam NEVER had an inalienable claim upon God’s blessing, rewards, and fellowship.
    - It is sometimes (erroneously) presumed that Adam, being righteous at his creation, had some claim upon God.



- But even if Adam could have said that he had done all the will of God, he would still be an *unprofitable* servant, having done ONLY what was always his duty to do (Luke 17:10).
- This false presumption is denied in this Confession of Faith.
  - Our Confession insists in this section on recognizing the immeasurable chasm separating the creature from his Creator.
  - It acknowledges that all of God's covenant dealings with men remain both SOVEREIGN and GRACIOUS,
    - They are imposed by the will of God alone, and not by the will of man (Isaiah 40:13-17).
    - They benefit only the creature, and make up nothing lacking in God, or improve His condition in any way (Acts 17:25).
    - The only "conditions" or "obligations" to which God "agrees" in these covenants are imposed by GRACIOUS promises directed only manward.
    - God is only bound by His own Holy Word.
- If Adam had completely obeyed God's just commands in the 'Covenant of Works'
  - God would surely have given Adam a great reward, but Adam could not rightly have demanded it.
  - God would only have conferred any reward upon Adam because it pleased Him to do so
  - Thus, making the so-called "Covenant of Works" actually more a *part of*, or *subset* of the "Covenant of Grace."
  - Adam NEVER had the ability to 'earn' gifts from God, even by some presumed sinless obedience to God's command against eating of the forbidden fruit.
  - Obedience was the debt already owed.... Not the vehicle for reward.
  - It was the interruption of Adam's obedience (by his sin) that eventuated in the curse and fall.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 7:

### Of God's Covenant With Man

**Section 2.** The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works<sup>1</sup>, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity<sup>2</sup>, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Gal. 3:12

<sup>2</sup>Rom. 10:5, Rom. 5:12–20

<sup>3</sup>Gen. 2:17, Gal. 3:10

**Section 3.** Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second<sup>1</sup>, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved<sup>2</sup>, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Gal. 3:21, Rom. 8:3, Rom. 3:20–21, Gen. 3:15, Isa. 42:6

<sup>2</sup>Mark 16:15–16, John 3:16, Rom. 10:6–9, Gal. 3:11

<sup>3</sup>Ezek. 36:26–27, John 6:44–45

#### **OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

“We here consider the two covenants revealed in Scripture. Note again that both are covenants of grace in the sense that both express the mercy of God upon those who have no inherent claim upon Him.”

- The first covenant was a covenant of works. The grace of God was seen in this covenant when life was promised Adam and his posterity upon condition of perfect and perpetual obedience, which Adam owed God even apart from any gracious blessing.
- The fall rendered man totally incapable of meeting the conditions of that covenant, so that God mercifully implemented a newer expression of ‘covenant’ known as the covenant of grace.
- [Williamson] “Both covenants were ‘of grace’, but the second rightly deserves to be called by that name because God himself provides the work required to meet the conditions of the covenant whereby his people are saved.”
- The elements which constituted the ‘covenant of works’ are not formally stated in scripture, but are nevertheless implied.
  - The Tree of Life was in the midst of the garden, as was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil from which Adam was forbidden to eat upon pain of death.
  - There was clearly held before him the alternative of obedience and life or disobedience and death.
  - Genesis 2:15-17  
“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”
  - It may be legitimately inferred from the Genesis passage that the Lord required ‘perfect and personal obedience’ since the least infraction of His will is threatened with death.
  - Galatians 3:12  
“But the law is not of faith, rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them.’”
  - Because the elements of a covenant are clearly present in the Genesis account, Paul presents a hypothetical to the Galatians, that IF a man were to keep all of God’s commandments, he would receive the reward of life.
- Some object to speaking of a covenant of works at all on the grounds that:
  - Such a covenant is not formally stated in Scripture
  - Such a designation falsely suggests that the works of man could have merited God’s blessings.
- There are numerous doctrines not specifically stated in Scripture, but which by necessary inference, or what the Confession of Faith (Chapter 1, Section 6) calls “Good and Necessary Consequence” may be determined. Some examples are:
  - The Doctrine of the Trinity
  - Our Eschatology
  - Our Ecclesiology & Polity

- Our views on Baptism and the Lord's Table
- The same may be said about the term, "covenant of works."
  - The language of the Confession carefully tries to protect against a misunderstanding of the term.
  - The use of the term actually serves to precisely distinguish the futility of man's works in obtaining eternal life.
  - Only God's gracious gift can bestow what man himself could NEVER attain.
  - The term also pinpoints the precise matter in which defection from the covenant of grace is to be seen. Paul points out in Romans 11:6 that, if we are saved by grace, then it is no more of works. Conversely, if we are saved by works, it cannot be called grace.
- The covenant of grace, quite as much as the covenant of works, was sovereignly imposed by God.
- God did not consult man, He consulted Himself. Man has no part in his own salvation.
- The Arminian view of these doctrines is that Christ died for all men ("Universal Atonement").
  - By this they mean that He procured the removal of all mankind from the covenant of works, and may them subject to provisions of the covenant of grace.
  - Therein (according to the Arminians) all men are equally and individually offered eternal life on an easier basis than the covenant of works.
  - God required perfect and perpetual obedience to the whole law in Adam's case, but now He requires only that men fulfill the conditions of faith and repentance and evangelical obedience.
  - But the conditions are left up solely to the free choice of any person, ironically replacing works of perfect and perpetual obedience with a work of their will and choice.
  - God then (according to the Arminians) confers his reward in the same way for the fulfillment of the covenant of grace as He formerly did for the fulfillment of the conditions of the covenant of works.
  - Arminian terminology cannot hide the fact that "evangelical works" are still works, and that a covenant which has conditions that man fulfills by his own 'works' cannot remotely be considered a covenant of grace in any proper threat.
  - To the Arminian, salvation in Christ is merely *potential*, because it depends upon activities and actions of men. Perhaps most significantly, at the time of Christ's atoning sacrifice, these actions and activities did not and could not exist for people not yet born.
- The Reformed view of these doctrines is that all conditions of the covenant of grace are really and truly fulfilled by works of God.
  - Part of this work is done *for* us *by* Christ.
  - Part of the work is done *in* us *by* the Holy Spirit.
  - It is true that one condition of the covenant of grace is faith in Jesus Christ.
    - But this condition is fulfilled only because the Lord himself GIVES faith to His people (and only His people). [Cf., Ephesians 1:17, 2:8].
    - Christ's atonement is for His Elect Bride.
    - His atonement then is said to be 'limited'.... Not in power, only in application
      - [R.C. Sproul] "*Limited atonement does not mean that there is a limit placed upon the value or merit of the atonement of Jesus Christ. It's traditional to say that the atoning work of Christ is sufficient for all. That is, the meritorious value of the atonement is sufficient to cover the sins of all people, and certainly, anyone who puts their trust in Jesus Christ will receive the full measure of the benefits of that atonement.*"
  - Christ's atonement is 100% efficacious for those to whom God's Election has been decreed.
  - The Reformed version of the gospel and salvation offered in it is actual because it depends entirely and solely upon God for the end to be attained, as well as for the creation and ordaining of the actions and professions necessary for the receiving of that end.
  - Receiving and possessing salvation does have some 'steps' and 'professions' associated with it, but these are not be 'conditional' to salvation as in the Arminian system.
  - Salvation is ONLY truly conditional in the sense that it depends entirely on the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's elect.

*More to come on this in Chapters 10, 12, and 14*

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 7:

### Of God's Covenant With Man

**Section 4.** This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed<sup>1</sup>.

1. Heb. 9:15–17, Heb. 7:22, Luke 22:20, 1 Cor. 11:25

**Section 5.** This covenant was differently administered in the (time of the law), and in the (time of the gospel)<sup>1</sup>: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come<sup>2</sup>; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah<sup>3</sup>, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old Testament<sup>4</sup>.

1. 2 Cor. 3:6–9

2. Heb. 8–10, Rom. 4:11, Col. 2:11–12, 1 Cor. 5:7

3. 1 Cor. 10:1–4, Heb. 11:13, John 8:56

4. Ga. 3:7–9, 14

#### **OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that the word “testament” is a biblical term for the covenant of grace, (2) that the covenant of grace has in all ages been the same in substance, (3) that it has been differently administered (without any alteration in its essence), and (4) that there are only two covenants disclosed in Scripture, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.”

- A striking example of the type of error against which this section of the Confession testifies is found in modern dispensationalism.
- Clearly the term *modern dispensationalism* needs some clarification.
  - Usually, we are accustomed to hearing the word *dispensationalism* used only in terms of doctrines of Eschatology- the study of last things, or of the ‘end’ times.
  - “Premillennial Dispensationalism” is the modern, pseudo-orthodox eschatology practiced by nearly all modern churches
    - Arminian denominations (Baptists, Calvary Chapels, Vineyard Fellowships, etc.).
    - Some Reformed denominations hold to it as well: (e.g., many Calvinist Baptist churches like John MacArthur, Phillip De Courcy)
  - But here in the Confession, ‘dispensationalism’ is used in purely *hermeneutical* terms.
  - *Hermeneutics* is the study of, and methodologies used in the interpretation of the text of Scripture. It involves the art or science of exegesis, the study of (or instruction in) the principles of exegesis and its interpretation or explanation. It is the branch of our faith that defines the rules whereby the meaning of the Scriptures is to be ascertained.
  - In hermeneutical terms then, ‘dispensationalists’ believe that in Scripture God deals with His people historically through a series of *dispensations* (statements and restatements) of His will.
  - Dispensationalists do not see *Covenant* as the ‘vehicles’ or ‘vessels’ within which God dispenses redemption.
- Today, Dispensationalism is found in many churches, even some that claim their (technical) adherence to the Westminster Standards.
  - Churches can adhere to many orthodox doctrines, but still stumble on this one premise.
    - The infallibility of the Bible
    - The Virgin Birth of Christ
    - The Trinity
    - The bodily resurrection, etc.
  - Most (hermeneutical) dispensationalists are in these ways adherents of the historic Christian faith.
  - But (hermeneutical) dispensationalists are in opposition to the Confession of Faith, in that they teach that God has employed, in different periods of history, entirely distinct (or even contrary) principles of redemptive dealing with mankind.

- For example, it is the common teaching of (hermeneutical) dispensationalists that God has a different purpose for, and method by which He administers salvation to Jews and to Gentiles.
  - Hermeneutical dispensationalists therefore speak of several covenants as though they are separate and distinct dispensations of redemption:
    - The Scofield Reference Bible (the darling of hermeneutical dispensationalists)
      - Lists the following ‘covenants’:
        - EDENIC, ADAMIC, NOAIC, ABRAHAMIC, MOSAIC, PALESTINIAN, DAVIDIC, & NEW
      - It divides history into numerous ‘dispensations’:
        - Innocency, Conscience, Human Government, Promise, Law, Grace and Kingdom.
        - In each dispensation, the method by which God dispenses saving benefits is fundamentally different.
        - The differences are such as would suggest that God’s way of saving at one dispensational point in history is completely different in another dispensation.
- The Confession teaches the absolute unity of the one and only Covenant of Grace by which, since the fall, God has ALONE dealt with sinners.
- While the Confessions acknowledges that there have been variations (‘dispensations’) in the manner of administrations of that one covenant, it is clear that there is only one Covenant through which redemption is administered.
- It is not wrong to speak of ‘dispensations’ provided we do not deny the unity of the One Covenant (of Grace) in all periods.
  - God, immediately after the fall, gave the human race a rudimentary knowledge of the plan of salvation by a redeemer (Gen. 3:15). At this time He also revealed the elementary fact that man’s sinful nakedness could only be covered by sacrificing the life of a substitute (Gen 3:21, 4:1-8).
  - Later, God revealed *more fully* to Noah the scope and grandeur of his redemptive purpose (Gen 9:8-17, 25-27). But there was no change in the truth or application of what had already been revealed (Gen 8:20-22).
  - At the time of Abraham (Gen 17:7ff, 22:18, etc.) much more was given, and the promise of a redeemer was more specific. The grandeur of God’s purpose was also more distinctly made known. The church was organized as a distinct visible organization, separated from the world by the sign of circumcision.
  - Then through Moses, the content of the covenant of grace was revealed in much greater detail and fulness. The simple theme of blood sacrifice (which was at the heart of divine revelation from the beginning) was elaborately explained in the ritual of the tabernacle and temple services. And the ethical provisions of the covenant were expounded in the moral law.
- But through all of these ‘dispensations’ God was ever leading His people to find their salvation in Christ alone.
- It was never imagined that there was any other way to salvation than that of forgiveness through the atoning blood.
- Rather, we might say that the more revelation given, the more clearly it was understood that there was, is, and ever shall be but one way of salvation, namely that which is provided by God in Christ the Redeemer.
- The ‘Old Testament’ looked faithfully forward to the same Redeemer to be fully revealed in the ‘New Testament’.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 7:

### Of God's Covenant With Man

Section 6. Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance<sup>1</sup>, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper<sup>2</sup>: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy<sup>3</sup>, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles<sup>4</sup>; and is called the new Testament<sup>5</sup>. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations<sup>6</sup>.

1. Col. 2:17
2. Matt. 28:19–20, 1 Cor. 11:23–25
3. Heb. 12:22–27, Jer. 31:33–34
4. Matt. 28:19, Eph. 2:15–19
5. Luke 22:20
6. Gal. 3:14, 16, Acts 15:11, Rom. 3:21–23, 30, Ps. 32:1, Rom. 4:3, 6, 16–17, 23–24, Heb. 13:8

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“All this leads to certain important conclusions. (1) Upon the basis of this one covenant, there is one true Church extending through all ages (Acts 7:38, Eph. 2:11-20, Rom. 11, etc.). The fact that the Scriptures speak of the Church as an organism continuing through all history is a corollary of the unity of the Covenant. (2) The Old Testament ordinances were in anticipation of redemption through Christ and are therefore superseded by the New Testament ordinances which have the same essential meaning.”

- It is because of the unity of the covenant in all dispensations that the Apostle can interchange the terminology of the ordinances of the Old and New Testament periods (Cf. 1 Cor. 5:7, Col 2:11-12, etc.).
  - Circumcision in the Old Testament is likened to Baptism in the New Testament
  - Passover in the Old Testament is likened to the New Testament celebration of the Lord's Table
  - Paul calls each by the name of the other.
  - So, Paul considers them all to be *comparable* (or analogous) signs and seals of the *same* covenant.
- This truth could only persist if the *essence* of the covenant remained unchanged in the two *testaments, dispensations, statements* or *administrations* of it.
  - If the *essence* of a thing changes, there can be no change of its *administration*-such would necessarily be administrations of *different* essences.
  - If the *administration* of the same thing changes, there is the *presumption* that no change has occurred in the *essence* of that thing.
- If there is no “difference” in the covenant then, we must see that further development in how it is faithfully administered **MUST** come from growth pointing to completion or consummation.

Williamson: “*The covenant of grace has not changed, but because it is now fully revealed and wholly accomplished, it may be seen with greater simplicity, clarity, fulness and efficacy than was the case in any previous era.*”

## Chapter 8

# OF CHRIST THE MEDIATOR

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 8:

### Of Christ the Mediator

**Section 1.** It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man<sup>1</sup>, the Prophet<sup>2</sup>, Priest<sup>3</sup>, and King,<sup>4</sup> the Head and Savior of His Church<sup>5</sup>, the Heir of all things<sup>6</sup>, and Judge of the world<sup>7</sup>: unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed<sup>8</sup>, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified<sup>9</sup>.

1. Isa. 42:1; 1 Pet. 1:19–20; John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:5
2. Acts 3:22
3. Heb. 5:5–6
4. Ps. 2:6; Luke 1:33
5. Eph. 5:23
6. Heb. 1:2
7. Acts 17:31
8. John 17:6; Ps. 22:30; Isa. 53:10
9. 1 Tim. 2:6; Isa. 55:4–5; 1 Cor. 1:30

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This section of the Confession teaches us (1) that God has, from eternity, chosen a definite number of Adam’s posterity to be saved through the redemptive work of Christ, (2) that he also, from eternity, promised to give these elect persons to Christ as the reward for his suffering, (3) that Christ engaged to perform and suffer all that was necessary to that end, (4) that this Messianic work required Christ to be the Prophet, Priest and King of His elect people as Head and Savior of the Church, and (5) that he must also be heir and judge of the world.”

- Christ is called the second Adam, or to be more precise, “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45).
  - Adam was the first person in human history to be a covenant head, representative person.
  - Christ is the last person in human history to be a covenant head, or representative person.
    - Christ came to undo for many what Adam did to them
    - Christ came to do for His people what Adam failed to accomplish.
- When Adam was sinless he was possessed of a clear mind, a pure heart, and a right will.
  - In that sense, it is proper to speak of him as a *prophet*, a *priest*, and a *king*.
    - As a *prophet*, (pre-fall) Adam was able to:
      - “Think God’s thoughts after Him.”
      - He could interpret the works of God and speak the truth of God for the whole creation.
    - As a *priest*, (pre-fall) Adam:
      - Dedicated himself unto God as a “living sacrifice.”
      - He himself, and all that he surveyed, he devoted to the worship of God.
    - As a *king*, (pre-fall) Adam:
      - Subdued and ruled all in accordance with right knowledge and holy devotion.
      - His activities were in conformity with, and expressive of, the will of God.
  - We DO NOT say that there was in Adam a consciousness of these three offices, nor that he was *called* by these titles in any official sense.
  - We DO mean that the *work* of a prophet, priest, and king was implicit in his headship.
  - Had he not sinned, it would have been more blatant; but his fall ruined all that.
- Adam’s fall, made the necessity of the advent of “the last Adam” imperative.
  - Much of the Old Testament revelation of Christ in preparation for his coming centered on the same three Messianic offices (Prophet, Priest, and King).
  - It was because of man’s sinful depravity (known and foreseen by God) that three distinct and separate offices were necessary.
    - These were borne in history after the fall by three separate lines of individuals, from what had been part and parcel to sinless manhood.



- Through the use of distinct offices, God revealed the dismal imperfection of man's fallen nature, and show the perfection required of Christ.
- The offices:
  - Prophet.
    - Used of Abraham (Gen 20:7); Enoch (Jude 14, Gen. 5:18); Noah (2 Peter 2:5); Isaac (Gen 27:28,29,40); Jacob (Gen 49:8-11).
    - Moses was the first to be designated a prophet with prominence.
    - God promised (Deut. 18) that there would be a succession of prophets until at last there would arise a supreme prophet.
    - None has arisen since Christ (the seal of the Prophets).
  - Priest.
    - First mentioned with reference to the mysterious Melchizedek (Gen 14:18), but there is no record of his beginning or end.
    - This is important (mostly) because Ps.110:4 predicts that Messiah would be, "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek," indicating that Jesus would have an eternal and unchangeable priesthood (Heb. 7:24).
    - Abraham was also a priest (Gen.13:4, 22:13), as was Isaac (Gen.26:25) and Jacob (Gen. 33:20, 35:7), but it wasn't until the Mosaic era that Aaron was the first to *officially* hold the formal office.
    - 1 Sam 3:35ff reveal that there would be a succession of priests only until a supreme priest arose whose work would abide forever and ultimately fulfill the office.
  - King.
    - The first king in history was Saul. Moreover, the original desire of the people to have a visible human king was condemned by God (1 Sam. 10:19)
    - Yet, from the beginning of history the special task of ruling in obedience to God's will was a subject of divine revelation.
    - Adam was to rule (Gen. 1:26), as was Noah after the fall (Gen. 9:2)
    - Abraham was a king in the sense that he was regarded as the equal of other kings (Gen. 14:1,2,13, 17-24). His wife was called a princess (Gen. 17:15), and from her a succession of kings was promised (v.16).
    - Jacob prophesied that the scepter (symbol of kingly rule), would not depart from the tribe of Judah until the supreme king (Christ) had come (Gen. 49:10).
    - Thus, in spite of the divine disapproval of the reason the Israelites desired a king, the institution of the monarchy was clearly in accord with the eternal plan and will of God (1 Sam 8:20 compared to 8:22).
- During the Old Testament period, these offices were held by true and false prophets, faithful and evil priests, righteous and wicked kings.
  - The true, faithful, and righteous officers foreshadowed the glory of the future Messiah.
  - The false, evil, and wicked practitioners demonstrated the inability of fallen man to fulfill God's requirements without divine intervention.
- When Christ came, he fulfilled all of the requirements which God had laid down for each of these offices.
  - As our Prophet, He revealed to us by the Word and Spirit the will of God for our salvation.
  - As our Priest, He offered Himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, continuing to intercede for us, applying to us the benefits of His one, perfect sacrifice.
  - As our King, he subdues us to Himself, rules and defends us, and continues daily to do so as he causes the kingdom of darkness to recede and the kingdom of grace to advance on earth.
- Christ in the fulfillment of His three offices, is the head and savior of His Church.
  - It is not possible for a true Christian, and true Church, or a true People to claim Christ if they do not accept, and worship Him as the fulfillment of all three offices.
  - Some people accept Him as prophet, OR priest, but deny Him as King.
  - Pick any combination of either/or faithfulness, the result is the same.
- He who is Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Savior of His Church, is also heir of all things and Judge of the Earth.
  - He rules both the Church and the Creation pursuant to His redemptive purpose.
  - Whether this is ignored, overlooked, or denied, it remains eternally true.
- It behooves his People to lead the world by our example.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 8:

### Of Christ the Mediator

Section 2. The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature<sup>1</sup>, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin<sup>2</sup>; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance<sup>3</sup>. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion<sup>4</sup>. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man<sup>5</sup>. John 1:1, 14, 1 John 5:20, Phil. 2:6, Gal. 4:4

1. Heb. 2:14, 16–17, Heb. 4:15

2. Luke 1:27, 31, 35, Gal. 4:4

3. Luke 1:35, Col. 2:9, Rom. 9:5, 1 Pet. 3:18, 1 Tim. 3:16

4. (Rom. 1:3–4, 1 Tim. 2:5)

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This section of the Confession teaches us (1) that Christ is God, (2) that He is also man, having supernaturally entered into human nature without sin, and (3) that He is yet one Person, Christ the only mediator between God and man.”

- This is the doctrine of “Hypostatic Union.”
  - Jesus has two complete natures: one fully human and one fully divine. What the doctrine of the hypostatic union teaches is that these *two natures* are united in *one person* in the God-man. Jesus is not two persons. He is one person. The hypostatic union is the joining (mysterious though it be) of the divine and the human in the one person of Jesus.
- John the Apostle said, “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” [1 John 4:2-4]
- This union is of critical importance in Christianity.
- Denying the union of Christ's two natures is a serious heresy.
  - “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.” [2 John, 7-11]
- During the first few centuries of the Church, many battles between doctrinal truth and error were generalized, codified, and dealt with in various creeds.
  - The early Christians were continually called upon to defend the Christian faith against all-out pagan opposition.
    - Among these heretical attacks in the first two centuries was *Gnosticism*.
      - Gnosticism was Satan's great counterfeit and surrogate for Christianity in those days.
      - The Gnostics put up false caricature of the entire Christian system that led many away from the One True Faith.
      - The Apostle John actually wrote his epistles to directly oppose the Gnostics, who among their other issues, tried to highjack his Gospel for their purposes.
      - Gnostics practice a supra-historical faith- a faith based upon vain speculations of things supposedly lying behind or outside of history.
      - Theirs is a system that artificially separates material creation from spiritual realities.

- During the third and fourth centuries, attacks against the church became less generalized and more concentrated (primarily on the doctrine of the Trinity).
      - *Monarchianism*- made Christ and the Holy Spirit subordinate to the Father, not only in their redemptive works, but in their very essence.
      - *Modalism (or Modalistic Monarchianism)*- made out God to be one person who assumes three identities (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), but only one at a time.
      - *Arianism*- taught that Christ and the Holy Spirit were merely creatures, and that the Father is the only person rightly called “God.”
    - Against these and other heresies attacking the early church, councils were called and credal responses formulated.
      - Council of Nicea (AD 325).
      - Council of Constantinople (AD 381)
    - Conscious and conscientious oppositions were raised to all of the subtle (innocent-sounding) and not-so-subtle (openly hostile) errors allied against the early church.
    - Generally, the early church councils succeeded in clarifying and dogmatically defining orthodoxy with respect to the Trinity.
  - Between the fifth and seventh centuries there arose three additional heresies: *Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, and Eutychianism*.
    - *Apollinarianism* taught that Christ was God, but that He did not possess true (or complete) humanity: that He had a body and a soul, but in place of a human spirit Christ had the divine Logos (or Word).
    - *Nestorianism* taught that Christ exists in two distinct and separate persons, one divine and the other human (rather than one person having two natures).
    - *Eutychianism* (also called monophysitism) taught that in the incarnate person of Christ there was a single divine nature. It specifically taught that Christ’s divine nature was so intermixed with His human nature that He was, in fact, not fully human OR fully divine.
    - There were other heresies, but these were the most prominent.
    - The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) formulated and codified the true and orthodox doctrine of Christ’s person.
      - It is the substance of this Chalcedonian Creed, sometimes called the Chalcedonian Formula, that makes up the statement of Christ’s hypostatic union in this section of the Confession.
      - [Williamson]: “Centuries of deadly conflict between Satan and the Church are crystallized in these words- ‘that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion.’”
  - In His divine nature, Christ is: Eternal [John 17:5,24]; Omnipotent (Matt. 8:27); Omniscient [Luke 6:8]; His supernatural paternity was respected in his human conception [Luke 1:35].
  - In His human nature, He: began in time (Gal 4:4); was by human generation from Mary’s substance [Luke 1:35]; was subject to the limitations, incident to human existence (i.e., growth, hunger, sorrow, pain, limitations of knowledge, etc.) [Heb 2:17, 4:15, etc.]
  - In His uni-personality, {*Scripture is clear that Christ’s human nature was genuine and complete, as was His divine nature, and that they ever remained distinct within His person with no mixture, dissolution, or confusion between them*}. Yet Scripture is equally insistent that Christ was but ONE PERSON.
    - Neither God nor men ever addressed Him or dealt with him as one or the other, nor did He ever act at any time as if He were one or the other.
      - The modern practice of making pictures of Christ as if His human nature could properly be portrayed by itself is not only a fearful error, it is *impossible*. [The Larger Catechism, Question 109 deals with the error of “making of any representation of God, of all or any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever” as a violation of the second commandment.
    - Just as God is one God, and yet three eternally distinct Persons, so Christ is one person, and yet has two entire natures which are distinct from one another in the unity of his person.
    - Because He is one person with two natures, we may speak of Him as God and as shedding human blood.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 8:

### Of Christ the Mediator

Section 3. The Lord Jesus, in His human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure<sup>1</sup>, having in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge<sup>2</sup>; in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell<sup>3</sup>; to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth<sup>4</sup>, He might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a Mediator and Surety<sup>5</sup>. Which office He took not unto Himself, but was thereunto called by His Father<sup>6</sup>, who put all power and judgment into His hand, and gave Him commandment to execute the same<sup>7</sup>.

1. Ps. 45:7, John 3:34
2. Col. 2:3
3. Col. 1:19
4. Heb. 7:26, John 1:14
5. Acts 10:38, Heb. 12:24, Heb. 7:22
6. Heb. 5:4-5
7. John 5:22, 27, Matt. 28:18, Acts 2:36

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“In this section of the Confession we learn (1) how the human nature of Christ was equipped for His mediatorial work, (2) why it was necessary that He also be God to perform this work, (3) how He was divinely called to this office, (4) that He was invested with requisite authority, ability, etc., and (5) that He was ordained to execute this work.”

- The human nature of Christ did not cease in any way to be human (limited, finite, etc.) when taken into unity with His divine nature.
  - It was necessary that He be furnished by God with whatever He needed to fulfill His office.
  - He was entirely like us, except for our sin.
- Even without sin, He was not qualified or authorized to perform His messianic task (Hebrews 2:11)
  - He could receive authorization only by the special call of God (Hebrews 5:4).
  - It was necessary that He be given divine orders to fulfill the task (Hebrews 5:1; Luke 4:18).
- The Old Testament persons anointed of God to hold anticipatory messianic offices were supernaturally endowed for their work by a special operation of the Holy Spirit distinct from any other operations He may have done in, for, or through them personally (1 Samuel 10:1,6 compared with 1 Samuel 28:16; Judges 14:6, 16:20).
  - This special operation of the Holy Spirit was outwardly symbolized by anointing with oil
  - Christ was not anointed with oil, but He was anointed by the Holy Spirit without measure (not limited in the ways that His Old Testament precursors were (John 3:34; Luke 4:18).
- Christ did not have the need of the Holy Spirit for personal salvation since He was without sin.
- Christ DID need the Holy Spirit to enable Him (in His humanity) to accomplish the work of redemption.
- Christ at all times performed His preaching, worked His miracles, and yielded perfect obedience, in entire dependence upon the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38), claiming, “...I do nothing on my own authority...” (John 8:28-29).
- In the end, Christ’s human nature sank under the total affliction of the curse of God, visited upon His human nature, to bear the awful damnation for which He died (although of His own will).
- This shows that there is no power inherent in His human nature apart from the Spirit of God.
- It is equally true and important that Christ was possessed of a divine nature.
  - Thus, He was, in and of Himself, able to lay down His life and take it up again (John 10:17).
  - Endowment by the Holy Spirit as to His human nature could no have given Him this divine authority and power.
  - To be truly sovereign *over* death, and *subject* to death He had to be God, and not merely man.
  - A man may in a sense be said to lay down his life, but he must be more than mere man to take it back up again.

- Further, were Christ not God (and thus infinite in capacity for suffering), how could He have suffered the limitless wrath of God (in place of ALL His Elect, through all time) in three days?
  - Because He was God, He was able to offer what was *greater* in value than is required by the sins of the world.
  - How could He have access to God on our behalf with guaranteed efficacy?
  - How could He certainly defeat all of His (and our) enemies?
  - How could He send us His Holy Spirit?
- How could any of these things be accomplished if Christ is not fully God and fully man as well?
  - If Christ had not been God and man in ONE PERSON, the diverse requirements for our salvation could not have met in that one work of redemption.
  - Because Christ united in Himself the requisite conditions AND possessed the necessary qualifications, He was able to accomplish our redemption as the single mediator between God and Man.

Fully God : Fully Man : United as one Mediator

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 8:

### Of Christ the Mediator

Section 4. This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake<sup>1</sup>; which that He might discharge, He was made under the law<sup>2</sup>, and did perfectly fulfill it<sup>3</sup>; endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul<sup>4</sup>, and most painful sufferings in His body<sup>5</sup>; was crucified, and died<sup>6</sup>, was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption<sup>7</sup>. On the third day He arose from the dead<sup>8</sup>, with the same body in which He suffered<sup>9</sup>, with which also He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of His Father<sup>10</sup>, making intercession<sup>11</sup>, and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world<sup>12</sup>.

1. Ps. 40:7–8, Heb. 10:5–10, John 10:18, Phil. 2:8
2. Gal. 4:4
3. Matt. 3:15; 5:17
4. Matt. 26:37–38; 27:46, Luke 22:44
5. Matt. 26,27
6. Phil. 2:8
7. Acts 2:23–24,27, Acts 13:37, Rom. 6:9
8. 1 Cor. 15:3–5
9. John 20:25,27
10. Mark 16:19
11. Rom. 8:34, Heb. 7:25; 9:24
12. Rom. 14:9–10, Acts 1:11, Acts 10:42, Matt. 13:40–42, Jude 6, 2 Pet. 2:4

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This section of the Confession teaches us (1) that Christ voluntarily took upon Himself the mediatorial office (2) with the estate of humiliation that it involved, as well as the estate of exaltation wherein He continues to perform His mediatorial work.”

- The voluntary character of the entrance of Go the Son into human nature and His Messianic office is everywhere affirmed in Scripture.

#### Hebrews 2:10-17

*10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, 12 saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” 13 And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.” 14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. 16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

- Christ imposed the human condition upon Himself. He exercised an entirely FREE choice in this.
  - He voluntarily condescended to take a human nature upon himself.
  - And He voluntarily submitted Himself to death.
  - John 10:17,18- “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”
  - Galatians 2:20- *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*
- Christ’s voluntary assumption of the Messianic offices entailed the experience of the **estate of humiliation** requisite to the accomplishment of His tasks, which was clear before His advent:
  - He was to be subject the humiliation of human birth (Is. 7:14, 9:6; Gen. 3:15, 17:7; Ps.72).
  - He was to be subject to the humiliation of a low condition (Ps.22:9-12; Micah 5:2; Job 25:6; Ps.22:6).

- He was to be subject to the humiliation of being made under the law (Ps.40:6-8; Hen.10:4-10; Ps.45:6f, 72:1).
- He was subject to the humiliation of having to render perfect obedience to the law (Ps.45:7; Ex.28; Ps.40:8-10).
- He was subject to the humiliation of having to undergo the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and accursed condemnation to die on the cross (Ps.22; Isaiah 53, etc.)
- He was subject to the humiliation of death, burial, and continuing under the power of death for a time (Ps.35:11, 118:22, 16:9-11; Isaiah 53:8).
- Christ's Messianic offices also entailed the experience of the glorious **estate of exaltation**.
  - The Scriptures required Christ's rising again from the dead on the third day (Ps.16:10, 49:15,68:18; Eph 4:8-10)
  - The Scriptures required that Christ ascend into heaven (Ps. 47:5, 24:7-10).
  - The Scripture required that Christ sit at the right hand of God the Father, to intercede for us from there, to reign over us, and to rule all things (Ps, 16:11, 90:1; Dan.7:13,14; Zech.6:12,13)
  - The Scriptures require that Christ come again at the last day to judge the living and the dead (Ps.98:9, etc.) [THIS PARTICULAR POINT WILL BE COVERED IN CHAPTER 33].
- All of these Scriptural predictions, except for the last day resurrection and judgement, have already been, or are presently being fulfilled by Christ according to the witness of the New Testament.
- So, the voluntary character of the Lord's work is clearly affirmed by Scripture and divinely prescribed as necessary for His Messianic Offices in order to affect the redemption of the His people (cf. Luke 2:49, 4:43; Matt 16:21; Luke 22:37,24:44).

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 8:

### Of Christ the Mediator

**Section 5.** The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father<sup>1</sup>; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him<sup>2</sup>.

1. Rom. 5:19, Heb. 9:14, 16, Heb. 10:14, Eph. 5:2, Rom. 3:25–26
2. Dan. 9:24,26; Col. 1:19–20; Eph. 1:11,14; John 17:2, Heb. 9:12, 15

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This section of the Confession teaches us (1) that Christ made satisfaction to God for those whom He represented, (2) that this satisfaction was by active and passive obedience, and (3) that by this satisfaction Christ secured complete redemption for those whom He represented.”

- Today, the proverbial rubber meets the legendary asphalt.
  - This is the doctrine of Particular Redemption, sometimes called, “Limited Atonement” (the ‘L’ in the ‘TULIP’ acrostic).
  - Traditional Reformed Confessions acknowledge that Christ was a substitute for some men, rather than for all men.
  - The historical problems we have had with using the ‘limited’ term is the common and erroneous misunderstanding among the non-reformed (primarily Arminian, Lutheran, Roman Catholic) churches that we somehow mean there were limits to Christ’s atonement *itself*.
- Arminians like to believe that we limit Christ’s work, while *they* do not.
  - The truth is that the Arminian limits the *efficacy* of the Atonement, while the Reformed system does not.
    1. Arminians, Lutherans, Roman Catholics:
      - Insist that Christ’s sacrifice was for all of mankind (all humans who ever lived have equal, and unfettered access to salvation).
      - They (like us) adhere to the belief that only through Christ can salvation and reconciliation be obtained by men.
      - Functionally meaning, that to adhere to unlimited atonement and simultaneously hold to the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice alone, all humans must have been saved (the heresy of so-called *Universal Salvation*).
      - So, they must admit that all of mankind has NOT been saved, and that only SOME humans ever become beneficiaries of Christ’s atoning sacrifice.
    2. Arminians therefore share our understanding that salvation is only ever efficacious for a limited portion of the human race.
- Williamson: “*If all who accept the Scriptural dictum thus “limit” the ultimate number that shall be saved to merely a part of the human race, why should the Reformed Christian alone be held in disrepute for “limiting” the atonement?*”
- The precise difference between the Reformed Confessions and that of the Arminians (and others) is not the ultimate *effect* of the atonement, but rather the original *design* of it.
  - When Christ died, was it His plan or design to save all men or only some men?
  - The Reformed Churches have always answered that the works of God are never inconsistent, and that those who are *actually* saved are those (and only those) whom it was always God’s design to save.
  - Christ’s atonement is 100% effectual for 100% of those He came to save, and no others.
  - The Arminian (and the other systems mentioned) have always sought some way to make the work of Christ *distributively* the same for all men.
    1. They say that the design of the atonement was to provide “equal” benefits for all men (and therefore salvation is presumed to be “more fairly distributed”).
    2. But this requires a profound lowering of the conception of what Christ’s atonement actually IS.
    3. In other words, Christ secured something less than complete salvation; He secured only access to it.



- Because they *want* to say that Christ did as much for EVERY particular man by way of Salvation as He did for SOME, they place themselves at the top of a slippery logical slope of conceding that Christ alone could not actually secure Salvation for ANYONE.
  - In the Arminian system, Christ can only secure the *possibility*, or *chance*, or *opportunity* for salvation, contingent (ultimately) upon the “free will choice or decision” of each recipient of it.
  - IF the work of Christ is the same for all men, then it cannot actually do for any what it does not accomplish for all;
  - Since the work of Christ does not guarantee salvation for *all*, it must necessarily not *secure* salvation for any.
  - The only way that the Arminian can extend the design of Christ’s atonement and to include everyone equally within its provision, is to eliminate its substitutionary character.
- This is a false limitation placed upon Christ’s atonement by men, which wounds the very heart of the gospel.
  - If Christ did not actually take upon him my sin, guilt, and punishment, then what shall I do?
  - If he merely opens the way of access to God so that I can go there WITH my sin and guilt intact, woe is me, for I have no way to purge myself of its stain.
    1. Yet that is the most that we can attribute to Christ’s death, if we try to maintain that it was designed for the equal benefit of all men, that is, opening heaven to all, in order that they might each come to ask for pardon and forgiveness.
- The witness of the Bible and our Reformed Confession is that the work of Christ did much more for sinners than to merely gain them *access* to God for *possible* pardon and restoration.”
  - What it actually gained for sinners was just precisely pardon and restoration.
    1. Christ actually took upon Himself the sin and punishment of His people (Isa. 53; Heb. 10:14, 3:25,26).
    2. We in turn receive the imputed righteousness of Christ (1 Cor. 5:21,ff.)
  - This is pardon and restoration.
    1. We are pardoned because our sin is punished in Christ.
    2. We are restored because His righteousness becomes ours.
- If we hold with Scripture, that in this, as in all other redemptive works of God, He had a *special* people in view for *particular* redemption, then we wind up magnifying the power of Christ’s redemption rather than diluting it; we can rest in the presence of God when we are assured that redemption has been accomplished by Him, and imputed to us.
- What is the Testimony of Scripture?
  - Jesus was so named because He would SAVE HIS PEOPLE from their sins. (Matt. 1:21).
  - He gave His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28)
  - He promised that He would ACTUALLY SAVE all that the Father had given Him (John 6:37,39).
  - John 6:37-39:  
*“<sup>37</sup>All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. <sup>38</sup>For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup>And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. <sup>40</sup>For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*
  - John 17:5-10:  
*“<sup>5</sup> And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.<sup>6</sup>I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. <sup>8</sup> For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup> I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. <sup>10</sup> All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.”*
  - John 10:14ff:  
*“<sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”*
  - The Apostle Paul stated plainly that only those who are predestined of God to subsequently receive salvation do actually receive it. (Romans 8:29)
    1. Each particular benefit of salvation is therefore unfolded to them (Romans 8:30).
    2. The basis of it all, is that God did not spare His Son, but delivered Him up for his elect (Romans 8:33).

- Clearly, these (and other) texts indicate more than God's intention of making salvation merely possible. They are words of a God who intended to SURELY save a people of His choosing from their sins.
- Certainly, there are some texts of Scripture that *seem* applicable to general or universal atonement:
  - Hebrews 2:9-  
*"But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."*
  - 2 Corinthians 5:14,15-  
*"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."*
  - 1John 2:2-  
*"He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."*
  - But concerning the interpretation of these verses as supporting universal atonement, three important principles of Biblical Interpretation must be ignored or overlooked
    1. CONTEXT- the context of these verses speaks not in the context of all mankind, but within the immediate or referenced context of a limited population of mankind. When the authors speak of Christ's tasting death for *everyone*, is it truly meant to convey every one *to whom* the writer is speaking?
    2. SCRIPTURE INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE- The very first principle of Biblical Hermeneutics is that how Scripture speaks of a particular subject *elsewhere* is the first (and primary) point of comparison to interpret the Scripture *here*. For instance, Scripture frequently employs rather universal expressions to describe phenomena which are merely general and not absolute. For example, Matthew 3:5 says that when John the Baptist was preaching, there all Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan went out and were baptized by him. Also, Luke tells us that all the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the Baptism of John; John's First Epistle says that the whole world lies in wickedness (yet says as well that we are of God).
    3. COMMON GRACE- There are many gracious benefits that accrue to the whole human race due to the atonement of Christ APART from eternal salvation. There is then a *sense* then in which Christ is the 'savior of all men' that is different entirely from how he is "specially the savior of those that believe." [1 Tim. 4:10]. The death of Christ has secured *temporal* benefits for the human race and a DELAY IN THE EXECUTION OF THE SENTENCE OF DAMNATION (cf. Genesis 8:20-9:17 regarding the covenant of grace applicable to all men.)

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 8:

### Of Christ the Mediator

Section 6. Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein He was revealed, and signified to be the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world; being yesterday and today the same, and for ever<sup>1</sup>.

1. Gal. 4:4–5, Gen. 3:15, Rev. 13:8, Heb. 13:8

Section 7. Christ, in the work of mediation, acts according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself<sup>1</sup>; yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature<sup>2</sup>.

1. Heb. 9:14, 1 Pet. 3:18
2. Acts 20:28, John 3:13, 1 John 3:16

Section 8. To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same<sup>1</sup>; making intercession for them<sup>2</sup>, and revealing unto them, in and by the word, the mysteries of salvation<sup>3</sup>; effectively persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by his word and Spirit<sup>4</sup>; overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner, and ways, as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation<sup>5</sup>.

1. John 6:37, 39, John 10:15–16
2. 1 John 2:1–2, Rom. 8:34
3. John 15:13, 15, Eph. 1:7–10, John 17:6
4. John 14:16, Heb. 12:2, 2 Cor. 4:13, Rom. 8:9, 14, Rom. 15:18–19, John 17:17
5. Ps. 110:1, 1 Cor. 15:25–26, Mal. 4:2–3, Col. 2:15

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections teach us (1) that the benefits of Christ's atonement have been applied to the elect in all ages even though they were not actually accomplished until the incarnation, (2) that these benefits were applied prior to the incarnation by types and ordinances different from those of the present, (3) that Christ's mediatorial work involves concurrently both natures, (4) that Christ effectually applies redemption to those for whom he purchased it, and (5) the manner in which he does this.”

- In Chapter 7, Sections 4-6 we discussed how, in all ‘dispensations’ of God's historical intersections with mankind, salvation was always by faith in Christ's atonement, and that any perceived changes in how God dealt with men were really only required by progress in divine revelation leading to the advent of Christ.
- The salvation of God's people in all ages has always through the cross of Christ alone.
  - Psalm 51:16- *“For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.”*
  - David understood that God did not regard the Old Testament sacrifices to have intrinsic efficacy.
  - The very design of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament was partly to show that these could not make the practitioner perfect.
    - Hebrews 9:8-10- *“By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.”*

- Sacrifices only proved to point Old Testament believers forward to that one offering by which Christ would perfect those sanctified by it. The Law was a mere shadow of what was to come.
  - Hebrews 10:1- *“For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.”*
  - Hebrews 10:11-14- *“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”*
- We also saw in Sections 1-3 of this chapter that Christ’s mediatorial work concurrently involves both His human and divine natures.
  - The plan of salvation (as applied to our redemption) is self-consistent.
    - Those chosen of the Father were purchased by Christ.
    - Those purchased by Christ are effectually called unto His kingdom.
    - John 6:37- *“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”*
  - The manner by which Christ accomplishes this is touched upon herein, but will be more thoroughly discussed in the Chapter on Effectual Calling (Chapter 10).
  - Here we will merely stress that Christ does effectually apply redemption to those for whom He died.
    - In grasping this truth, it is helpful to remember these truths:
      1. Christ freely and sincerely offers salvation to all who hear the gospel, whether they are elect or not. [cf. Matt 11:28; 20:16; 23:37]
      2. Christ promised that no one who accepts His offer will be cast out. [cf. John 6:37].  
*“To say that Christ effectually applies redemption to his elect must not be twisted or perverted to mean that He restrains others from accepting His grace.” Williamson.*
      3. The difficulty with those who are not effectually called is wholly within themselves.
        - a. They are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1f). They will not come to Christ (Matt. 23:37).
        - b. They will not come to Christ (Matt. 23:37)
        - c. They account His gospel as a foolish thing (1Cor. 1:23, 2:14).
        - d. It is not because of what Christ does, but because of what they are and what they do, that they ‘cannot come’ to Christ (John 6:44).
      4. That the elect come is only because Christ enables them to do so.
        - a. He creates a new heart (Psalm 51:10, etc.) within them.
        - b. This new heart makes them so that they will want to accept the salvation that He freely gives to all who will receive it. No one knows who the Father is except the Son, and whomever the Son reveals Him to (Luke 10:22).
        - c. God reveals Himself to us through the Holy Spirit, not by the spirit of the world, so that we might know the things that are (then) freely given to us by God (1 Cor. 2:10,12).

Chapter 9

**OF  
FREE WILL**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 9:

### Of Free Will

**Section 1.** God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor, by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good, or evil<sup>1</sup>.

1. Matt. 17:12, James 1:14, Deut. 30:19

**Section 2.** Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom, and power to will and to do that which was good and well pleasing to God<sup>1</sup>; but yet, mutably, so that he might fall from it<sup>2</sup>.

1. Eccl. 7:29, Gen. 1:26

2. Gen. 2:16–17, Gen. 3:6

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections [*by which Williamson means the entire chapter*] teach us (1) that man, by nature, possesses a free will, (2) that this freedom or liberty means that man is not forced to will that which is contrary to his nature or desire, and (3) that man in four estates enjoys the same liberty but different degrees of ability to do good or evil.” [*note that we will, in this first lesson on the chapter, only be discussing man’s estate(s) before the fall.*]

- It is all too common to bring the railing accusation against the Reformed Faith that it denies “free will.”
- Many reject the Reformed Faith (“Calvinism”) out of hand because they assume that divine sovereignty (of which predestination is but one aspect) cancels all true human liberty and responsibility.
- Ironically, no OTHER system teaching safeguards true human liberty and responsibility as does ours.
- But in order to grasp this fact we must carefully note what freedom of the will is and what it is not.
  - By free will we mean that man’s will is not coerced.
  - We mean that man is not forced by some external force greater than himself to something he does not want to do.
  - We mean that man is free to do what he wants to do within the limits of his ability.
- What else can freedom or liberty be than to do as we please?
- However, we must carefully note that **liberty** is not identical to **ability**.
  - Confusion of these distinct things accounts for much false thinking on the subject of free will.
  - Many people really mean **ability** when they say **liberty**.
  - They speak of man being free to *choose to do good or evil* when they really mean to say that men are *able to do good or evil*.
    - In this they seriously err, for the Bible clearly and consistently teaches:
      - That man is free to DO good or evil, that he is at liberty to do either,
      - But that he is able to do only evil because of his fallen condition (Deut. 30:19, John 6:44, etc.).
    - The essence of this common confusion is located for us in Christ’s teaching in Matthew 12:33 where he says, “Either make the tree good, and his fruit; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by its fruit.”
    - The will is a faculty of man’s soul or personality.
      - The will is therefore determined by the soul (self, ego, personality) of the man.
      - It cannot escape the moral character out of which it comes.
      - If the soul is entirely corrupt so that its knowledge and desire are defective and rotten, it follows that it will ever will to do only that which is evil.
    - Thus, absolute liberty exists even though there is total inability to do good.
- Man originally had a sinless personality.
- He desired only that which was good and well-pleasing to God.

- He was free to do that which was according to his own desire because his nature was wholly uncorrupted.
- And because his nature was wholly un-corrupted his desires were only good.
- He had absolute liberty to *choose* good, and also the *ability* to actually do good.
- He had no *more* liberty to do good than have we fallen men, but he had complete ability to actually do good that is totally absent in fallen man.

*With sin's entrance into the equation, man lost all ability to do good.... which we will discuss next week.*

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 9: Of Free Will

**Section 3.** Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation<sup>1</sup>: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good<sup>2</sup>, and dead in sin<sup>3</sup>, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto<sup>4</sup>.

1. Rom. 5:6, Rom. 8:7, John 15:5.
2. Rom. 3:10, 12
3. Eph. 2:1, 5, Col. 2:13
4. John 6:44, 65, Eph. 2:2–5, 1 Cor. 2:14, Tit. 3:3–5

**Section 4.** When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He freeth him from his natural bondage under sin<sup>1</sup>; and, by His grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good<sup>2</sup>; yet so, that by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil<sup>3</sup>.

1. Col. 1:13, John 8:34, 36
2. Phil. 2:13, Rom. 6:18, 22
3. Gal. 5:17, Rom. 7:15, 18–19, 21, 23

**Section 5.** The will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to do good alone in the state of glory only<sup>1</sup>.

1. Eph. 4:13, Heb. 12:23, 1 John 3:2, Jude 24

### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections [*by which Williamson means the entire chapter*] teach us (1) that man, by nature, possesses a free will, (2) that this freedom or liberty means that man is not forced to will that which is contrary to his nature or desire, and (3) that man in four estates enjoys the same liberty but different degrees of ability to do good or evil.” [*note that we will, in this second lesson on the chapter, primarily be discussing man’s estate(s) after the fall.*]

- Last week, we concentrated on man’s *freedom of will*, as contrasted to his *freedom of ability* to prosecute and live-out what he wills to do.
- We started the discussion with man’s estate(s) prior to the fall of Adam: how Adam was in his created estate.
- From there, we toggled to the estates of man in which he existed *after* the fall of Adam, but *before* the advent of Christ, and of our estate now, after the fall *and* after the advent of Christ:
  - As mankind *generally* exists, under the curse of Adam’s fall, but *outside* the grace of Christ through *election, justification, and adoption*.
  - As we exist now *in Christ*, during our *sanctification* but before our *glorification*.
- Now we shift to the discussion of Free Will, to man’s estates once regenerated.
- With sin’s entrance into the world, man lost his *ability* to do good, but not his *liberty* to will it.
  - This may seem like a minor point of reasoning, but it is critical to our understanding our condition, our need for the Sovereign Grace of God, through Christ, made effectual by the Holy Spirit, and wholly outside our choosing (as the primary cause).
  - One sin, as God had warned our first parents, was sufficient to destroy the pure nature from which alone the good fruit of right action could conceivably grow ‘organically’.
- Before the fall, man was at liberty to CHOOSE either good or evil, and he was able to DO either.
- After the fall, man remained able to choose either good or evil, but he was only able to DO evil.
  - Genesis 6:5- “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”
  - Genesis 8:20 & 21-“Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.”
  - Psalms 14:1-4- “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the LORD?”
  - Psalms 53:2,3- “God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.



- Jeremiah 13:23- “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil.
- 1 Corinthians 2:14- “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”
- Sinful man cannot even do that one good thing necessary to bring about his deliverance own: no man is able to come to Christ unless he is FIRST called by God.
  - John 6:44- “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”
  - But this is due to man’s own nature; he is not kept from any good by external force or coercion.
  - He is kept from it by the very “laws” of his own depraved character.
    - [Williamson]- “Just as a corpse has arms, legs, etc., which lay unused because the one who exercised them is dead, but which are used again when God resurrects the body to life, so it is with the will of man. He is spiritually dead. He is able to do good only as he is regenerated in order that he may again possess the good heart to will and to DO God’s good pleasure (Eph. 2:1ff., John 3:3, Phil. 2:13).”
- The regenerate man possesses the same absolute liberty as did Adam before the fall, and sinners after the fall.
- The difference between an unregenerate man and a regenerate man is one of *ability*, not *liberty*.
  - Both are free to do good.
  - Only one is able to do good.
    - And he is able only because God the Holy Spirit has given him a new heart (Eph. 2:10, 1 John 5:18, Ezek. 36:26).
    - He is made a new creature (Gal. 6:15).
- Therefore, regenerate man has ability to will and do what is good.
  - Yet his ability is not *identical* with that which Adam originally had.
    - Adam was once able to do God’s will perfectly.
    - The regenerate man is not YET able to do God’s will perfectly.
  - This does not mean that he is not a new creature. He *is*.
    - 1 John 3:9-10-“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”
    - He *does* truly delight in the will of God (that he formerly hated and derided).
    - He *does* persist in the way of righteousness (which he formerly would/could/did not).
    - Sin cannot prevail against him (as it formerly did) [cf., 1John 3:3, Eph. 5:9, Rom. 6:14].
  - But sin is present with him.
    - Romans 7:21-23- “So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.”
  - The reason for this is that those who are new creatures in Christ are in the midst of the *process* of being made holy.
    - We are not “finished products” yet, even though we are wholly changed in our very essence by Christ.
    - We are BEING sanctified.
    - We are really only what we ought to be (and someday will be) “in principle.”
    - Someday we will be what we ought to be in total, in detail, in fullness.
    - But now, God’s work is still being wrought (shaped, bent, fashioned, formed, produced) in us.
  - God works in us to will and to do, more and more, of His good pleasure.
  - By and by, His work in us will be done, and we shall be glorified.
  - But even in glory man will possess essentially the same liberty that he now has.
    - The difference (again) will be in man’s ability (not his liberty) to do good.
    - He will then be able to do ONLY THAT WHICH IS RIGHT.
    - His will then will be *contrary* to all evil, not in bondage to it.
    - He will no longer be susceptible to sin’s attraction, nor possess the slightest desire to do evil any more.

**May the LORD hasten that day!**

# Chapter 10

## OF EFFECTUAL CALLING

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 10:

### Of Effectual Calling

Section 1. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call<sup>1</sup>, by his Word and Spirit<sup>2</sup>, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ<sup>3</sup>; enlightening their minds, spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God<sup>4</sup>; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh<sup>5</sup>; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good<sup>6</sup>, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ<sup>7</sup>; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace<sup>8</sup>.

1. Rom 8:30; 11:7; Eph 1:10-11.
2. 2 Cor 3:3, 6; 2 Thes 2:13-14.
3. Rom 8:2; Eph 2:1-5; 2 Tim 1:9-10.
4. Acts 26:18; 1 Cor 2:10, 12; Eph 1:17-18.
5. Ezek 36:26.
6. Deut 30:6; Ezek 11:19; 36:27; Phil 2:13.
7. John 6:44-45; Eph 1:19.
8. Psa 110:3; Song 1:4; John 6:37; Rom 6:16-18.

Section 2. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man<sup>1</sup>; who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit<sup>2</sup>, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it<sup>3</sup>.

1. Rom 9:11; Eph 2:4-5, 8-9; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:4-5.
2. Rom 8:7; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:5.
3. Ezek 36:27; John 5:25; 6:37.

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

"These sections of the Confession teach us (1) who they are who are effectually called, (2) when, (3) by what means, (4) from what moral and spiritual condition, (5) to what moral and spiritual condition, (6) in what manner they are effectually called, and (7) that this effectual call is wholly of God."

- We here begin a study within the doctrines of Salvation (Soteriology) called in Latin, the *ordo salutis*, the order of the application of redemption to the elect.
- In this order we distinguish the following:
  - Calling - God's free offer of salvation in the gospel,
  - Regeneration- the creative act of God making the elect new beings in heart,
  - Conversion- the exercise of that new heart in responding to the gospel in repentance and faith,
  - Justification- the judicial act of God upon repentance and faith by which he declares and constitutes his elect "just" or righteous,
  - Adoption- the act by which God admits them into the rights and privileges of the sons of God.
  - Sanctification- the work of God's Spirit by which the elect are enabled to persevere in faith unto ever greater conformity to the will of God,
  - Glorification- by which, at the resurrection of the body, the believer is at last constituted perfect in Christ both in body and soul, forever.
- The first phase of the application of redemption is *ordinarily* effectual calling.
  - We say 'ordinarily' because there are certain exceptions.
  - Section 3 of this chapter will speak of those who "are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word" such as infants dying in infancy, and persons who suffer from severe mental disorder.
  - Such of course could not receive saving grace in quite the same way as others, so that their regeneration must take place apart from the ministry of the Word, even though it must be by sovereign means apart from their own abilities.
  - Note that Calvinism is frequently accused of being harsh in this area, because we remain steadfast in our doctrines that man is lost apart from Sovereign Grace, innately culpable to the result of the fall, accountable under the law for Adam's sin, and deny the unbiblical concept of conditional accountability. Denying the 'ordinary means of grace' through the Word to those incapable of hearing it, is not the same thing as forbidding extraordinary means, which we will cover in depth in Section 3.
- Those who restrict the scope of divine sovereignty in order to suspend the operations of grace upon the powers of man logically must pay a heavy price at this very point.
  - They can offer no hope to those who they must admit have no ability or power.

- Yet the absolute sovereignty of God in the salvation of men does not conflict with the fact that in *all* ordinary cases God employs the means which he himself has ordained.
- In all cases, except those specified, effectual calling is accomplished through the instrumentality of the preaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:21).
  - God has commanded His church to go into all the world to preach the gospel to everyone (Matt. 24:14, 28:19; Acts 1:8, etc.)
  - The reason is that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17).
  - This does not mean that every human being in history will hear the gospel, as many have not (Eph. 2:11,12).
    - God appointed some to dwell in darkness until the set time for deliverance to come (Acts. 17:26,27).
    - There were nations appointed to darkness before the advent of Christ.
    - God appointed the Jews (except for a small remnant) to walk in darkness until the fulness of the Gentiles were brought in.
  - Yet in the Old Testament era some Gentiles were effectually called, and in the New Testament era some Jews are also.
- In redemptive history, God has controlled all things in such a way that the elect (except in the cases dealt with in Section 3) always have heard the gospel in order that they might be saved.
  - He saw to it that Rahab and Ruth heard the gospel.
  - He sees to it that the elect Jews (and others) hear it today.
  - [Williamson]: “*And so in the general task of expanding the witness of the Church to all the world, there is a divine control exercised so that the elect will hear the call of God.*”
  - God sees to it that the elect hear His voice. (John 10:16)
- The gospel then comes to the elect, but it also comes to others with whom they are intermingled.
  - It comes with good offers of grace and salvation to all.
  - It makes no discrimination, and neither must those who preach it.
  - Why do some accept and others reject the offer of eternal salvation?
    - It is contrary to the will and desire of men to accept it, until, in the case of some, their basic nature is changed.
    - The change is the result of the instantaneous creation of a new heart in them by the almighty power of the Spirit of God (Ezek. 36:26).
    - This is the “new birth” (John 3:3f), the “new creation,” by which the elect are (quite literally) “raised from the dead.”

John 3:1-8- “Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

- By verses like this, we see that the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit is:
  - Prevenient- that it precedes all spiritual activity of man that pertains to salvation.
  - Monergistic- it is accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit.
  - Mysterious- it cannot be observed or described
  - Sovereign- it takes place solely when and where He wills.
  - Effectual- it invariably produces the desired result; the person consequently has spiritual abilities previously lacking (he can see and enter the Kingdom).
- [Williamson] “*Regeneration is something that man has no part in, so far as doing anything is concerned. He is wholly passive therein. He is not performing or operating in regeneration. Rather, he is operated upon, and the result of that operation is that he has another heart, mind, or soul.*”
- Regeneration is closely associated with the preaching of the gospel (in ordinary cases), but it is NOT the *gospel* which regenerates; It is the Holy Spirit.
  - We may think that the Word of God as the instrument employed by God to effect regeneration, but the regenerating is done, not by the gospel itself, but only by the Holy Spirit who is pleased to operate through it.
  - Regeneration effects an essential change in the soul of the new believer- the reason, the emotions, and the will.
  - The one regenerated immediately begins to think differently, feel differently, and will to do differently than before.
  - That immediate change make the believer to thankfully accept the free offer of the gospel, so that God’s call becomes effectual.
  - It is ALWAYS effectual. Every such elect person repents and believes. He does so because he begins to act out of a new nature created or implanted in him by regeneration. Cf., Romans Chapter 9.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 10:

### Of Effectual Calling

Section 3. Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit<sup>1</sup>, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth<sup>2</sup>. So also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word<sup>3</sup>.

1. Luke 18:15-16 and John 3:3, 5 and Acts 2:38-39 and Rom 8:9 and 1 John 5:12 compared together.

2. John 3:8.

3. Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:12.

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This section of the Confession teaches (1) that there are some human beings ‘who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word’, (2) that such may be elected, and (3) that in such cases the Spirit works when, where and how he pleases.”

- Except in such cases as these, regeneration takes place in connection with the use of the means of grace which God himself has appointed.
- But there are some who are incapable of understanding the spoken or written word, not merely for reasons of spiritual inability but also from natural incapacity.
- This is because they either died in infancy or, are for some reason mentally deficient so that they would not be able to understand the gospel, even though they are numbered among the elect.
- It must be admitted of course, that the preponderance Scriptural testimony concerning the salvation of these ‘special cases’ is meager in comparison with that provided for the non-exceptions.
- Christ said that little children and even tiny infants are members of the kingdom, who should not be hindered from responding to His calling (cf., Luke 18:15,16; as well as parallel passages in the other Synoptic Gospels).
- David seems also to express the view that infants dying in infancy may be saved (2 Sam. 12:23).
- But beyond these few statements and good and necessary inferences which may drawn from other Scriptures, there is strict limitation placed upon what we may legitimately say about the subjects of salvation.
- It is important to note this 1647 (original) formulation of the Westminster Confession does not place any numerical limitation on the actual numbers of such infants: it says only “elect infants, dying in infancy.” Only God knows how few or many such persons there are.
- We should carefully observe that this is the same qualification applies to all of the elect, both cognitively aware or (as we shall discuss next time) “all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.”
- Once again, we enter the arena where Calvinism is regularly looked upon as stern and forbidding.
- Many are horrified at the teaching of predestination and total human inability. Salvation that is possible for all, and which becomes actual only by something that each is able (and required) to supply, seems more attractive than a salvation that is only certain for some because none can actually do anything.
- But the truth is that Calvinism is merciful and the opposing view is harsh because it denies salvation to the weak and helpless, granting it only to the supposedly strong and able.
  - Under any other system, how could infants dying in infancy “decide” for Christ?
  - How could the mentally deficient, of their own will, choose Him, when they cannot even understand the meaning of simple words?
- Arminianism *sounds* very comforting when men can imagine that they have abilities in their own strength to do what must be done for salvation.
  - This is no comfort at all however, for those who have no strength of their own, whether they can know it or not.
  - It is pure torture for those suffering the loss of a baby, or for others watching a loved one trapped inside the prison of their own minds; where there are no visible means to judge the credibility of these tender souls’ eternal condition, there is not a living hope.
- Only if the Doctrines of Grace (i.e., “Calvinism”) are true is there reason to hope for the salvation of such as these.
  - We rejoice in this hope, and gladly assert that it is only on the basis of pure Reformed doctrine that there is any basis of hope for infants dying in infancy and others of like incapacity.
  - When you really think through the consequences of this idea, infants and the mentally incapable are actually a sort of visible microcosm of the rest of humanity:
    - Wholly incapable of saving ourselves, either in intellect, ability, knowledge, works, or confession.
    - We are all of us totally dependent upon God’s Electing Decree, Christ’s atoning sacrifice, and the Holy Spirit’s effectual call.
    - Salvation is by Grace alone- *Sola Gratia*.
  - But we must also deal with the obverse of this Section’s clear verbiage, and mention some errors that have crept into the church regarding infants *particularly*.

- Since (as we have shown before) Scripture offers examples (even if only a few) of individuals incapable of cognitive understanding and verbal confession of their regenerating faith, and since we cannot know how many or how few of these people there are, we must reject *other* confessional documents (such as the Roman Catholic doctrine of the existence of the Limbus Infantum; and those (e.g., Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the United Presbyterian Church, and others) that add necessary “declarative statements” to Chapter 10, Section 3 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, that all persons dying in an apparent incapacity of being “reached by the gospel” should automatically be considered by us as being “saved.”
  - First, there is the prevailing view in the Roman Catholic Church: all *unbaptized* children are lost. When they die, they enter the Limbus Infantum (or the *Infantium*), a place on the outskirts of hell. Their suffering there is *negative* rather than *positive*. They merely suffer the lack of “beatific vision.”
    - This approach, while containing an *element* of truth (inasmuch as it rightly recognizes the fact that responsibility varies with opportunity), is wrong on two counts:
      - Scripture nowhere ascribes such importance to the omission of the rite of baptism;
      - It also nowhere teaches the existence of a Limbus Infantum.
  - Over and against this is the contrary position of those who hold to some degree of *Pelagianism* that teaches all babies are “innocent.” According to this view, “original sin,” (if it can be addressed at all) is not punishable apart from *actual* transgression.
    - Since little children are not capable of *actual* transgression but are innocent, all are saved if they die in infancy.
      - This, or something akin to it, is the position of many evangelical Protestants today.
      - We love these people as brothers in Christ, but we do not believe that Scripture endorses this reason for their position.
        - Infants, too, are guilty in Adam.
        - Moreover, they are not innocent (see Job 14:4; Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12, 18, 19; I Corinthians 15:22; and Ephesians 2:3).
        - If they are going to be saved at all, this salvation will have to be granted on the basis not of their own innocence but of the application of Christ’s atonement on their behalf.
  - The Westminster Confession does not give a clear answer to the question whether all those who die in infancy are saved.
    - In fact, it leaves room rather for the opinion that some might not be elect and saved; it states, “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how he pleaseth”
    - In the year 1903 the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. “interpreted” this article by adopted the following Declaratory Statement:
      - “The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America does authoritatively declare as follows . . . With reference to Chapter X, Section III, of the Confession of Faith, that it is not regarded as teaching that any who die in infancy are lost. We believe that all dying in infancy are included in the election of grace, and are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when and where and how he pleases.”
    - [Williamson]: “It is to be suspected that the basis of this statement is not so much pure Reformed conception as the notion that God could not justly condemn such helpless individuals. With this sentiment our Confession (and the Bible) have nothing to do.”
  - We hold it therefore to be a perversion of our confessional doctrine to hold that ALL infants dying in their infancy must necessarily be damned to hell (in some format), necessarily be saved, or in some manner be passively ‘excused’ from the curse of the fall.
  - [Williamson] “All men sinned in Adam and fell with him in his first transgression (Rom. 5:12). It is wholly within the just administration of God therefore to condemn all to everlasting punishment.”
    - If infants dying in infancy are human, they are also therefore guilty and liable to damnation,
    - If they are numbered among God’s Elect, they will necessarily be saved in the fullness of time.
    - If they are to be saved, they (like the rest of humanity) can never be considered saved, “because it would be unjust for God to condemn them.”
    - If they are saved, it can only be because God has graciously elected them to an eternal life which they do not deserve.
- SO, what is our ‘take-away’ from all this?
  - We can assert that there are definitely elect as well as non-elect infants who die in infancy.
  - Our doctrine is clear that elect infants are effectually called into salvation through Christ, by the Holy Spirit.
  - Believers have a special warrant to hope that their infants who die in infancy are elect, and therefore vouchsafed in Christ, through the Spirit (cf, Luke 18:15,16; 2Sam. 12:23; Acts 2:38,39; Ezek. 16:20,21).
  - Beyond this, we simply may not go.
  - We may legitimately hope, but we may not demand, presume, or redefine God’s Holiness in our own image.
  - We pray for the eternal estate of our Children’s souls, and we trust in the infallibility of God’s covenant with His elect.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 10:

### Of Effectual Calling

Section 4. Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word<sup>1</sup>, and may have some common operations of the Spirit<sup>2</sup>, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved<sup>3</sup>: much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess<sup>4</sup>; and to assert and maintain that they may is very pernicious, and to be detested<sup>5</sup>.

1. Mat 22:14.

2. Mat 7:22; 13:20-21; Heb 6:4-5.

3. John 6:64-66; 8:24.

4. John 4:22; 14:6; 17:3; Acts 4:12; Eph 2:12.

5. 1 Cor 16:22; Gal 1:6-8; 2 John 1:9-11.

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This section of the Confession teaches us (1) that those who are not elected will not be saved (2) because they will not come to Christ (3) even though they may hear the Word and be powerfully affected by supernatural forces, and (4) that the light of nature affords those untouched by the gospel with no basis for saving faith, for which reason they are without God and without hope.”

- Out of the totality of men only some hear the gospel.
- Of this number (which only God knows) only some are savingly affected by the gospel.
  - Only the elect respond to it, and this they do only after (and because) God gives them a new heart by the creative power of his Holy Spirit in regeneration.
  - This inward ability is bestowed upon the elect only, and this is why they come to Christ for salvation.
  - The credit belongs only to God.
- But what of the others who hear the gospel?
  - They are also genuinely and sincerely called by the ministry of the Word.
  - God does entreat them to come to Christ.
  - He takes no delight in His perfect knowledge of the fact that they will not listen (Ezekiel 18:32, 2 Peter 3:9, etc.).
  - These may also experience the power of the gospel to some extent.
    - Christ's parable of the Sower reminds us that it is possible for one to give every *appearance* of possession of faith and obedience for a time and even to display evidence of great zeal for the things of Christ, and then lose all interest or even lapse into hostility toward the kingdom.
    - Scripture speaks of those “who were once enlightened and tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come (Heb. 6:5,6).
    - Peter uses strong words to describe the miserable case of those who experienced these things only to fall back into their old ways (2 Peter 2:20-22).
    - [John Murray, Redemption Accomplished and Applied] “*The Scripture itself, therefore, leads us to the conclusion that it is possible to have very uplifting, ennobling, reforming, and exhilarating experience of the power and truth of the gospel, to come into such close contact with the supernatural forces which are operative in God's kingdom of grace that these forces produce effects in us which to human observation are hardly distinguishable from those produced by God's regenerating and sanctifying grace and yet be not partakers of Christ and heirs of eternal life.*”
    - The one fatal defect for these individuals is that they never truly come to Christ.
      - They *seem* to do so, but they do not *really* do so.
      - There is no *genuine* repentance and faith.
      - For this reason, they cannot be saved.
      - The entire fault lies in them, just as in the elect the entire credit for *their* condition belongs to God.
  - [Williamson] “*Of all who hear the gospel and perish these words of Christ are true: ‘Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.’ (John 6:40). It is true, of course, that they will not because they are totally depraved by nature. It is also true that God alone can replace that totally depraved heart with a new heart which will want to come to Christ. But God owes this gift to none. And those who receive it not still have no one to blame but themselves for rejecting the offer of God's grace.*”
- If those who hear the gospel and fail to accept it cannot be saved, what about those who are not touched by it at all?
  - If they are “diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature” or “the law of that religion they do profess” will they not be accepted by God?

- [Williamson] *"It would not be an exaggeration to say that there has been a revolution in the attitude of Protestants concerning this question. Prior to the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy in the early decades of this (the 20<sup>th</sup>) century, most Protestant denominations in the United States maintained foreign missions because it was believed that men would eternally perish without the knowledge of Christ. Then came the startling thesis expressed by the 'Layman's Inquiry' into the basis of foreign missions (entitled 'Rethinking Missions') which suggested that the foreign mission program should be one of learning as well as teaching, and that the foreign missionary should seek a synthesis with other religions rather than only conversions from them."*
- Nearly a century has now passed, and since the 1960's the leaders of the modern ecumenical movement (as stated in the Missions section of the World Council of Churches documents) openly assert that adherents of 'pagan' religions may be 'saved' without hearing the gospel of Christ at all.
- In more and more instances, the older Protestant denominations have placed primary emphasis upon works of relief, medicine, and education, rather than preaching the gospel in their foreign mission fields.
  - But in truth, this is a useless enterprise in the long run.
  - There is a relationship between these social and economic blessings and the gospel.
  - We enjoy these blessings because, to some extent, the gospel is leaven to a society (we call this 'common grace').
- This truly is a case of cause-and-effect: Gospel versus "religiously affiliated" hospitals, schools, food banks, etc.
  - Where these works of charity and mercy are the FRUITS of the *effect* of the gospel impacting the hearts of true believers, they are acts of grace that simultaneously sanctifies the believer, and become blessings of *common* grace in the believer's culture.
  - But to the extent that the *true gospel* is minimized, forgotten or rejected in the name of purely *social* constructs, all eternal benefits in Christ are lost, and the transitory benefits in the surrounding culture lose their moorings and quickly drift away. They ultimately corrode and decay, taking society with them.
    - It is plainly evident that the *transformation* of the so-called "under privileged" or "under developed" nations that have been attempted in the name of this social gospel since the 1960's, have been dismal failures.
    - Without an inward change of heart that only the gospel can bring, the end is plain from the beginning.
    - What will benefit will billions of additional dollars bring to third world countries where cows are worshipped, but human life is devalued?
- We must face the fact that apart from any temporary alleviation of man's misery by "outside" help through purely social and economic "aid" (even by "religious" entities) the souls of men are doomed without the gospel of Christ being of primary importance.
- It was this conviction which always used to, and always should, provide the *proper* sense of urgency and perspective that the missionary task truly requires.
  - "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).
  - "He that hath the Son hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12).



# **Chapter 11**

# **OF**

# **JUSTIFICATION**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 11:

### Of Justification

Section 1. Those whom God effectually calleth, He also freely justifieth<sup>1</sup>: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them<sup>2</sup>, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God<sup>3</sup>.

1. Rom. 8:30, Rom. 3:24
2. Rom. 4:5–8; 2 Cor. 5:19,21; Rom. 3:22,24–25,27–28; Tit. 3:5,7; Eph. 1:7; Jer. 23:6; 1 Cor. 1:30–31; Rom. 5:17–19
3. Acts 10:44; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9; Acts 13:38–39; Eph. 2:7–8

Section 2. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification<sup>1</sup>: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love<sup>2</sup>.

1. John 1:12; Rom. 3:28; Rom. 5:1
2. James 2:17,22,26; Gal. 5:6

#### **OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

“These sections teach us (1) that those who are effectually called (regenerated and converted) are also justified, (2) that justification is judicial, (3) that it is effected by imputation, (4) that it is conditioned by, and instrumentally applied through, faith (which is a gift from God), and (5) that while justification is by faith alone, it is invariably productive of good works.”

- Here, the content-order of the Confession steps briefly away from the “*Ordo Salutis*” (the “order of salvation”) to speak of Justification.
  - Chapters 14 (Of Saving Faith) and 15 (Of Repentance Unto Life) will help us resume our discussion of conversion in its logical (some might say ‘more linear’) relationship of our salvation to our effectual calling.
  - Only as *conversion* takes place is there effected justification, *adoption*, *sanctification* and *perseverance*.
  - It is important to note in these things, that the Confession tends to maintain the narrative order of redemption from the heavenly perspective (i.e., the “God’s-eye-view”) of things, from the view point of The One doing the IMPUTING, not the one(s) benefitting from the imputation and who then begin walking in it.
  - The “*Ordo Salutis*” is, after all, a *constructed* discussion of the primary doctrinal waypoints on the way to salvation from man’s perspective.
  - Rest assured that we will pick up *all* of the pieces of the *Ordo Salutis* in our confessional study in just a couple more chapters.

#### **JUSTIFICATION**

- Only those who are effectually called of God are also justified by Him.
  - [Romans 8:28]: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”
  - Justification will NEVER be found by itself in the believer, it is but one *link* in the *chain* of redemptive work of God.
  - Justification is by faith, but there can be no faith except in one who is sovereignly regenerated by the Holy Spirit.
  - Regeneration is accomplished only in those whom the Lord has chosen from the foundation of the world (cf., Ephesians 1:4,5,11; 2:4-10).
- What is justification?

- The Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 33 answers it thus: “*Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.*”
- We are all (every one of us) wrong with God, have sinned, and have come up short of His Glory (cf., Romans 3:23).
- So, Justification is God’s response to our most pressing and confounding need: *how can sinful man be made just with God?*
- John Murray, in Redemption Accomplished and Applied said, “*Far too frequently we fail to entertain the gravity of this fact. Hence the reality of our sin and the reality of the wrath of God upon us for our sin do not come into our reckoning. This is the reason why the grand article of justification does not ring the bells in the innermost depths of our spirit.*”
- Only when we realize, by God-given grace and conviction, the utter sinfulness and pollution that dwells in the very depths of our nature, can we learn what it means to be justified.
- Central to this is a right grasp of Romans 8:33-
- “*If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.*”
  - It is God who justifies.
  - Justification is something we cannot effect on our own, for ourselves.
  - It is infinitely more than just that trite old slogan, “Justification means that it is ‘just-as-if-I had never sinned’”
    - Justification does not mean that one is to *be*, or *become* inherently good, holy, or upright.
    - It is not merely some religious exercise in which we engage ourselves,
    - No matter how ‘noble’ or ‘good’ our attempts might be, they could never earn our justification.
  - It is the SINNER who is justified; at the very *instant* he is declared just by God, he remains *inherently* sinful and unworthy of his own merits.
  - So, Justification occurs *in spite of* our fallen nature, not as the *result* of our transcendence from it.
- All this does NOT mean that internal personal holiness is left orphaned and unprovided for in the plan of salvation.
  - This will be the subject of subsequent chapters: we *are being* sanctified as we *have been* justified.
  - We are required to spend the rest of our lives engaged in the task of growing into the image of perfection in Christ.
    - [2 Cor. 7:1] “*Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*”
    - [Hebrews 12:14] “*Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*”
  - Personal, internal, inherent holiness must (and shall) be realized by a *process* which takes time, but holiness is the *fruit* of the event of our being justification, not the *root* of our being ‘candidates’ for justification.
  - Holiness takes time; Justification does not. Justification is immediate.
- Justification is not a process, but an instantaneous act of God, applied without delay to the (as-yet) unsanctified Christian at the moment he believes.
  - He is then and there, and from that time forth, regarded by God as if he were perfectly righteous.
  - It is a LEGAL declaration of a *henceforth* righteousness, on account of the *immediately preceding* efficacious calling of the Holy Spirit.
  - Judgement has been declared (a change of *status*) as the result of an act of regeneration (a change of *nature*).
  - [Murray, *ibid.*] “The distinction (*between regeneration and justification*) is like the distinction between the act of a surgeon and the act of a judge. The surgeon, when he removes an inward cancer, does something in us. That is not what a judge does- he gives a verdict regarding our judicial status.”
  - [Williamson]: “But here is the marvel of justification. God does what a human judge cannot and must not do. He declares righteous those who are really ungodly

(Rom. 4:5; 3:19-24, etc.). If men were to do so it would be abomination (Prov. 17:15). But God does so and yet is not unrighteous in doing it.”

- The question is: how? The answer is: God provides a just and legal basis upon which to declare the unrighteous to be just- by imputation.
  - Through imputation He is able to cause the sinner to legally possess a righteousness and to be freed from unrighteousness even while a sinner.
  - And having thus constituted them righteous He is able to declare them to be such.
  - Imputation means to “reckon, think, or regard.”
    - When an innocent man is reckoned or thought to be guilty, he will complain that men are falsely imputing guilt to him. They consider him to be what he actually is not.
    - So it is with us. God (without doing wrong) regards us to be righteous.
    - The reason that God can do this is that Christ kept the law perfectly and thus worked out a perfect righteousness which He then freely offered to the Father on our behalf for this purpose; thus God is able to reckon us free from guilt.
    - The reason is that Christ placed Himself in our stead so that God could consider our guilt to belong to Him.
    - He was condemned just as we are justified.
- In Theology, we sometimes refer to this doctrine using the term ‘double imputation’ because of Christ’s *active* and *passive* obedience in the legal transaction of our justification.
  - Christ’s active obedience was His perfectly obeying God’s law.
  - His passive obedience was in meekly suffering the full penalty of the law against sins he didn’t Himself commit.
  - God regarded His righteousness to be ours, and our guilt to be His.
  - Without imputation of *both*, there would be no basis for our justification.
  - With the imputation of *both*, God is able to declare us righteous in His sight.
  - This declarative transaction is the crux of justification.
- It clearly emerges in this doctrine that the *sole ground* of our justification is the obedience of Christ.
  - It cannot be, in any sense, on account of our own righteousness.
  - [Phil. 3:8,9] *“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-“*
  - Since we have no righteousness of our own, and since we must have *perfect* righteousness before God in order that he might declare that we are righteous, there can be no mixture of our own righteousness with that imputed to us.
  - Saving faith is simply “receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness,” and for this reason “the alone instrument of justification.”
- God requires of us nothing except utter reliance upon the righteousness and satisfaction of Christ.
  - This means that at the instant we begin to trust in Christ we are then and there declared to be legally without sin, guilt, or fearful of any future punishment.
  - This declaration cannot depend upon anything done by the sinner.
  - [Williamson] *“Faith which is not ‘doing’ but only dependence upon what Christ has done instantaneously results in complete and eternal justification, provided it be true faith. If it is true faith it will also produce good works which are the sure evidence thereof.”*

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 11:

### Of Justification

Section 3. Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf<sup>1</sup>. Yet inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them<sup>2</sup>, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead<sup>3</sup>, and both freely, not for anything in them, their justification is only of free grace<sup>4</sup>; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners<sup>5</sup>.

1. Isa 53:4-6, 10-12; Dan 9:24, 26; Rom 5:8-10, 19; 1 Tim 2:5-6; Heb 10:10, 14.
2. Rom 8:32.
3. Mat 3:17; 2 Cor 5:21; Eph 5:2.
4. Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7.
5. Rom 3:26; Eph 2:7.

Section 4. God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect<sup>1</sup>, and Christ did, in the fulness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification<sup>2</sup>: nevertheless, they are not justified until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them<sup>3</sup>.

1. Rom 8:30; Gal 3:8; 1 Pet 1:2, 19-20.
2. Rom 4:25; Gal 4:4; 1 Tim 2:6.
3. Gal 2:16; Col 1:21-22; Titus 3:4-7.

Section 5. God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified<sup>1</sup>; and although they can never fall from the state of justification<sup>2</sup>, yet they may by their sins fall under God's fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance<sup>3</sup>.

1. Mat 6:12; 1 John 1:7, 9; 2:1-2.
2. Luke 22:32; John 10:28; Heb 10:14.
3. Psa 32:5; 51:7-12; 89:31-33; Mat 26:75; Luke 1:20; 1 Cor 11:30, 32.

Section 6. The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament<sup>1</sup>.

1. Rom 4:22-24; Gal 3:9, 13-14; Heb 13:8.

#### **OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

"These sections teach us (1) that Christ has provided the basis for our justification, (2) that this is of free grace (since Christ's placing Himself in our stead was voluntary, as was God's accepting him as our substitute), (3) that the justification of the elect was eternally decreed, historically accomplished by Christ, (4) that God justifies sinners even with respect to sins committed after they believe, (5) that this does not mean that they cannot and do not fall under His displeasure and chastisement, and (6) that justification is essentially the same for all believers in all ages."

- It has already been shown that Christ provided the basis for our justification by His *active* and *passive* obedience (cf.: Chapter 8, Section 5; Chapter 11, Sections 1 & 2).
- It was also proved that this was wholly voluntary on His part, as was God's accepting Him as our substitute (cf.: John 10:17,18; 1 Tim. 2:6; Eph. 5:2).
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# **Chapter 12**

## **OF**

## **ADOPTION**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 12: Of Adoption

Section 1. All those that are justified God vouchsafeth, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption<sup>1</sup>; by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God<sup>2</sup>; have his name put upon them<sup>3</sup>; receive the Spirit of adoption<sup>4</sup>; have access to the throne of grace with boldness<sup>5</sup>; are enabled to cry, Abba, Father<sup>6</sup>; are pitied<sup>7</sup>, protected<sup>8</sup>, provided for<sup>9</sup>, and chastened by him as by a father<sup>10</sup>; yet never cast off<sup>11</sup>, but sealed to the day of redemption<sup>12</sup>, and inherit the promises<sup>13</sup>, as heirs of everlasting salvation<sup>14</sup>.

1. Gal 4:4-5; Eph 1:5.
2. John 1:12; Rom 8:17.
3. Jer 14:9; 2 Cor 6:18; Rev 3:12.
4. Rom 8:15.
5. Rom 5:2; Eph 3:12. • f.
6. Gal 4:6.
7. Psa 103:13.
8. Prov 14:26.
9. Mat 6:30, 32; 1 Pet 5:7.
10. Heb 12:6.
11. Lam 3:31.
12. Eph 4:30.
13. Heb 6:12.
14. Heb 1:14; 1 Pet 1:3-4.

### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This chapter of the Confession teaches us (1) that those who are *effectually called* (regenerated in order that they might respond to the gospel) and *justified* (declared just with God) also have conferred upon them the grace of *adoption*, (2) that the adoption is closely related to regeneration and justification, but distinct from them, and (3) that they are thereby made children of the living God.”

- Adoption, like the other aspects of the application of redemption, is inseparably connected with the eternal decree of God and, the mediatorial work of Christ.
- “*Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will*” [Ephesians 1:4,5]
- He ordered not only the end from the beginning, but also every step necessary for the attainment of that end.
- One step that is necessary to the attainment of this end is adoption.
  - The Father not only chose His elect to be regenerated, justified, sanctified, and glorified, but also to be adopted.
  - The Son did His work in order that we might be adopted, as well as called, justified, sanctified and glorified.
- [Galatians 4:4-7]- “*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*”
- To receive the Holy Spirit is to receive the Spirit of Adoption (Romans 8:15).
  - One cannot receive the Spirit nor can one trust in Christ apart from adoption.
  - [John 1:12,13]- “*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*”
- But what is adoption?
  - [John Murray, Redemption Accomplished and Applied]- *Adoption, as the term clearly implies, is an act of transfer from an alien family into the family of God Himself.*”
  - It means that those who were by nature children of wrath, children of darkness, even children of Satan are constituted the children of light and of God (see Eph. 2:3, Col. 3:6, John 8:44).
  - [Williamson] “*Contrary to the widely accepted doctrine of Modernism, God is not the Father of all men. There is, of course, a sense in which God sustains a relationship to all men. There is, of course, a sense in which God sustains a relationship to all men. He is the Creator of all. He doeth*

good to all, In Him we live and move and have our being, And there is divine mercy and compassion extended toward all men that cannot be denied (1 Tim. 4:10, Ezek. 18:23). If the concept of 'fatherhood' meant no more than this, there would be little objection to speaking of 'the fatherhood of God' or the 'brotherhood of men.' But the biblical concept of the relationship existing between God and man, and between men, requires us to reject this manner of speaking."

- Because of the fall of man, the relationship between God and man can no longer be likened to that of father and son.
  - Rather, this relationship now exists between *Satan* and man.
  - We are *properly* called children of the devil (1 John 3:10) rather than children of God.
  - [Williamson] "We must admit this because, 'whosever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.' Since men do not honor or obey God they can hardly be called his sons, and they can hardly be called brothers when they do not love one another."
- The terms *father*, *son*, and *brother* belong within the sphere of intimate and loyal family relationship, and simply do not apply to those who are outside of Christ.
  - But it is precisely such a relationship that is the possession of all who are in saving union with Christ by effectual calling, conversion, and justification.
  - When one becomes a believer in Christ then he can say with wonder and thanksgiving, "*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*" [1 John 3:1,2].
- It is equally important to distinguish the sonship belonging to believers from the unique sonship which belongs only to Christ.
  - Christ also is the son of God and the brother of believers.
  - He is not the only son, but He is the only son who is not adopted (John 1:12, 3:16, etc.).
  - [Williamson]- "When Modernism speaks of our sonship as if it were the same as Christ's it does grace injustice to His deity. Christ is begotten, not adopted. His sonship is eternal. It had no beginning. He is equal with the Father in power and glory. Our sonship is of another order. We are made to be God's sons in God's appointed time. Our sonship is due to change in our status. Christ's sonship is due to the eternal generation of the Father."
  - Yet this does not alter the fact that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is also our God and our Father (see 1 Peter 1:3, 17, etc.).
  - In effect, Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, "My Father is your father, and my God is your God" in John 20:17.
    - The difference is *not* that we have a different father and God,
    - The difference is that the God-man is, as His divine nature, of one substance with the Father, whereas we are mere men and sons of the Father only by adoption.
- But we must not let the difference between our sonship and that of Christ minimize the wonder of our sonship.
  - The wonder is that, despite this infinite difference, we are-by adoption- taken into the number of the children of God, and given all the liberties and privileges of sons.
  - We are joint-heirs with Christ.
    - If Christ is 'heir of the world' it is because He is very and eternal God (Romans 4:13).
    - But the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God: and if children then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ (Cf., Romans 8:16,17).
  - And that is all the more astounding precisely because we are mere men, and unworthy sinners besides (*Simul Justus et Peccator*).
- One of the chief privileges belonging to those who receive the grace of adoption is PRAYER.
  - Only those who are adopted can pray in a manner acceptable to God.
  - Thus, the Spirit given in effectual calling is the Spirit of adoption, whereby believers are enabled to pray (see Romans 8:15f.).
  - The Spirit bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God (Romans 8:16).
  - The Spirit also helps us in our infirmities, because we don't know what we should pray, but the Spirit makes intercession for us. (Romans 8:26).
- Finally, we note that God treats us as sons.
  - We receive His pity and protection (Ps. 103:13; Prov. 14:26)
  - We come under His watchful Providence (Matt. 6:30-32, 1 Peter 5:7)
  - He subjects us to appropriate discipline because we are his sons (Heb. 12:6f).
  - But above all, He keeps us in safety even to the end (Romans 8:23, 28, 38).

We will discuss more about these things when we get into Chapters 13 (Sanctification), 17 (Perseverance of the Saints), and 18 (Assurance of Grace and Salvation)



# **Chapter 13**

## **OF**

### **SANCTIFICATION**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 13:

### Of Sanctification

Section 1. They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection<sup>1</sup>, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them<sup>2</sup>; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed<sup>3</sup>, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified<sup>4</sup>, and they more and more quickened and strengthened, in all saving graces<sup>5</sup>, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord<sup>6</sup>.

1. Acts 20:32; Rom 6:5-6; 1 Cor 6:11; Phil 3:10.
2. John 17:17; Eph 5:26; 2 Thes 2:13.
3. Rom 6:6, 14.
4. Rom 8:13; Gal 5:24.
5. Eph 3:16-19; Col 1:11.
6. 2 Cor 7:1; Heb 12:14.

Section 2. This sanctification is throughout in the whole man<sup>1</sup>, yet imperfect in this life; there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part<sup>2</sup>, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh<sup>3</sup>.

1. 1 Thess. 5:23.
2. Rom 7:18, 23; Phil 3:12; 1 John 1:10.
3. Gal 5:17; 1 Pet 2:11.

Section 3. In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail<sup>1</sup>, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome<sup>2</sup>; and so the saints grow in grace<sup>3</sup>, perfecting holiness in the fear of God<sup>4</sup>.

1. a. Rom 7:23.
2. b. Rom 6:14; Eph 4:15-16; 1 John 5:4.
3. c. 2 Cor 3:18; 2 Pet 3:18.
4. d. 2 Cor 7:1.

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

"These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that the regenerate nature in believers is, by God's Word and Spirit, enabled to develop, (2) that in this development the believer dies more and more unto sin and lives more and more unto righteousness, (3) that this work of sanctification pervades the whole man, (4) that it is never perfect in this life (i.e., complete victory over sin is not attained in this life), but (5) that genuine progress is made in that all true believers do strive to perfect holiness in the fear of God."

- Sanctification is closely associated with effectual calling and regeneration.
  - It is a work of God *in* us.
  - It is the continuation of that which is begun in effectual calling and regeneration.
  - Regeneration is the renewal of our whole nature.
  - Calling becomes effectual when that new nature consciously responds to the gospel in repentance and faith.
  - Sanctification simply continues the nurture and development of that new nature which is brought into being by regeneration and into operation by effectual calling.
- [Williamson]- *"But why is it that the believer invariably dies more and more to sin and lives more and more unto righteousness? The answer is: because ... if a person is united to Christ and adopted into His family, then he is dead in sin in the sense that it no longer has the dominion over him."*
- 1 John 3:7-10- *"Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."*
- The governing disposition of such a person is the law of God which is written in the heart (Rom. 7:22).
- It is not that the believer is sinless, but rather that he can no longer yield himself the servant of sin.
  - He is, in fact, utterly at war with sin even though it may at times manifest its power within him (Rom. 7:14ff).

- Above all, he can never abandon himself to sin again (1 John 4:4, 3:9).
- Appearances to the contrary prove, not that regenerate persons may abandon themselves to sin, but only that men may appear to be regenerate without really being so (1 John 2:19).
- There is a false doctrine called *Perfectionism*, which teaches three major errors against the true doctrine of sanctification:
  1. It teaches that only some (possibly only a *very few*) believers attain freedom from the dominion of sin.
    - a. This is contradicted by the teaching of Scripture, that,
      - i. *“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” [Romans 8:14].*
      - ii. *“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.” [1John 3:9].*
  2. It teaches that one may be justified without also at the same having victory over the dominion of sin, with which error we have already dealt.
  3. It teaches that the victory that is attainable in this life is a freedom from sinning, or at least from consciously sinning. This is contradicted by:
    - a. Paul’s exhortations in Romans 7:14-18: *“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.”*
    - b. John’s reminders in 1 John 1:8,10: *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”*

Even if a person were not “conscious of sinning” he ought to be conscious that it is a sin to **say** that he has no sin.

- The doctrine of sanctification does not teach that sin is obliterated in every (or even in **any**), true believer in this life.
  - It teaches us that there is rather a radical breach with the power and love of sin.
  - It teaches us that established within us is a new power and love which necessitates unquenchable conflict with sin.
  - The dominion of sin is broken, though the presence of sin is not entirely eliminated.
  - [Williamson]: *“Just as penicillin may break a fever, thus destroying the dominion of a disease, and yet some time elapses before every trace of the disease is eliminated, so it is with sin.”*
  - Sin no longer commands the heart: its main lines of communication have been destroyed.
  - The control center is now in the hands of God, but the alien force still harasses.
  - The skill, cunning, and desperation of the enemy is as before, but he has been defeated by Christ and has no abiding power over us.
  - As Murray said, *“There is a total difference between surviving sin and reigning sin.”*
- It is impossible that a true believer will rest content with his sin, indulging it freely, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.
  - Only if we “put to death the deeds of the body,” (Romans 8:13) will we live.
  - The greater the progress one makes in sanctification, the more he will be distressed by the sin still present in him. (Romans 7:21-24) *“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.”*
- It is necessary to clarify that it is the Holy Spirit that sanctifies us.
  - This is true, even though it remains such a difficult and relentless task for us (conflict with sin).
  - [Williamson]: *“How can a struggle that engages every ounce of my strength and will be the work of the Holy Spirit? The answer is that “it is God who works in us” in order that we might “will and do” (Phil. 2:13). It is God who creates that new nature which must engage in conflict with sin. And it is the same God who strengthens, encourages, warns and enables us to do what we must do.”*
  - All work which is performed by us in sanctification is the effect of that which God has done and is doing in us by His Holy Spirit.
  - His work does not make our work unnecessary but rather makes it certain.
  - When we find ourselves willing and able to fight against sin, we may know that God works in us by His might and power.
  - Of ourselves, we can do nothing, but through Christ who strengthens us, we can do all things.
- It has pleased God to strengthen us in our warfare with sin by means of the Word, sacraments, prayer, and discipline.
- It is the Holy Spirit who makes these effectual to the sanctification of believers.

# Chapter 14

## OF SAVING FAITH

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 14:

### Of Saving Faith

Section 1. The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls<sup>1</sup>, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts<sup>2</sup>, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word<sup>3</sup>; by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments and prayer, it is increased and strengthened<sup>4</sup>.

1. Heb 10:39.
2. Eph 1:17-19; 2:8; 2 Cor 4:13.
3. Rom 10:14, 17.
4. Luke 17:5; Acts 20:32; Rom 1:16-17; 4:11; 1 Pet 2:2.

Section 2. By this faith a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein<sup>1</sup>; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands<sup>2</sup>, trembling at the threatenings<sup>3</sup>, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come<sup>4</sup>. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace<sup>5</sup>.

1. John 4:42; Acts 24:14; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 John 5:10.
2. Rom 16:26.
3. Isa 66:2.
4. 1 Tim 4:8; Heb 11:13.
5. John 1:12; Acts 15:11; 16:31; Gal 2:20.

Section 3. This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong<sup>1</sup>; may be often and many ways assailed and weakened, but gets the victory<sup>2</sup>; growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ<sup>3</sup>, who is both the author and finisher of our faith<sup>4</sup>.

1. Mat 6:30; 8:10; Rom 4:19-20; Heb 5:13-14.
2. Luke 22:31-32; Eph 6:16; 1 John 5:4-5.
3. Col 2:2; Heb 6:11-12; 10:22.
4. Heb 12:2.

#### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“We must observe that regeneration is inseparable from its effects. One of the effects is faith. Another is repentance. Regeneration is the renewing of the heart or mind, and the renewed personality must and will act according to its nature. In faith and repentance we simply see the new nature beginning to assert itself. Likewise it must be stressed that repentance and faith are the activity of the sinner alone. It is God who regenerates, and it is the sinner who repents and believes. Finally, we must realize that repentance and faith are inseparable. There cannot be one without, or apart from the other.”

- Conversion follows regeneration.
- Repentance and faith accompany rather than follow one another.
- True conversion is a complex matter involving a full-orbed transformation of the heart, mind, and personality of a person.

[Williamson] “As the lowly caterpillar is metamorphosized into a beautiful butterfly, so the sinner becomes a saint by the [*extrinsic*] renewing of his mind (Romans 12:2).”

- Because man was made in the image of God, there is *diversity* within the *unity* of his personality.
  - He has the faculties of reason, affection, and will.
  - He can think or reason.
  - He can feel deep desires.
  - He can choose between various alternatives
- Full-orbed conversion involves all of these in their *unity* and *diversity*.
  - Without any one of them, without all of them, the total personality does not experience true conversion.
  - Faith denotes that aspect of change whereby the soul turns to Christ and experiences supreme attachment to Him.

- Both phases of this complete turning involve the total personality-reason, affections, and will.
- Anything less than full-orbed conversion will NOT do.
  - “REVIVAL MEETING CONVERSIONS”
    - Many fail to stand the test of time, or the times of testing.
    - They usually appeal deeply to *feelings, emotions, or affections*, but lack engagement of *knowledge*.
    - Without scriptural knowledge of one’s own depravity on one hand, and Christ’s work of redemption on the other, there can be no true conversion.
  - “HEAD KNOWLEDGE CONVERSIONS”
    - Sometimes, those who regularly hear sound teaching of doctrine, and who participate in certain group activities that are Christian, can ‘talk the talk’ and appear to their fellows able to ‘walk the walk’.
    - They fail to be truly converted because they have had no true conversion of the heart.
    - This is truly “dead orthodoxy.”
  - “SPECTATOR RELIGION”
    - Sometimes sinners possess an adequate knowledge of the law and gospel of God, together with deep feelings of contrition and conviction, yet never actually turn from death in sin to life in Christ.
    - Christianity is, to them, like a great stage drama- they have the screenplay, their lines, and all of the stage cues memorized,
      - Emotionally, they are true method actors-
      - They seem sincerely moved and totally emersed in character
      - They appear sincerely emotional every time they participate in the act.
    - But their acting is not the same as BEING the part the play.
    - They are not truly heart-converted.
- [Williamson] “The Confession speaks of repentance and faith as ‘graces.’ That is, they are divine gifts (Acts 11:18, Eph. 2:8). When God regenerates the soul, He implants the seed (or beginning) of repentance and faith. It is improper therefore to think of either repentance or faith as mere momentary acts of the soul, they are rather permanent states or conditions expressive of the soul.”
- We might rightly refer to the initial acts of repentance and faith as events, but the initial acts begin activities, behaviors, and relationships that never cease (Luke 22:32).
- This is only possible because faith and repentance are given by God and they cannot fail.

# **Chapter 15**

## **OF REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 15:

### Of Repentance Unto Life

**Section 1.** Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace<sup>1</sup>, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ<sup>2</sup>.

1. Zec 12:10; Acts 11:18.
2. Luke 24:47; Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21.

**Section 2.** By it a sinner, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God, and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for and hates his sins as to turn from them all unto God<sup>1</sup>, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments<sup>2</sup>.

1. a. Psa. 51:4; 119:128; Isa 30:22; Jer. 31:18-19; Ezek. 18:30-31; 36:31; Joel 2:12-13; Amos 5:15; 2 Cor 7:11. •
2. b. 2 Kings 23:25; Psa. 119:6, 59, 106; Luke 1:6.

**Section 3.** Although repentance be not to be rested in as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof<sup>1</sup>, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ<sup>2</sup>; yet is it of such necessity to all sinners that none may expect pardon without it<sup>3</sup>.

1. Ezek. 16:61-63; 36:31-32.
2. Hosea 14:2, 4; Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7.
3. Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30-31.

**Section 4.** As there is no sin so small but it deserves damnation<sup>1</sup>, so there is no sin so great that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent<sup>2</sup>.

1. Mat 12:36; Rom 5:12; 6:23.
2. Isa 1:16, 18; 55:7; Rom 8:1.

**Section 5.** Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins particularly<sup>1</sup>.

1. Psa. 19:13; Luke 19:8; 1 Tim 1:13, 15.

**Section 6.** As every man is bound to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for the pardon thereof<sup>1</sup>, upon which, and the forsaking of them, he shall find mercy<sup>2</sup>; so he that scandalizeth his brother, or the Church of Christ, ought to be willing, by a private or public confession and sorrow for his sin, to declare his repentance to those that are offended<sup>3</sup>, who are thereupon to be reconciled to him, and in love to receive him<sup>4</sup>.

1. Psa. 32:5-6; 51:4-5, 7, 9, 14.
2. Prov 28:13; 1 John 1:9.
3. Psa. 51 throughout; Josh 7:19; Luke 17:3-4; James 5:16.
4. 2 Cor 2:8.

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

"We must observe that regeneration is inseparable from its effects. One of the effects is faith. Another is repentance. Regeneration is the renewing of the heart or mind, and the renewed personality must and will act according to its nature. In faith and repentance we simply see the new nature beginning to assert itself. Likewise it must be stressed that repentance and faith are the activity of the sinner alone. It is God who regenerates, and it is the sinner who repents and believes. Finally, we must realize that repentance and faith are inseparable. There cannot be one without, or apart from the other. Conversion follows regeneration: but repentance and faith accompany rather than follow one another"

- True conversion is a complex matter, and it involve the whole heart, mind, and personality of a person.



- Repentance and faith are two aspects of this whole-person transformation of the soul.
  - Saving Faith represents that aspect of change whereby the soul turns to Christ and experiences supreme attachment to Him.
  - Repentance Unto Life represents that aspect of change whereby the soul turns from sin and experiences true abhorrence of it.
  - BOTH phases of this complete turning involve our whole personality- our reason, affections, and will.
- There is no hard and fast break between “repentance” on the one side, and “faith” on the other side, nevertheless it is helpful to look at each in the context of the whole.
- On the Repentance side of the ledger, our *knowledge*, *feelings*, and *will* must each and all demonstrate our repentance:
  - Man must know his lost condition.
    - Romans 3:20- “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”
    - Psalms 51:3,4- “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.”
    - Ezekiel 36:31- “Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations.”
  - Man must have a broken and contrite heart.
    - Jeremiah 31:19- “For after I had turned away, I relented, and after I was instructed, I struck my thigh; I was ashamed, and I was confounded, because I bore the disgrace of my youth.”
    - Psalms 51:17- “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”
    - 2 Corinthians 7:11a- “For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! ...”
  - Man must turn from the ways of sin
    - Acts 26:18- “...to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”
    - 2 Corinthians 7:10- “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”
- On the Faith side of the ledger, our *knowledge*, *feelings*, and *will* must each and all demonstrate our abiding faith in Christ:
  - Man must know the divine remedy for sin.
    - Romans 10:13-17- “For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”
    - Psalms 9:10- “And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.”
    - Philippians 3:8- “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”
  - Man must feel drawn to Christ with heart approbation
    - John 4:42- “They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’”
    - 1 Thessalonians 2:13- “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”
  - Man must turn to Christ to rely upon Him alone for salvation.
    - Acts 15:10-11- “Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”
    - Acts 16:30-31- “Then he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”
    - Philippians 3:9- “[in order that I may gain Christ]... and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith”
- Many errors have crept into Christendom over the centuries due to misunderstandings about the nature of faith and repentance as related to their being fundamental *extrinsic* graces rather than *works intrinsic* to man, and how the idea of confession of sin unto repentance fits into the process.

- The Roman Catholic Church has created an entire dogma related to penance, confession, and sacerdotal absolution.
  - [A.A. Hodge]- “Romanists distinguish penance (1) as a virtue, which is internal, including sorrow to sin and a turning from sin unto God, (2) as a sacrament, which is the external expression of the internal state. This sacrament consists of (a) *contrition* (i.e., sorrow and detestation of past sins, with a purpose of sinning no more), (b) *confession* (or self-accusation to a priest having jurisdiction and the power of the keys), (c) *satisfaction* (or some painful work, imposed by the priest and performed by the penitent, to satisfy divine justice for sins committed), and (d) *absolution* (pronounced by the priest judicially and not merely declaratively)”
    - [also Hodge] By the Roman view, this painful work “makes a real satisfaction for sin that is absolutely essential: the only means whereby the pardon of sins committed after baptism can be secured”
    - There is then, in the Roman Catholic View of repentance (as at least a prominent element) the notion that the sinner can and must pay for his own sins to win the favor of God.
    - The BIBLICAL view of repentance is precisely the opposite of this. There is no more radical misconception of repentance than to regard it as a WORK performed by the Christian-the favor of God can never be won or earned at all.
- The Arminians have an errant doctrine as well called “evangelical repentance.”
  - This doctrine teaches that repentance precedes regeneration, and is based upon a presumption that unregenerate man is not truly, entirely, or utterly dead in sin, nor is he destitute of all powers of spiritual good.
  - According to the Arminians, unbelieving man can yet hunger and thirst after righteousness and offer the sacrifice of a contrite and broken spirit which is pleasing to God. This state of mind or heart is believed to be a self-generated act of obedience in return for which God bestows the gift of eternal life.
  - True repentance, far from being a conscious act of obedience well-pleasing to God and in return bringing His blessing and reward, is rather a consciousness of one’s total inability to please God or do anything to secure His blessing and reward.
- [Williamson]“There can be no true repentance without faith in Christ. When one is conscious of complete inability to do anything to avoid God’s wrath and curse and win His favor, he is ready to trust in Jesus Christ who has borne that wrath and curse and won His favor as the substitute for His people.”
- The Roman Catholic practice also has built into it the obligation of members to “confess” their sins, and to accept, rely, and actively participate in the intermediary sacerdotalism of ordained priests.
  - All sin must be confessed to God rather merely to man (1 John 1:5-10).
  - It is much more overwhelming to face God than to face another man.
  - It is also *efficacious* to face God in our repentance, because no mere man has the power to forgive sins.
    - The sinfulness of a man’s heart has more that needs to be confessed than only the evident sins that can be dragged-up before a human priest.
    - It is much easier to recite a list of sins than it is to mourn the defilement of the heart.
    - It is a duty that requires much greater constancy than is possible from either human confessors or priests.
  - [Williamson]- “How can a defiled sinner stand before that holy God who is a consuming fire? Does he not *need* a priest who can stand between? He does indeed need one who can (1) remove God’s wrath, and (2) absolve guilt and remove defilement. But no priest of Rome can for so, for the simple reason that he also is defiled.”
- ONLY THE ONE AGAINST WHOM THE SIN IS COMMITTED CAN TRULY “FORGIVE” THE SIN
  - It is true that Scripture requires us to confess our sins against our brethren TO those brethren (James 5:16). This duty is also implicit in the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:12).
  - We are also supposed to be ready to forgive any who trespass against us (Luke 17:3,4)
- All sin is ultimately against God
  - Our primary duty is to regard all sin as an offense against God, and to confess all our sins to Him (Psalm 51:4)
  - It is the glory of the gospel of Christ and the Reformed Confession that informs us that the only savior and priest who is able to do what every sin situation requires is Christ.
    - He was “made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” [Hebrews 2:17].
    - The Word of God commands that we acknowledge none *other* to be our priest. We are not to imagine that He cannot be touched because of our infirmities, but to come boldly to Him for mercy and relief (Hebrews 4:15).
    - Therefore, no sin can be considered to have been truly removed until it is confessed unto God through Christ.

# Chapter 16

## OF GOOD WORKS

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 16:

### Of Good Works

**Section 1.** Good works are only such as God hath commanded in his holy Word<sup>1</sup>, and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised by men out of blind zeal, or upon any pretense of good intention<sup>2</sup>.

1. Micah 6:8; Rom 12:2; Heb 13:21.
2. 1 Sam 15:21-23; Isa 29:13; Mat 15:9; John 16:2; Rom 10:2; 1 Pet 1:18.

**Section 2.** These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith<sup>1</sup>; and by them believers manifest their thankfulness<sup>2</sup>, strengthen their assurance<sup>3</sup>, edify their brethren<sup>4</sup>, adorn the profession of the gospel<sup>5</sup>, stop the mouths of the adversaries<sup>6</sup>, and glorify God<sup>7</sup>, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto<sup>8</sup>, that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life<sup>9</sup>.

1. James 2:18, 22.
2. Ps 116:12-13; 1 Pet 2:9.
3. 2 Pet 1:5-10; 1 John 2:3, 5.
4. Mat 5:16; 2 Cor 9:2.
5. 1 Tim 6:1; Titus 2:5, 9-12.
6. 1 Pet 2:15.
7. John 15:8; Phil 1:11; 1 Pet 2:12.
8. Eph 2:10.
9. Rom 6:22.

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

"These sections of the Confession teach (1) the nature and (2) the source of good works, (3) that truly good works are such by warrant of divine commandment only, (4) that truly good works can only spring from the inward root of true repentance and faith, (5) that the effects and uses of good works are (a) the expression of the believer's gratitude, (b) confirming faith, (c) edifying others, (d) manifesting faith to others, (e) refuting adversaries of God, and (f) glorifying God, and (6) that good works are necessary."

- This Chapter, among other things, takes on the eternal question asked by Christians, "What (really) is a *good work*?"
  - Does a donation of my monies to a charity count? How about my volunteer labor on behalf of a service organization?
  - We commonly act as though anything done out of charity or kindness qualifies as a 'good work'.
  - But according to Scripture (and as systematized in the Confession of Faith) it is not so.
- Two requirements are set forth in Scripture in order that a work may be considered truly "good."
  - It must be in conformity with the revealed will of God.
    - It must be that which God Himself has commanded in His Holy Word.
    - Deuteronomy 6:25- "*And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.*"
  - It must *also* spring from a 'good conscience'.
    - It must be that which is done with sincerity of heart as an act of service to God.
    - Hebrews 13:18- "*Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.*"
- [Williamson]- "The impossibility of an unbeliever doing good works is due to the fact that his heart (or conscience) and the law of God are not in agreement the one with the other."
- For example, some sincerely believe that they are performing "good works" when they, under the pretext of being more *inclusive, tolerant, kind, or 'loving'*, abstain from calling-out the numerous sins prevalent in our culture associated with homosexuality.
  - Scripture tells us that homosexuality is:
    - A direct frontal attack on His Person and the created order. [Gen. chs. 1&2]
    - Abhorrent to God. [Lev.18:22, etc.]
    - An indication of the progression of sin resulting in death (personal and societal). [Rom. 1:27-27].
    - A disqualifying sin, separating the practitioner from the kingdom of God- [1 Cor. 6:9-10]

- A sin against one's own body- [1 Cor. 6:18]
- Scripture also tells us that our proneness to tolerate this sin (as well as MANY OTHERS) is that our consciences have become seared as with a hot iron.
  - [1 Timothy 4:1-5] *"Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer."*
- Scripture similarly warns us against our consciences beginning to prefer the doctrines of men over the doctrines of God: we are entirely too prone to be "man pleasers" and not prone enough to stand firm for the clear doctrines of God.
  - [Galatians 1:10] *"For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."*
  - [Ephesians 6:5-7] *"Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man."*
  - [Jeremiah 17:5] *"Thus says the LORD: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD'."*
  - [Romans 12:2] *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect"*
- So, one can quite sincerely grow to think that abstaining totally from something (like speaking out plainly against obvious sin) is a "good work" because the sinner is not made uncomfortable by any confrontation.
- Whereas, such conformity is really only sin because of allying with the sinner against God.
- Fallen man has the ability to commit the most terrible crimes under some conviction that they do service to God, because simple obedience to the conscience is obedience to evil.
  - [John 16:1-4] *"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you."*
  - [Titus 1:15-16] *"To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work."*
- Bringing the human conscience wholly into line with the law of God is the only antidote to this, and the only place to begin doing "good works."
- [Williamson] "But let us suppose for a moment that an unregenerate man sees the works of a believer and decides to imitate him. Is it not possible that he could do many of the same things? Indeed it is. 'Works done by unregenerate men.... may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others'. An unbeliever may place a ten dollar bill in the offering plate for the support of the preaching of the true gospel of Christ. Yet we must still deny that he has done a 'good work'. And we *must* do so, not because he is this time not in outward conformity with the law of God. He is. But 'whatsoever is not of faith is sin' (Romans 14:23). A man must not merely do what God commands, but he must do it because he recognizes God's will and seeks to obey him. 'Without faith it is impossible to please him' (Heb. 11:6)."
- BOTH faithful conformance to God's will, AND the faithful participation of a Christian conscience are necessary for a work to be considered truly 'GOOD'.
  - Because of this double principle the unbeliever is NEVER able to do truly good works.
  - Moreover, even the true believer is sometimes unable to do truly good works because they have imperfectly conformed their conscience to the Word of God
  - This distinction is not appreciated enough.
    - The truth is requisite to sanctification and good works (John 17:17)
    - Only to the extent that our consciences are illuminated by the truth of God are we able to do good works, and not *merely* by the earnestness with which we heed the voice of our conscience.
  - It is neglect of this truth that has sometimes led to serious perversion of the Word of God.
    - This happens when the weaker brother is looked upon as the more pious, and the stronger brother is deemed less so.
    - Paul warned the Romans (chapter 14) to be charitable to the weaker in faith, but NOT to engage them in doubtful disputations about their interpretations of God's will.
      - He pointed to strong points of conscience among the brethren
      - He suggested that their views were immature and out of conformance with the will of God.

- Passion, zeal, and hyperactive works of ‘conscience’ are no substitute for mature and tempered consciences trained by the Word of God.
- None of this is meant to overcome charity. Truth should not be used (immaturely) as a cudgel against the sincerely naive.
  - [Williamson] “The stronger brother ought not to seek to induce the weaker brother to violate his conscience. He should avoid every occasion of presenting a temptation to sin, and every violation of conscience is sin. But we cannot but protest against the modern notion that the weakness of such a brother should become the rule of practice for those who are strong. This is sin twice compounded.”
  - It abandons the objective truth of God’s revealed will.
  - It encourages the immature believer to persist in following an errant conscience.
- What is the solution?
  - Educating our consciences BY the Word of God to conform to the will of God.
  - Encouraging our minds to lead us into faithfully following an enlightened conscience.
    - The weaker brother should allow their consciences to be educated by the more mature.
    - The mature should commit to faithfully engaging the weaker brethren.
- In answer to the rhetorical question, “Why is my liberty judged by another man’s conscience?”
  - [Williamson] “We are not suggesting that any Christian is immediately or perfectly delivered from this difficulty. We all have need of sanctification through the truth. But the true believer is to some extent, and more and more as the truth of God is formed in his soul, delivered from ignorance in order that he might serve God with all good conscience. There is in every such man a measure of genuine agreement between the conscience or heart and the will of God.”

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 16:

### Of Good Works

**Section 3.** Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ<sup>1</sup>. And that they may be enabled thereunto, beside the graces they have already received, there is required an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit to work in them to will, and to do, of His good pleasure<sup>2</sup>: yet are they not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty unless upon a special motion of the Spirit; but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them<sup>3</sup>.

1. John 15:4–6, Ezek. 36:26–27
2. Phil. 2:13, Phil. 4:13, 2 Cor. 3:5
3. Phil. 2:12, Heb. 6:11–12, 2 Pet. 1:3, 5, 10–11, Isa. 64:7, 2 Tim. 1:6, Acts 26:6–7, Jude 20–21

**Section 4.** They who, in their obedience, attain to the greatest height which is possible in this life, are so far from being able to supererogate, and to do more than God requires, as that they fall short of much which in duty they are bound to do<sup>1</sup>.

1. (Luke 17:10, Neh. 13:22, Job 9:2–3, Gal. 5:17)

**Section 5.** We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come; and the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom, by them, we can neither profit, nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins<sup>1</sup>, but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants<sup>2</sup>: and because, as they are good, they proceed from His Spirit<sup>3</sup>; and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment<sup>4</sup>.

1. Rom. 3:20, Rom. 4:2, 4, 6, Eph. 2:8–9, Tit. 3:5–7, Rom. 8:18, Ps. 16:2, Job 22:2–3, Job 35:7–8
2. Luke 17:10
3. Gal. 5:22–23
4. Isa. 64:6, Gal. 5:17, Rom. 7:15, 18, Ps. 143:2, Ps. 130:3

**Section 6.** Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in Him<sup>1</sup>; not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unreproveable in God's sight<sup>2</sup>; but that He, looking upon them in His Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections<sup>3</sup>.

1. Eph. 1:6, 1 Pet. 2:5, Exod. 28:38, Gen. 4:4, Heb. 11:4
2. Job 9:20, Ps. 143:2
3. Heb. 13:20–21, 2 Cor. 8:12, Heb. 6:10. Matt. 25:21, 23

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that the Christian's ability to do good works is not of himself but only of the Holy Spirit who dwells in him, (2) that the Holy Spirit exerts a constant influence in the believer, (3) that this does not provide occasion for indolence nor does it in any way deny duty to exercise diligence, (4) that works of supererogation are impossible, (5) that no believer ever performs his duty perfectly in this life, (6) that our best works are without merit or perfection, and (7) that the good works of believers are accepted and rewarded only for Christ's sake.”

- First things first: Just about now, everyone is wondering about this arcane word, “supererogate” used in Section 4. So, here is the dictionary definition:
  - Supererogate- *to do more than duty requires; to atone for a deficiency by means of a surplus action or quality.*
- It is basic to all right thinking about good works of Christians to recognize that they are all “wholly from the Spirit of Christ.”
  - [John 15:5]- *“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*

- God does not regenerate the soul and then leave it to effect only what it can do by its own power.
    - It is His sovereign power that is operative so as to complete and perfect that work begun in regeneration.
    - [John 15:4]- *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.”*
- Good works are the *product* and *evidence* of the work of God in us, they are NOT the *cause* of God’s works on our behalf.
  - The precise ways *how* the Spirit accomplishes His work in us is a mystery. His ways are past our finding out, but they are *through* or *by means of*, the truth.
  - [John 17:15-19]- *“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”*
  - By the truth we are brought under the inward control of the principles of the Word of God.
    - As a result, we are able to know that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
    - [Romans 12:1,2]- *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*
    - [Williamson]- *“We do not pretend to know how the Spirit does this work; we only know that God’s Word requires us to acknowledge that he does it, so that we will praise the Spirit for everything good that we are able to do.”*
- The Confession also teaches us that, to acknowledge that the *source* of all our good works is God is in no way to suggest that our negligence, slothfulness, and carelessness are excusable.
  - We are truly without excuse regarding our Christian obligations.
  - We are bound to perform our duty regardless of how we feel about doing it.
  - We can claim no need for a special motion of the Holy Spirit directing us to do what is right and our duty.
  - [Williamson]- *“There are those who excuse themselves from duties on this ground. They know (1) that God commands them to do good and (2) that they have no ability to do good works except it be given by the Spirit, and so (3) they excuse their failure to do good works on the grounds that they are unable to do them because the Spirit has failed to move them. But this is mere pretense. They pretend that they would be delighted to do good works if only they ‘could’. Whereas, in reality, they could do them if they only ‘would’, that is, if they had a right attitude of mind and heart.”*
- The lack of a proper attitude of mind and heart *generally* is illegitimate evidence, and no excuse to claim that the indwelling Spirit has somehow failed to give the special motion necessary for a person to perform their duties of good works at any *particular* moment.
  - This improper attitude is perhaps better evidence of an unconverted heart, and that the Spirit does not dwell within the individual at all.
  - Man is without excuse regarding his failure to perform his right duties to God.
  - [Romans 1:18-20]- *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”*
  - Mankind is without excuse, because the condition of his heart is only his own doing.
  - The cause of man’s depravity and inability is sin.
- A true believer will not make excuse for sin, nor wait for some “special motion of the Spirit” before he strives to do his duty.
  - “Striving” is the important term here.
  - A true believer will strive to do his duty because, having a converted heart in which the Spirit dwells, he will DESIRE to do what is right.



- Moreover, the believer learns in Scripture that the Spirit does *not* work in ‘fits and spurts’; the prompting of the Spirit is ubiquitous and unceasing.
- [Romans 8:12-16]- *“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”*
- [Williamson]- “Neither can the ‘motions’ of the Spirit be observed or felt. The *effects* of His work may be felt, but the activity itself is spiritual (John 3). Indeed, if we may speak properly of ‘feeling’ in this matter, it is the ‘feeling’ that the believer has respecting Scripture as a result of the Spirit’s work in him.”
  - The believer feels the power and authority of the warnings and exhortations of Scripture which require him to do his duty.
  - The believer feels the effect of the Spirit pricking his conscience to trust God’s Word and pursue his own duties.
  - [2 Peter 1:10]- *“Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.”*
  - [Timothy 1:6]- *“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”*
  - The unbeliever cares nothing for the prompting of the Spirit, and to the extent that he fears to judgement of men, can only make excuse for his own lack and blame the Spirit for withholding His ‘special’ unction.
- The evidence that one possesses the Spirit of God is that one will feel or acknowledge the authority of that Word which lays duty upon him.
  - He is ‘led’ by the Spirit through the Word.
  - Those who wait upon a ‘special motion of the Spirit’ demonstrate that they *may* be themselves unregenerate but are *certainly* mistaken about the way in which the Spirit works obedience in the hearts of those who truly are regenerate.
  - Those who do their duty because they humbly reverence the will of God revealed in Scripture, and they (only) have warrant to believe that they are the children of God indeed.
    - [1 John 2:3-6]- *“And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know Him” but does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps His word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in Him: whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.”*
- Addressing Section 4 of this Chapter, let us consider one errant doctrine regarding works:
  - The Roman church teaches that sinful men, having received divine grace, are capable of doing not merely all of their duty, but even more besides.
    - Their Baltimore Catechism (Article 1125) speaks of the “super-abundant satisfaction of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the saints.”
    - Super-abundant satisfaction is defined as “that which they gained during their lifetime but did not need, and which the Church applies to their fellow members of the communion of saints.”
    - This super-abundance fills what the Roman Church calls the “treasury of merits,” from which the less fortunate may draw.
  - In Chapter 13 (Of Sanctification) we already dealt with the fact that NO believer is ever able to attain perfection in this life, let alone attain MORE than is necessary, and upon which another soul may draw.
- [Williamson]: “The marvel is not that the good works of believers are so ‘great’, but rather that they are accepted and rewarded at all.”
  - If even our righteousness is as filthy rags... if even our best works are defiled and mixed with weakness and imperfection, how is it possible that they can even be called good works at all/
    - The answer is that believers have union with Christ.

- Just as the *person* of believers is accepted by God because of our union with Christ, so it is with our *works*.
- What we DO in the name of Christ that is considered 'good' is only so because of HIS mediation.
- That is, both are of God.
- [A.A. Hodge, *Commentary on the Confession of Faith*]- "It is all of grace- a grace called a reward added to a grace called a work... God promises to reward the Christian just as a father promises to reward his child for doing what is its duty, and what is for its own benefit alone. Because a certain gracious proportion has been established between the grace given in the reward and the grace given in the holy exercises of the heart and life: - the more grace of obedience, the more grace of reward- the more grace on earth, the more glory in heaven- because God so wills it, and because the grace given and exercised in obedience prepares the soul for the reception of the further grace given in the reward."
- [Williamson]- "They who excel others in works will thus have the greater reason to humbly acknowledge that they owe the greater debt of gratitude to God."

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 16:

### Of Good Works

**Section 7.** Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others<sup>1</sup>; yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith<sup>2</sup>, nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word<sup>3</sup>, nor to a right end, the glory of God<sup>4</sup>; they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God<sup>5</sup>. And yet their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing unto God<sup>6</sup>.

1. 1 Kings 21:27, 29; 2 Kings 10:30-31; Phil 1:15-16, 18.
2. Gen 4:3-5 with Heb 11:4, 6.
3. Isa 1:12; 1 Cor 13:3.
4. Mat 6:2, 5, 16.
5. Amos 5:21-22; Hosea 1:4; Hag 2:14; Rom 9:16; Titus 1:15; 3:5.
6. Job 21:14-15; Psa 14:4; 36:3; Mat 23:23; 25:41-45.

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This section of the Confession teaches us (1) that unregenerate men may do (what we shall call) *formally* good works, (2) that these are nevertheless inherently wicked works (as God sees them), and (3) that notwithstanding, the neglect of such formally good works is more wicked still.”

- Intuitively, this may seem to us rather narrow, ‘legalistic’, *cruel* and a bit like “gnat strangling.” It is none of those things.
  - [Williamson]- “By ‘*formally good works*’ we mean actions which, as far as they are considered in themselves, are the same as the good works that true believers may perform. We have already seen why the wicked cannot perform any good works whatsoever (Sections 1,2). But it is of no little importance to insist that the wicked can and do perform those works which are ‘*formally good*’. If it were not so there could be no human society in which believers and unbelievers could exist.”
  - It is therefore no small thing to infer that these “formally good” works done by unconverted men are actually for the earthly benefit of converted men; i.e., “Common Grace” in which we are to work to advance the Kingdom.
- It is commonly observed that there is much in unconverted men that we consider *goodness*.
  - The sole reason for this ‘goodness’ however, is the influence of the common grace of God (cf. Chapter 5, Sections 2-6).
  - The conscience of man is not permitted to wholly extinguish the recollection of the commandments of the law.
    - **Romans 2: 12-15-** “For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.”
  - Our culture’s mores, the historical traditions of men, codified civil law, as well as the convicting power of the gospel upon unbelievers, all stimulate the human conscience (generally) to exercise a high degree of personal restraint upon their *inherently* wicked hearts.
    - When viewed by God (mediated through each person’s relationship to Christ), ‘good works’ done by intrinsically evil men may be considered exceedingly heinous sins.
    - As an example, consider a hypothetical:
      - A wealthy man has made his money through devious means.
      - His conscience warns him-
        - That *culturally* immoral activity has led to his prosperity.
        - That time is likely to reveal his errors, and *history* certain to judge him for them.

- In time, he may be judged according to the *law* for his actions
  - He has an awareness of the judgement of God to ultimately come to him.
- He therefore subsequently purposes to do some great humanitarian and philanthropic works to “make up for his sins,” and “appease the wrath of God.”
  - He builds a great hospital to alleviate human suffering
  - In the course of time many believers and unbelievers receive the mercy of proper medical care.
  - Certainly, the Christians among the cured would rightly give thanks and praise to God that this rich man had been moved to such a great and “good work.”
- But this is all based upon our finite, human perspective. We tend to ‘grade on the curve’ as we engage in such ‘fruit inspection.’ We can’t truly trust our own (subjective) senses to accurately see and judge (objective) truths.
- But it is no exaggeration to say that in God’s view of it, this “good work” might well be the crowning blasphemy, the supreme wickedness, of that sinner who sought by his own works to ‘make up for’ his sins; to strive to appease the wrath of God instead of trusting in the work of Jesus Christ.
- Augustine referred to such *good works* as “splendid sins” because that is what they actually are: *splendid* from one perspective, but nothing more than *sins* when viewed from another.
  - All that could rightly be called *splendid* in them comes from *outside* the sinner.
  - While all that is *sinful* is wholly within his own heart and intent.
- It would be a grave mistake to think that such sinners (as in our hypothetical) would be better off without their *splendid sins*.
  - If we could imagine that our rich man did nothing beyond his source sins in acquiring wealth, we could *only* say that he would then have been even worse off still.
  - For, in that case, he would have added to the original fault by resisting the conviction and warning of God (through all of the stated means) as his conscience was pricked.
  - Outright blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is altogether unpardonable.
  - [Williamson] (using his own hypothetical)- “*John Dillinger was a vicious criminal. His whole life was criminal because he lived outside of and against the law, yet it is known that he showed certain kindness and loyalty to his associates in crime and even to “good people” who were not immediately connected with his crimes. There was then, in a sense, “good” in John Dillinger. And he would have been worse still had he betrayed all or violently attacked or killed all. This does not mean that part of his life was law-abiding. But it simply recognizes that the absence of his “better activities” in the life of crime would have rendered him worse still.*”

# Chapter 17

## OF THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 17:

### Of the Perseverance of the Saints

**Section 1.** They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved<sup>1</sup>.

1. John 10:28-29; Phil 1:6; 1 Pet 1:5, 9; 2 Pet 1:10; 1 John 3:9.

**Section 2.** This perseverance of the saints depends, not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father<sup>1</sup>; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup>; the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them<sup>3</sup>; and the nature of the covenant of grace<sup>4</sup>: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof<sup>5</sup>.

1. Jer. 31:3; 2 Tim 2:18-19.
2. Luke 22:32; John 17:11, 24; Heb 7:25; 9:12-15; 10:10, 14; 13:20-21; Rom 8:33-39.
3. John 14:16-17; 1 John 2:27; 3:9.
4. Jer. 32:40.
5. John 10:28; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 John 2:19.

**Section 3.** Nevertheless they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins<sup>1</sup>; and for a time continue therein<sup>2</sup>: whereby they incur God's displeasure<sup>3</sup>, and grieve his Holy Spirit<sup>4</sup>; come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts<sup>5</sup>; have their hearts hardened<sup>6</sup>, and their consciences wounded<sup>7</sup>; hurt and scandalize others<sup>8</sup>, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves<sup>9</sup>.

1. Mat 26:70, 72, 74.
2. Psa. 51 title with v. 14.
3. 2 Sam 11:27; Isa 64:5, 7, 9.
4. Eph 4:30.
5. Psa. 51:8, 10, 12; Song 5:2-4, 6; Rev 2:4.
6. Isa 63:17; Mark 6:52; 16:14.
7. Psa. 32:3-4; 51:8.
8. 2 Sam 12:14.
9. Psa. 89:31-32; 1 Cor 11:32.

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

"These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that true believers cannot fall from grace (that is, totally or finally), (2) that they will certainly persevere, (3) that this certainty is not because of anything originating in them but in God only (the decree of election, the merits and intercession of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who enables them to persevere, and the provisions of the eternal covenant), and (4) that this certainty in no way denies that true believers may fall into grievous sins for a time, the occasions of such lapses being (a) the temptations of the world, (b) the seductions of Satan, (c) the remaining corruption of their own nature, and (d) the neglect of the means of grace; and the effects of such lapses being (a) to displease and to grieve God, (b) to deprive themselves of a measure of God's grace and comfort, (c) hardening their own hearts, (d) wounding their own consciences, (e) incurring temporal judgements, and (f) causing others to stumble."

- When a person has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and truly converted unto Christ (by repentance and faith), is it *possible* to again become a child of wrath and of eternal destruction?
  - Scripture answers emphatically that it is not.
    - John 3:36- "*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*"
    - John 5:24- "*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*"
  - When a man has once exercised faith in Jesus Christ, he cannot come into condemnation any more. He has passed from that condemnation, never to return again.
  - The Christian then ought to be confident of his salvation:
    - Philippians 1:6-7- "*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because*

*I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel."*

- Jeremiah 32:40- *"I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul."*
- Human experience often seems to contradict this teaching.
  - Who among us can't think of someone:
    - Who became a member of the Church, *once* gave ample evidence of their great interest in divine things, *maintained* fastidious attendance to the means of grace available to them for a considerable length of time,
    - But who *later* fell away from the fellowship of Christ into complete neglect and even antagonism?
    - Such a person certainly seems to us to have "fallen from grace."
  - We use the word "seems" because the apostle John tells us what really happens in such cases:
    - 1 John 2:19- *"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us."*
    - So, such cases do NOT prove that believers can fall from grace, but only that that we can be fooled by false appearances and professions of true belief.
    - John insisted that true believers cannot fall from grace. Had they been true believers, they would have persevered in their faith.
    - He knew from the Word of God what he could not know from appearances; namely that believers cannot *actually* fall from grace.
- Why is it that true believers cannot fall from grace?
  - Is it because of something in the power of the believers themselves?
  - Or, is it because the power of God sovereignly prevents it?
  - The answer is clear.
    - True believers are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation
      - 1 Peter 1:3-8- *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."*
- This is the difference between the Reformed Faith and Arminianism (particularly Rome), and even Amyraldism (so-called "4-point Calvinism").
  - False systems teach that it is the power of man, either with the power of God in concert, or alone (man's power in some systems being even more controlling than God's), which keeps the saved from being lost.
  - This is claimed because in these false systems, salvation is said to be possible or available for all, and Christ's atonement *universal* or *general* (rather than limited or particular only to those decretally elect of God from eternity-past).
  - And so, from beginning to end under these false systems, the sinner must by his own power do the one thing necessary to make the 'possibility' become 'reality'.
  - For these, the power of God is powerless until 'tapped' by the sinner making his move toward salvation. The sinner determines his state of salvation, and his continued participation in the communion of the saints.
- This 'self-determinism' (as false as it actually is) is naturally attractive because it leaves the sinner in command even over the power of God.
- But what sounds attractive at the beginning of new life, loses its appeal when we look to the end.
  - No sooner has the person started down this path, than the Roman Catholic and Arminian begin to have some sad news broken to him.
  - Man has insufficient grace and merit on his own to make the entire journey.
  - [Williamson] "We liked it when we were told that that we could start the trip by our own free will and power. But now we learn the bitter fact that we can also 'run out of gas' and 'fail to make our destination' by the same free will and power. The power of God that is powerless until the sinner makes his move at the beginning is just as powerless at any later time that the sinner may will it to be so. If at any time he falters and chooses unbelief rather than faith, sin rather than godliness, falling away rather than perseverance, he at that moment loses all power of a saving sort. He is right back where he started. And there is nothing the power of God can do about it."
- The Roman Catholic and the Arminian are consistent.
  - They are honest enough to admit that grace which is not sovereign at the beginning is not sovereign to the end.

- Salvation which depends upon man is no more dependable than man himself.
- Contrast this to the Reformed Faith:
  - Which begins with a frank recognition that if God were to merely make salvation *possible* for men, and leave it up to them whether or not to turn this possibility into reality, there would be NONE saved, because man is totally unable to do so. He loves evil too much to turn by himself to good.
  - But in resting all hope for the sinner upon the election of the Father, the atonement of the Son, and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, the Reformed Faith not only speaks to the need of the helpless sinner at the beginning, but does so also to the end.
    - It prefers to offend angry sinners in order to give them a salvation that cannot fail.
    - If it is God alone who saves then we have a salvation which cannot fail every time it is applied. A salvation which depends upon God entirely is entirely dependable.
      - John 10:27-30- *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."*
- Nevertheless, the Confession places great emphasis on this chapter being about the Perseverance of the Saints. This still needs some defense from our human perspective: What is OUR responsibility?
  - [Williamson]- "Having advertised the fact that it is the power of God alone which renders the saints secure, we must stress with even greater urgency the necessity of perseverance on the part of believers. When we say that the ultimate basis for perseverance is the Holy Spirit's operation in believers, we do not mean that it is the Holy Spirit who perseveres."
  - I have always personally thought that this doctrine, when seen from the 'God's-Eye-View' perspective, could easily be called, "The Preservation of the Saints."
    - Preservation from God
    - Perseverance from us as pertains to active obedience.
  - [A.A. Hodge, Commentary on the Confession of Faith]-"The true doctrine is not that salvation is certain if we have once believed, but that perseverance in holiness is certain if we have once believed...[*The doctrine is*] ...not that persistent effort on our part is not necessary in order... [*to be saved*]... but that in this effort we are certain of success; for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure."
  - The infallible certainty of salvation as respects true believers does not render our perseverance any easier, as though we were playing a game rather than fighting a battle.
    - We believe that those who claim that it is simple to overcome life's problems and trials because they taken on themselves the name of Christ deceive themselves as well as others.
    - The true description of the battle of perseverance is that it is a struggle all the way, that engages all that is in us.
    - But it is a struggle from which a true believer, as distinguished from a mere pretender, will never turn away until the battle is won and the goal reached.
    - Matthew 24:9-13- *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."*
  - It is clear from Scripture that while true believers never fall totally or finally from grace, they can and do lapse in their sanctification.
    - This is sometimes referred to as "backsliding," and does NOT speak to the non-elect being false-professors of Christ, but of actual Christians stumbling.
    - It is illustrated in the lives of even such great men as Noah, Moses, David, and Peter.
      - Each fell into lamentable sin for a time, *after* they became true believers.
      - It could be legitimately wondered how sin could overcome those in whom the Spirit dwells?
      - There are various reasons for their stumbling, at least one of which can be seen in every case:
        - Attraction of the world- (1 John 2:15)- *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world."*
        - Temptation of Satan- (Matthew 26:69-75)- *"Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, 'You also were with Jesus the Galilean.' But he denied it before them all, saying, 'I do not know what you mean.' And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, 'This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.' And again he denied it with an oath: 'I do not know the man.' After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.' Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, 'I do not know the man.' And immediately the rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the*



saying of Jesus, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly."

- Corruption remaining in a believer's heart- (James 1:12-14)- *"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire."*
- Neglect of the means of grace- (Hebrews 10:23-25)- *"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."*
- We must be very careful not to place too much of our own inference into discussions about sins in these (and in fact, all) saints.
  - Scripture records their lapses, not to encourage us to sin, but to warn us against such falls ourselves.
  - For example, as we read of David's lapses,
    - We read of God's displeasure (cf. 2 Sam. 11:27).
    - We read of their own loss of comfort and assurance (cf. Psalm 51:8-13).
    - We read of the harm that was done to their own hearts and consciences (cf. Psalm 32:3,4).
    - We read of the dishonor brought upon the cause of God and truth (cf. 2 Samuel 12:14).
  - [Williamson]- *"Such tragic falls we should never make light of. We should contemplate them only with fear and trembling. Such things should remind us of Peter's warning: 'If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?' (1 Peter 4:18)."*
- It is not as if the true believer need have no concern about falling, or that he can fall without any serious harm.
  - The truth is that even the believer is saved with nothing to spare. He is scarcely saved.
  - But the point is that he IS saved, and he is saved because even if he stumbles (as our forebears in Christ did), he will soon again rise up to the conflict with sin, and will (except for the tragic lapses) continue in that conflict to the end.
- The precise reason why the Church practices Biblical Church Discipline, and even that there are methods in Scripture to prosecute proper confrontations and treatments of offense and sin, is because even believers must be occasionally battle with besetting sin.
  - Matthew 18:15-18
  - 1 Corinthians 5:1-5
  - 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

THE PURPOSE OF OUR PRACTICING BIBLICAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS TO RESTORE A STUMBLER BROTHER, because we cannot know with assurance whether they are 'family' and will be preserved, or are numbered among the reprobate, and so are lost.

[Williamson]- *"If Christians would study the way in which these men rose up from such lapses to strive for God once more, they would never be tempted to a false and easy view of security, but would hold the true doctrine of perseverance."*

# **Chapter 18**

## **OF THE ASSURANCE OF GRACE AND SALVATION**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 18:

### Of Assurance Of Grace and Salvation

**Section 1.** Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and estate of salvation<sup>1</sup>, which hope of theirs shall perish<sup>2</sup>; yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in a state of grace<sup>3</sup>, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed<sup>4</sup>.

1. Deut 29:19; Job 8:13-14; Micah 3:11; John 8:41.
2. Mat 7:22-23.
3. 1 John 2:3; 3:14, 18-19, 21, 24; 5:13.
4. Rom 5:2, 5

**Section 2.** This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope<sup>1</sup>; but an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation<sup>2</sup>, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made<sup>3</sup>, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God<sup>4</sup>: which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption<sup>5</sup>.

1. Heb 6:11, 19.
2. Heb 6:17-18.
3. 2 Cor 1:12; 2 Pet 1:4-5, 10-11; 1 John 2:3; 3:14.
4. Rom 8:15-16.
5. Eph 1:13-14; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:21-22.

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that there is a false assurance in which unregenerate men sometimes indulge, in which they are deceived, and in which they will finally be discovered, (2) that there is a true assurance, in which true believers are not deceived but rather infallibly confirmed, and in which they will not be confounded, and (3) that this infallible assurance rests upon (a) God’s infallible Word, (b) the graces in the believer’s heart of which the Word speaks, and (c) the testimony of the Spirit which enables the believer to confirm the one by the other.”

- Scripture says that men are prone to deceive themselves as well as others.
  - Jer. 17:9- “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*”
  - They are supremely confident that all is well with their souls, but they only deceive themselves
    - Gal. 6:3- “*For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*”
    - Deut. 29:19,20- “*one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, ‘I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.’ This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven.*”
  - The hypocrite’s hope will perish
    - Job 8:13-14- “*Such are the paths of all who forget God; the hope of the godless shall perish. His confidence is severed, and his trust is a spider’s web.*”
- But it is also certain that there is such a thing as *true assurance of relationship with God*.
  - Romans 8:16-17- “*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*”
  - 1 John 2:3- “*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.*”
  - 1 John 3:14- “*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.*”
- Scripture is not content to merely say that there is such a thing as right assurance, but exhorts us to show diligence to walk in that assurance.
  - Hebrews 6:10-12- “*For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*”
  - 2 Peter 1:10-11- “*Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities, you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*”

- If a man can confidently believe that he is saved while in reality he is not, it is also true that a man can confidently believe that he is saved and actually be saved.
- And he may not only be confident of this fact; he may also know that he is not deceived in his belief.
- What is the difference between true and false assurance?
  - [A.A. Hodge]- “True assurance begets unfeigned humility; false assurance begets spiritual pride. True assurance leads to increased diligence in the practice of holiness; the false leads to sloth and self-indulgence. True assurance leads to candid self-examination and to a desire to be searched and corrected by God; the false leads to a disposition to be satisfied with appearance and to avoid accurate investigation. And, the true leads to constant aspirations after more intimate fellowship with God which is not true of false assurance.”
- It is not the strength of one’s conviction which proves the validity of his assurance, but the *character* of one’s conviction.
  - A man may be fanatically sure that he is saved, but often this only means that he is *sincerely wrong*.
  - [A.A. Hodge]- “The second difference between true and false assurance is the basis of it. True assurance rests upon three things, all of which are absent in the case of those who possess false assurance: True assurance rests upon the infallible certainty of what God says; false assurance rests upon what man says. True assurance rests upon the evidence presented by the actual possession of those graces unto which God’s promises are made; false assurance rests upon the mere semblance of such. True assurance rests upon the testimony of the Holy Spirit within our hearts (by applying the Word of God), so that we know that we are the children of God; false assurance rests upon the testimony of the spirit of error by suppression of the Word of God.”
- This means, above all, that true, infallible assurance rests upon the Spirit and Word of God.
  - God has said certain infallible things in his Word.
    - Whoever believes in Christ already possesses life everlasting (John 3:36).
    - Whoever keeps his commandments knows Him.
    - God produces in the elect what he declares.
    - God enables us to believe in Christ and keep his commandments.
  - Therefore, when we do believe in Christ and keep his commandments, the Holy Spirit enables us to know that we do, and to possess true assurance.
- It is important to insist that this infallible assurance is never ours by some private revelation of the Spirit.
  - To claim assurance on the basis of a private witness of the Spirit apart from, or in addition to, the Bible is to claim a false assurance. God’s witness is enough.
  - By Scripture alone, the man of God is made perfect (2 Tim. 3:16,17).
- In effecting infallible assurance in the hearts of believers, the Holy Spirit does NOT impart new revelation.
  - He applies that which is already revealed: the Scriptural truth that believers shall be saved.
  - [Williamson]- “By bringing the sure Word of God (with the infallible promises it contains) and the actually *existing* graces of the heart (to which these promises are made) together, the Spirit enables the believer to say with assurance, ‘I am a child of God, and will be forever.’”
- Some have maintained that the Holy Spirit communicates assurance to the soul of the believer immediately, that is, without the use of Scripture.
  - Romans 8:16 is claimed in support of this view: “The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.”
  - It is true that the Spirit Himself bears witness, but he bears witness WITH the spirit of man immediately, and not TO the spirit of man immediately.
    - In other words, God exerts an immediate influence upon the spirit of man, but not by speaking directly to man’s spirit apart for the Scripture.
    - Rather, the immediate influence is such that man and God speak together-
      - Man saying, “I am saved because I am a true believer.”
      - God saying, “Whosoever believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.” (John 3:36).
- When our spirit is brought into conformity with God’s Spirit, what we say will be agreeable with what God the Spirit says in Scripture.
  - So, the assurance that we are the children of God comes, not from a witness of the Holy Spirit alone but from a joint witness affected by the Holy Spirit, and from our word being in agreement with His Word.
  - The *special* or *personal* aspect of this consists, not in what God says alone, but rather in the fact that we are by His grace enabled to say of ourselves what He says of true believers in Scripture.

[Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Fellowship With God, Studies in 1 John* (commenting on 1 John 2:3)]- “The first thing then, is this great certainty- *We know*. John has written these things that they may know that they have eternal life. We need not stay with this, and yet, of course, it is something which is absolutely basic, for this meets the whole position. Christians are not people who are in a state of uncertainty; the very definition of Christians in the New Testament is of people who know where they are, what they are, and what they have got; they are not men and women who are hovering in the dark.... Christians are men and women who are certain, and John writes in order that these people may be absolutely sure. They are sure, but there were certain things that were not clear to them. That always seems to be the position of the Christian in this life and world. We start with the truth which we believe by faith. Then it is attacked and shaken by various things but, thank God, these lessons are given to us to strengthen and establish us. That is the first thing to be accomplished in this message, and it is something of which we may be sure. There are certain things that you and I should *know*. Christians ceased to be seekers and enquirers; they are men and women who have ceased to doubt.”

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 18:

### Of Assurance Of Grace and Salvation

**Section 3.** This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it<sup>1</sup>: yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto<sup>2</sup>. And therefore it is the duty of everyone to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure<sup>3</sup>; that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience<sup>4</sup>, the proper fruits of this assurance: so far is it from inclining men to looseness<sup>5</sup>.

1. Psa 88 throughout; Psa 77:1-12; Isa 50:10; Mark 9:24; 1 John 5:13.

2. 1 Cor 2:12; Eph 3:17-19; Heb 6:11-12; 1 John 4:13.

3. 2 Pet 1:10.

4. Rom 5:1-2, 5; 14:17; 15:13; Eph 1:3-4; Psa 4:6-7; 119:32.

5. Psa 130:4; Rom 6:1-2; 8:1, 12; 2 Cor 7:1; Titus 2:11-12, 14; 1 John 1:6-7; 2:1-2; 3:2-3.

**Section 4.** True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it; by falling into some special sin, which woundeth the conscience, and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation; by God's withdrawing the light of his countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light<sup>1</sup>: yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived<sup>2</sup>, and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair<sup>3</sup>.

1. Psa. 31:22; 51:8, 12, 14; 77:1-10; 88 throughout; Song 5:2-3, 6; Isa 50:10; Mat 26:69-72; Eph 4:30-31. •

2. Job 13:15; Psa 51:8, 12; 73:15; Isa 50:10; Luke 22:32; 1 John 3:9. •

3. Psa. 22:1; 88 throughout; Isa 54:7-10; Jer. 32:40; Micah 7:7-9.

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that a man may be a true believer though he lack infallible assurance that he is such, (2) that he ought nevertheless, to attain this assurance, (3) that the possession of it inclines men, not to looseness, but to diligence, etc., (4) that those who have such assurance may have it shaken, diminished, and intermitted (because of negligence, sin, temptation, or trial), and (5) that whether or not the believer has assurance, yet, he does have security because of God's seed and operation in him, out of which he may gain, or regain, assurance in due time.”

- There's a lot of difference faith in Jesus Christ (without which none can be saved), and faith that one has true faith in Jesus Christ (without which, as important as it is, we can be saved).
- [Williamson]- *“The man who cried, ‘I believe: help though mine unbelief’ (Mark 9:24), surely had faith in Christ, but he was not sure of his faith. Just as a man may be sure that he is saved and yet not be saved, so a man may be saved (by faith in Christ) and yet not be sure that he is saved.”*
- Infallible assurance is not the essence of saving faith.
  - The Bible does not say that we must have *infallible assurance* to be saved, but only that we must have faith in Jesus Christ
    - (John 11:25-26)- *“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”*
    - We *ought* to have such assurance, but we absolutely must have faith.
  - Scripture shows that true believers have lacked such infallible assurance.
    - At the Last Supper, the Disciples each and all feared that they might be the one to betray Christ, and it was only His ‘outing’ of Judas that quelled their fears. (cf., Matt. 26:21ff.).
    - David asks for a restoration, not of his salvation, but of the joy of salvation, and probably such assurance was central to his joy.
    - Psalms 31:21-22- *“Blessed be the LORD, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city. I had said in my alarm, ‘I am cut off from your sight.’ But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help.”*
    - Psalms 51:7-12- *“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”*

- Scripture has many exhortations urging believers to strive for, and aspire to attain this assurance:
  - Hebrews 10:21-23- *“and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”*
  - Hebrews 6:9-12- *“Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”*
  - 2 Peter 1:10,11- *“Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*
- But if all true believers were required to possess full assurance as the essence of saving faith, there would be no need to exhort them, because being believers, they would already have it, making the Scripture guilty of error.
- [Williamson]- *“But such exhortations also teach us that believers may and ought to attain unto full assurance even though it is not of the essence of faith.... Indeed, for this very reason exceeding great and precious promises are made. Contrary to popular opinion, full assurance is not meant only for a few spiritually elite; it is something that all Christians ought to possess. And it is something that even the lowliest may have a proper and diligent use of the means of grace. Whoever will ‘give diligence’ will also ‘make his calling and election sure’. And by a neglect of the means of grace the most gifted may lack what the lowly [might] possess.”*
- Sometimes, people charge that having full assurance would tend toward carelessness and neglect.
  - This would be true perhaps, if God gave assurance by a direct revelation to the believer apart from Scripture.
  - But since God communicates the assurance that we are the children of God only by bringing our spirits into concurrence with His Word, we see how false this charge is.
  - The precise way in which our spirits are enabled to bear witness with God’s Spirit is by giving diligence.
    - As we (by God’s strength and grace) diligently use the appointed means of grace, striving after holiness in conformity with the commandments of God, we attain and sustain assurance.
    - Since this assurance is the fruit of diligence it cannot lead to carelessness.
    - [Williamson]- *“The tree determines the nature of the fruit, and not vice versa. Assurance is a fruit of grace. The tree from which it comes is that working of the Spirit of God which makes a believer diligent from the heart to God’s commands.”*
    - The root is grace, the tree is diligence, and the fruit is assurance.
- Since assurance is the fruit and not the root, it follows that it may at times be shaken, diminished, and intermitted.
  - Such was the case with Job (cf. 6:4, 23:3f, 29:2-5).
  - Such was probably the case with Peter (Matt. 26:69f, Luke 22:32).
  - The causes of the lack of assurance in those who have previously possessed it are varied.
    - Peter neglected to pray (Luke 22:46)
    - David was confronted with sudden temptation.
    - Job was subjected to grievous afflictions.
  - Causes may vary, appear in combinations, and overlap one another.
  - But the important fact is that even true believers, who have known full assurance, may lose it for a time or in a measure.
  - And they may cry out to God in their travail (Cf., Psalm 88).
  - [Williamson]- *“...even in the slough of despond, the downcast believer looks to God. Even in doubt and trouble he cries, ‘O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee: let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry’. And this makes all the difference. For whosoever is born of God, his seed remains in him.”*
- Even in great distress and doubt the Christian cries to his heavenly father, and this makes all the difference.
- The true believer may not be sure of himself, yet even in his sore distress he cries to God because he is a true believer.
  - Thus it cannot be that the root of assurance is destroyed.
  - So, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived.
  - So, regardless of our circumstances believers can be certain to be kept from utter despair.

**Chapter 19**

**OF**

**THE LAW OF GOD**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 19: Of The Law of God

**Section 1.** God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it<sup>1</sup>.

1. Gen. 1:26-27 with 2:17; Job 28:28; Eccl. 7:29; Rom. 2:14-15; 5:12, 19; 10:5; Gal. 3:10, 12.

**Section 2.** This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon mount Sinai in ten commandments, and written in two tables<sup>2</sup>; the first four commandments containing our duty towards God, and the other six our duty to man<sup>2</sup>.

1. Exodus 34:1; Deut. 5:32; 10:4; Rom. 13:8-9; James 1:25; 2:8, 10-12.

2. Mat. 22:37-40.

### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that the law of God was the standard of perfect obedience which God imposed upon Adam at creation, (2) that its demands were absolute, and (3) that this law, the demands of which have never ceased to stand for all men everywhere, was revealed in summary (by way of general principles) at Sinai on two tables of stone.”

- The law of God is central to the message of the Bible.
- Only Jesus Christ eclipses the law in importance.
  - Christ came not to destroy the law,
  - He came to fulfill the law.
  - (Matthew 5:17-19)- *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”*
- God’s law stands unchanged because God is everlasting and holy. His law has unceasing relevance
  - [Williamson]-*“It would be difficult to make a more radical error than to think of the law of God as something merely transient or mutable. For the law of God (that is the moral law) simply states what God requires of man. So long as God is God and man is man, there can be no revocation of the law.”*
  - (Psalm 119:152,160)- *“Long have I known from your testimonies that you have founded them forever. ...The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”*
- This does not mean that God gave Adam the law in an externally revealed and codified form.
  - The written law was given to Moses (John 1:17).
  - The law was first “written” in the heart and conscience of man (Romans 2:14,15).
  - This doesn’t mean that Adam was aware or conscious of the Ten Commandments of Moses in the same way that we are.
    - To us, the law is a negative power that incites our enmity (Galatians 3:23)- *“Now before faith [in Christ] came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.”*
    - To Adam it was a positive power which was to incite love of God, obedience, and doing of good
    - The difference was in Adam’s relation to the law, not the nature of the law itself.
    - [Williamson]- *“What was right for Adam and wrong for Adam is precisely the same as that which is commanded of or forbidden us by the Ten Commandments. Adam broke the law. But he and his children ceased not to be men. The only change was in their relationship to the law. The law had been the way of life to them. Now it was the way of death. They had ceased to live by it and had come to live against it.”*
    - Both consciously and unconsciously sinful men now to seek to suppress the truth in unrighteousness.
      - (Romans 1:18)- *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”*
    - Yet, in at least two important ways, men testify that they are obligated to keep the law of God:
      - All men exercise moral judgment



- However sinful they may be, they still exercise moral judgment against the sins of others, (Romans 2:1)
  - Even though they are liars, they condemn lies, etc.
- All men possess a conscience.
  - The show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, (Romans 2:15).
  - Man's inherent sense of right or wrong is due to the fact that he cannot escape the claims of the law of God.
- [Williamson]- *"Of those who deny the permanent relevance of the law, none are to be so sharply condemned as Christians. And there are Christians who say that Christ has delivered them from the obligation to keep the law. 'We are not under the law but under grace' they cry (Romans 6:14)... Suffice it to say that the truth lies in the opposite direction: the Christian above all is obligated to keep the law'."*
  - (Matthew 5:17-20)- *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*
  - From Christ's summary of Moses' Decalogue, that we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as we love ourselves, we can rightly infer the two divisions of the law of God.
    - (Matthew 22:37-40)- *"And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets'."*
  - We do not need to think that the two divisions required a 're-write' (or editing) of the two stones God gave Moses. Christ's summary might better be viewed as a rendering of what was written on Adam's heart before the fall.
- But to deny that Christians are obligated to keep the law of God is to deny that Christians are to love God and their neighbor.

In the next lesson, we will unpack Christ's summary of the Ten Commandments before moving on to Sections 3 through 5.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 19:

### Of The Law of God

**Section 2B.** This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon mount Sinai in ten commandments, and written in two tables<sup>1</sup>; the first four commandments containing our duty towards God, and the other six our duty to man<sup>2</sup>.

1. Exodus 34:1; Deut. 5:32; 10:4; Rom. 13:8-9; James 1:25; 2:8, 10-12.
2. Mat. 22:37-40.

Unpacking Christ's summary of the Ten Commandments before moving on to Sections 3 through 5.

#### **THE LESSON-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

##### **LOVE OF GOD-MAN'S DUTY TO GOD**

1. **The First Commandment** teaches us whom we are to worship. We are to worship the true God only. And in no instance may we properly give worship that is due Him to any other, nor may we in any sense acknowledge any other god to be a legitimate object of worship. *This commandment is frequently violated when Christians act as if Jews of Unitarians practice legitimate worship, or even worse, when they join with them in worshipping "a god who has no son" (2 John 9, 1 John 5:12, etc.).*
2. **The Second Commandment** teaches us how we are to worship. We are to worship God only as He has commanded us to worship Him. Anything that man devises, invents, or imagines corrupts the true reverence and worship of God. *This commandment is frequently violated when Christians have "pictures" of Jesus. When it is said that they are legitimate because they are not used in worship, we reply that they are not legitimate because one cannot have a proper thought or feeling with respect to Christ other than that of reverence and worship. Study WLC Question 109 carefully.*  
Question 109. What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?  
Answer. The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counselling, commanding, using, and anywise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself; tolerating a false religion; the making any representation of God, of all, or of any of the three Persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; all worshipping of it, or God in it or by it; the making of any representation of feigned deities, and all worship of them, or service belonging to them; all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretense whatsoever; simony; sacrilege; all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed.
3. **The Third Commandment** teaches us who they are that worship God. They are those who profess His name (take His name) with true sincerity of heart. It is as useless to worship the true God (even in the right manner) with insincerity as it is to worship a false god or the true God in an unacceptable way. *This commandment is frequently violated, at least to a degree, even by Christians. This happens when they do not concentrate intently upon the Word of God when they gather together for worship. See Luke 8:18, Proverbs 8:34.*
4. **The Fourth Commandment** teaches us when we are to worship and serve God. We are to spend one whole day in worship and six days in serving God. The one day that belongs to God is a day of rest, that is, of cessation from the labor and recreation of other days (except for works of necessity, piety, and mercy). This commandment is frequently violated. It is violated in two ways. It is violated when the Lord's Day is desecrated. It is also violated when one of the other six days is designated as a holy day by mere human authority, [as in the case of Adventism] (See Galatians 4:9-11; Col. 2:16,17).

##### **THE LOVE OF MAN- MAN'S DUTY TO MAN**

5. **The Fifth Commandment** teaches us the duty to respect and to obey God-given authority. All authority is of God. The authority that belongs to parents, employers, church officers, and civil rulers, is of God (Exodus 20:12, Eph. 6:5, Acts 20:18f., Rom. 13). It also teaches those who administer such authority that they must require all due obedience. *This commandment is commonly violated today by parents who fail to require obedience from their children. This is a desecration of divine authority. And it is certain to have evil consequences for the children. See Proverbs 29:15.*
6. **The Sixth Commandment** teaches us to reverence human life because man is made in the image of God. It is important to note that this commandment forbids murder but not every form of killing. It is legitimate to kill animals for food (Gen. 9:3). It is a divine requirement that murderers be executed (Gen. 9:6). And it is sanctioned by God to exercise self-defense, whether such defense be personal or national (Numbers 35:31, Ex. 22:2, Rom. 13:1f). *This commandment is often violated by intemperance. God does not forbid the temperate use of material things. But intemperance is wrong because it is a violation of the Sixth Commandment. See Westminster Larger Catechism Question 136.*

Question 136. What are the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment?

Answer. The sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense; the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions, distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreations; provoking words; oppression, quarreling, striking, wounding, and whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.

7. **The Seventh Commandment** teaches us to guard the sanctity of sex and marriage. This commandment forbids everything which destroys, undermines, or tends to undermine, the absolute unity of husband and wife according to the original divine institution. It therefore forbids not only adultery, fornication, and divorce, but even the least inclination of lust out of which such wicked sins come. *This commandment is frequently violated by the deliberate perusal of literature, motion pictures, and television programs which excite lustful thoughts and desires.* See Westminster Confession of Faith Question 139.

Question 139. What are the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment?

Answer. The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks; impudent or light behavior; immodest apparel; prohibiting of lawful, and dispensing with unlawful marriages; allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews, and resorting to them; entangling vows of single life; undue delay of marriage; having more wives or husbands than one at the same time; unjust divorce or desertion; idleness, gluttony, drunkenness, unchaste company; lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancing, stage plays; all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others.

8. **The Eighth Commandment** teaches us the divine sanction of personal property. This commandment stands in opposition to every form of private or public endeavor to claim possession of property except by inheritance or in return for money or labor. The Scripture does not countenance the doctrine which teaches that wealth is necessarily wrong. *Many utopian schemes of which Marxism is an example hold that private property is the root of all evil, so that human ills can be alleviated if personal property is eliminated, either by force or violence or by confiscatory taxation.*

9. **The Ninth Commandment** teaches us the sanctity of truth. Satan's kingdom is a kingdom of falsehood, lies, and deceit. The Kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of truth, candor, and integrity. When we speak, we ought to be sure of two things: (a) that we really mean what we say, and say what we mean, and (b) that what we say is in accordance, not merely with out intention, but also with the facts. *Gossip is a form of lying, even if we sincerely believe what we are relating. To repeat "hearsay" is to evidence no love of the truth. It is just as truly a violation of this command when we "sincerely" relate that which is not true, as when we "insincerely" relate what is true.* See Westminster Confession of Faith Question 145.

Question 145. What are the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment?

Answer. The sins forbidden in the ninth commandment are, all prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors, as well as our own, especially in public judicature; giving false evidence; suborning false witnesses; wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause; out-facing and overbearing the truth; passing unjust sentence; calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked; forgery; concealing the truth; undue silence in a just cause, and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others; speaking the truth unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end, or perverting it to a wrong meaning, or in doubtful and equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of truth or justice; speaking untruth, lying, slandering, backbiting, detracting, tale-bearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, rash, harsh, and partial censuring; misconstruing intentions, words, and actions; flattering, vain-glorious boasting, thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others; denying the gifts and graces of God; aggravating smaller faults; hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession; unnecessary discovering of infirmities; raising false rumours, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against just defence; evil suspicion; envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any, endeavouring or desiring to impair it, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy; scornful contempt; fond admiration; breach of lawful promises; neglecting such things as are of good report; and practicing or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.

10. **The Tenth Commandment** teaches us that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked". The requirement is that we learn to be content with what the Lord our God has given us. All discontent, envy, and covetousness is in essence a complaint against God's dealings with us. It is idolatry because it challenges His divine authority. *This is the root of all kinds of other sins.* See Larger Catechism Questions 147, 148.

Question 147. What are the duties required in the tenth commandment?

Answer. The duties required in the tenth commandment are, such a full contentment with our own condition, and such a charitable frame of the whole soul toward our neighbor, as that all our inward motions and affections touching him, tend unto, and further all that good which is his.

Question 148. What are the sins forbidden in the tenth commandment?

Answer. The sins forbidden in the tenth commandment are, discontentment with our own estate; envying, and grieving at the good of our neighbor, together with all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.

- The more one meditates upon the perfect law of God, as summarized in these ten principles, the more marvelous will it appear. There is no duty taught in any portion of Scripture which is not implicit here. There is no duty that can be legitimately imposed upon a believer which is not already imposed here. "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His Word, or beside it," and the reason is that the whole duty of man is already contained in the Ten Commandments. To yield the conscience to any duty not contained in these laws is to become the servant of man rather than of God.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 19:

### Of The Law of God

**Section 3.** Beside this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a Church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits<sup>1</sup>; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties<sup>2</sup>. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the New Testament<sup>3</sup>.

1. Gal 4:1-3; Col 2:17; Heb 9 throughout; 10:1.
2. 1 Cor 5:7; 2 Cor 6:17; Jude 1:23.
3. Dan 9:27; Eph 2:15-16; Col 2:14, 16-17.

**Section 4.** To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people, not obliging any other, now, further than the general equity thereof may require<sup>1</sup>.

1. Gen 49:10 with 1 Pet 2:13-14; Exod. 21 throughout; 22:1-29; Mat 5:17 with 5:38-39; 1 Cor 9:8-10.

**Section 5.** The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof<sup>1</sup>; and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator who gave it<sup>2</sup>. Neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen, this obligation<sup>3</sup>.

1. Rom 13:8-10; Eph 6:2; 1 John 2:3-4, 7-8.
2. James 2:10-11.
3. Mat 5:17-19; Rom 3:31; James 2:8.

#### **OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that God gave the nation Israel a ceremonial law (in addition to and distinct from the moral law) consisting of types and symbols of (a) Christ and His Redemptive work, and (b) the Holy Spirit and His work in the application of redemption, (2) that this law is now abrogated, (3) that he also gave that nation certain civil laws which terminated with the theocracy, but (4) that the moral law remains in effect (and it was understood under the Old Testament economy that it would be so).”

- Hebrews Chapters 7-10 contains an extended discussion of the ceremonial institutions of the Old Testament.
  - A contrast between Christ in heaven and the priests who carried out the ceremonial ordinances of the Old Testament.
    - **Hebrews 8:1-6-** “Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.’ But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.”
    - The Old Testament priests were themselves *substitutionary*-they were merely shadows and copies of heavenly things.
  - A contrast between the first holy section of the tabernacle (and the priests), the high priest (who alone went into the second most holy section once every year), and the holiest that the Holy Ghost was signifying was not yet made manifest.
    - **Hebrews 9:1-10-** “Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and man earthly place of holiness. For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron’s staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.”

- All earthly priests, tabernacles, temples, accessories of worship, and the priests were for the time *then* present.
  - None of them could make their practitioners whole, justified, or perfectly holy; nor could they perfect the worshiper's conscience.
- All these things were mere shadows of the good things to come, and not the true forms of reality (Hebrews 10:1).
  - All these things were declared to have testified to the (then future) work of Jesus Christ.
  - At the time of Christ's fulfilling these roles, their usefulness would be at an end.
  - By means of these things the Old Testament believers would see the future work of the Savior as in a glass darkly.
  - With the coming of Christ Himself, they would become as *unnecessary* as the once were *essential*.
- Thus, the abrogation of the ceremonial law is plainly affirmed.
  - [Williamson]-“The ‘handwriting of ordinances,’ says Paul, Christ ‘took out of the way, nailing it to his cross (Col. 2:14)...
  - ...He abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances (Eph. 2:13).”
- The Jews were unwilling to learn this.
  - Even Peter was reluctant to accept it (Acts 10:14; 11:2).
  - The Holy Spirit had to guide the Jerusalem Synod to an unequivocal position against the continuance of ceremonial obligations of the Old Testament (Acts 15:5,10).
  - Paul had to repeatedly battle against the Circumcision Party (Cf. Galatians 2, Titus 1, etc.).
- The political or civil laws of Israel were of a temporary character (which is self-evident).
  - What permanent obligation could there be for the assignment of tribes to particular regions of Canaan (Judges 18,19)
  - What other reason could there have been for the various groups who did service under the reign of David (1 Chron, 25ff)?
- Due mostly to our having an historical perspective of Christ and the Law, we sometimes think that it could not have been as not clear to those who lived under the ceremonial and civil laws of the Old Testament, so we tend to ‘give them a pass’.
  - [Williamson]- “No doubt the degree to which the Old Testament believers recognized the transient nature of the ceremonial and civil laws of Israel varied from person to person and from age to age. But there is good reason to affirm that some recognition of this was a possession of true believers even from the beginning.”
    - First, we may say this because of the dramatic difference between the manner in which God revealed the moral law (the Ten Commandments) and the ceremonial and civil laws. God revealed the ceremonial and civil laws through Moses, who wrote them on vellum or parchment. But God Himself wrote the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them not on perishable skins but upon tablets of stone-symbolic of the permanence belonging to them.
    - Second, we may say this because of the statements of the Old Testament believers which indicated a conscious distinction made by them between the moral law and the ceremonial and moral laws:
      - Psalm 51:16,17-“*For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*”
      - Psalm 40:6-8-“*In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.’*”
      - These statements don’t mean that David felt no obligation to observe the ceremonial ordinances, and he was not forgiven apart from faithfully practicing them, because they were a means by which the grace of Christ was administered to him.
      - But David indicated his awareness of the difference between ceremonial and moral legislation.
      - His words anticipate the abolition of the one and continuance of the other.
        - The Prophet Jeremiah (7:21-23) says, “*Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them: ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’*”
        - 1 Samuel 15:22- “*And Samuel said, ‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.’*”
    - The ceremonial law evidenced its temporary character by its very inability to make them who practice it perfect (Hebrews 10:1).
    - The ceremonial law could never actually nullify the sins of its practitioners. (Hebrews 10:11)

- The Holy Spirit Himself testified of something infinitely better than the ceremonial law (Christ's single oblation), who would supplant the ceremonial ordinances (Hebrews 10:16,17; Jer. 31:33f).
- [Williamson]- "Perhaps the most conclusive demonstration of the temporary character of the ceremonial and civil laws in the minds of the Old Testament believers is the fact that predictions of the coming suffering of Christ are given in ceremonial terms."
  - Isaiah 53:7- *"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth."*
  - Isaiah 53:11- *"Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities."*
  - Daniel 9:25-27- *"Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."*
  - Zeph. 1:7,8- *"Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests. And on the day of the LORD's sacrifice— 'I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire.'"*

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 19:

### Of The Law of God

**Section 6.** Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned<sup>1</sup>; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly<sup>2</sup>; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives<sup>3</sup>; so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin<sup>4</sup>, together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of His obedience<sup>5</sup>. It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin<sup>6</sup>: and the threatenings of it serve to shew what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law<sup>7</sup>. The promises of it, in like manner, shew them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof<sup>8</sup>: although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works<sup>9</sup>. So as, a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and not under grace<sup>10</sup>.

1. Rom. 6:14, Gal. 2:16, Gal. 3:13, Gal. 4:4–5, Acts 13:39, Rom. 8:1
2. Rom. 7:12, 22, 25, Ps. 119:4–6, 1 Cor. 7:19, Gal. 5:14, 16, 18–23
3. Rom. 7:7, Rom. 3:20
4. James 1:23–25, Rom. 7:9, 14, 24
5. Gal. 3:24, Rom. 7:24, Rom. 8:3–4
6. James 2:11, Ps. 119:101, 104, 128
7. Ezra 9:13–14, Ps. 89:30–34
8. Lev. 26:1–14, 2 Cor. 6:16, Eph. 6:2–3, Ps. 37:11, Matt. 5:5, Ps. 19:11
9. Gal. 2:16, Luke 17:10
10. Rom. 6:12, 14, 1 Pet. 3:8–12, Ps. 34:12–16, Heb. 12:28–29

**Section 7.** Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it<sup>1</sup>; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done<sup>2</sup>.

1. Gal. 3:21
2. Ezek. 36:27, Heb. 8:10, Jer. 31:33

#### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that true believers are not “under law” as a covenant of salvation, (2) but that they are “under” it as (a) a rule of practice, (b) a means of knowing their sin and consequent need of Christ, and (c) a revelation of Christ’s perfection, (3) that it is also operative upon the unregenerate (a) to restrain, (b) to warn, and (c) to reveal God to them, (4) that a “man’s doing good and refraining from evil because the law encourages to the one and deters from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law, and not under grace,” and (5) that these uses of law are in no way contrary to gospel grace, but rather essential to it.”

#### **FURTHER OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to A.A. Hodge)

“In these sections it is affirmed:-

1. That since the fall no man is able to attain righteousness and eternal life through obedience to the law. This is beyond question, because all men have sinned; because men’s natures are depraved; because the law demands perfect and perpetual obedience; and because ‘if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.’ Gal. 2:21.
2. That those who have embraced the gospel of Christ are no longer under the law as a covenant of life, but under grace.
3. That nevertheless, under the gospel dispensation, and in perfect harmony with its principles, the law is of manifold uses for all classes of men, and especially in the following respects: -
  - i. To all men generally the law is a revelation of the character and will of God, a standard of moral excellence, and a rule for the regulation of action,
  - ii. To unregenerate men, considered in relation to the gospel, the law is of use to convince them of the holiness and justice of God, of their own guilt and pollution, of their utter inability to fulfil its requirements, and so to act as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ. (Romans 7:7-13; Galatians 3:24)
  - iii. With respect to incorrigible sinners, the law is of use to restrain the outbursts of their evil passions, to render their disobedience without excuse, to vindicate the justice of

God in their condemnation, and to render their cases a warning to others. (1 Timothy 1:9; Romans 1:20, 2:15; John 3:18,36).

- iv. In respect to regenerate men, the law continues to be indispensable as the instrument of the Holy Ghost in the work of their sanctification. It remains to them an inflexible standard of righteousness, to which their nature and their actions ought to correspond. It shows them the extent of their obligations to Christ, and how far short, as yet, they are from having apprehended that whereunto they were apprehended in Christ Jesus. It thus tends to set up in the regenerate the habit of conviction of sin and of repentance and faith. Its threatenings and its promises present motives deterring from sin and assuring of grace, and thus leading the soul onward to that blissful attainment when the sovereignly imposed law of God will become the spontaneous law of our spirits, and hence that royal law of liberty of which James speaks (James 1:25, 2:8, 2:12.) See also Larger Catechism Q's 94-97)"

**WLC-Q. 94: Is there any use of the moral law to man since the fall?**

**ANSWER:** *Although no man, since the fall, can attain to righteousness and life by the moral law; yet there is great use thereof, as well common to all men, as peculiar either to the unregenerate, or the regenerate.*

*Rom. 8:3; Gal. 2:16; 1 Tim. 1:8.*

**WLC-Q. 95: Of what use is the moral law to all men?**

**ANSWER:** *The moral law is of use to all men, to inform them of the holy nature and will of God, and of their duty, binding them to walk accordingly; to convince them of their disability to keep it, and of the sinful pollution of their nature, hearts, and lives; to humble them in the sense of their sin and misery, and thereby help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and of the perfection of his obedience.*

*Lev. 11:44-45; Lev. 20:7-8; Rom. 7:12; Mic. 6:8; Jas. 2:10-11; Ps. 19:11-12; Rom. 3:20; Rom. 7:7; Rom. 3:9, 23; Gal. 3:21-22; Rom. 10:4.*

**WLC-Q. 96: What particular use is there of the moral law to unregenerate men?**

**ANSWER:** *The moral law is of use to unregenerate men, to awaken their consciences to flee from wrath to come, and to drive them to Christ; or, upon their continuance in the estate and way of sin, to leave them inexcusable, and under the curse thereof.*

*1 Tim. 1:9-10; Gal. 3:24; Rom. 1:20; Rom. 2:15; Gal. 3:10.*

**WLC-Q. 97: What special use is there of the moral law to the regenerate?**

**ANSWER:** *Although they that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works, so as thereby they are neither justified nor condemned: yet, beside the general uses thereof common to them with all men, it is of special use to show them how much they are bound to Christ for his fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead and for their good; and thereby to provoke them to more thankfulness, and to express the same in their greater care to conform themselves thereunto as the rule of their obedience.*

*Rom. 6:14; Rom. 7:4, 6; Gal. 4:4-5; Rom. 3:20; Gal. 5:23; Rom. 8:1; Rom. 7:24-25; Gal. 3:13-14; Rom. 8:3-4; Luke 1:68-69, 74-75; Col. 1:12-14; Rom. 7:22; Rom. 12:2; Titus 2:11-14.*

- The law is of great importance to believers.
  - It is a summary of God's complete will and the only infallible rule of practice.
  - The Apostles frequently quote these commandments as the rule for believers (cf. Romans 13:9; Ephesians 6:2, etc.).
  - We are warned against any deprecation of the law (Matthew 5:19) and taught that its demands concern every inward thought (Matthew 5:21-48).
  - It is the "carnal mind" which is "not subject to the law of God" (Romans 8:17).
  - But for the believer who delights in the law (Romans 7:22) it is called "the law of liberty" (James 1:25).
- The law is also of value in revealing to believers their sin and their need of Christ.
  - Paul said, "I had not known sin had not the law said, thou shalt not covet" (Romans 7:7).
  - The law instructs (Galatians 3:19ff).
  - The law teaches men that they are lost in order that they might seek Christ (Romans 10:4).
  - The law teaches a believer the duty of perpetual repentance and faith.
- The law discloses the glory of Christ.
  - It shows us how holy He is (Matthew 5:17; Romans 5:18,19).
  - It shows us the severity of the law and the punishment which it demanded of him.
- For the unbeliever nothing rivals the fact that the law executes the sentence of judgment against him.
  - Whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth will be stopped and the world can see the guilty. (cf. Romans 3:19).
  - Even so, the law accomplishes only good.
    - Though it incites enmity and sin because of man's depravity, it also restrains the outward expression of it (Romans 2:14,15).
    - Even in nations where the gospel has made little headway, there is some knowledge of the moral law, and it has some effect in restraining the progress of sin but in no way can it **remedy** it.



# **Chapter 20**

## **OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY, AND LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 20:

Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience

**Section 1.** The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the Gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law<sup>1</sup>; and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin<sup>2</sup>; from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation<sup>3</sup>; as also, in their free access to God<sup>4</sup>, and their yielding obedience unto Him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind<sup>5</sup>. All which were common also to believers under the law<sup>6</sup>. But, under the New Testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish Church was subjected<sup>7</sup>; and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace<sup>8</sup>, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of<sup>9</sup>.

1. Tit. 2:14, 1 Thess. 1:10, Gal. 3:13
2. Gal. 1:4, Col. 1:13, Acts 26:18, Rom. 6:14
3. Rom. 8:28, Ps. 119:71, 1 Cor. 15:54–57, Rom. 8:1
4. Rom. 5:1–2
5. Rom. 8:14–15, 1 John 4:18
6. Gal. 3:9,14,11, 1 Cor. 5:7
7. Gal. 4:1–3,6–7, Gal. 5:1, Acts 15:10–11
8. Heb. 4:14,16, Heb. 10:19–22
9. John 7:38–39, 2 Cor. 3:13,17–18

### **CHAPTER INTRODUCTION-** (with thanks to A.A. Hodge)

“The subject of this chapter is that liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free, which is very different from that freedom of the will which we discussed under Chapter 19. We there saw that freedom of the will is an inalienable, constitutional faculty of the human soul, whereby it always exercises its volitions as upon the whole it pleases in any given case. This liberty of will is essential to free agency, and is possessed of all free agents, good or bad, or they could not be held accountable. Christian liberty, on the other hand, implies two things: (1) Such an inward spiritual condition of soul that a man has full power through grace to desire and will as he ought to do in conformity to the law of God; and (2) Such relations to God that the person is delivered from the constraining motives of fear, and brought under the ennobling impulses of love and hope; and such relations to Satan and evil men that he is delivered from their coercive influences; and such providential circumstances that he has knowledge of his privileges and gracious aid in availing himself of them. This liberty involves the change of nature effected in regeneration and perfected in sanctification, and the change of relation involved in justification. It is the main element in the grace of adoption, and a privilege of all the children of God (Romans 8:14,15). It was purchased for us by Christ, and is therefore attributed to Him (Galatians 5:1); it is applied and effectually wrought in us by the Holy Ghost, and therefore attributed [as well] to Him (2 Corinthians 3:17).”

### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This section of the Confession teaches us (1) that Christ has purchased liberty for believers, (2) that this liberty consists of freedom *from* guilt, God’s wrath and curse, the love of the world, bondage to Satan, the dominion of sin, the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grace, and eternal punishment; and freedom *for* access to God, obedience to Him, and love for Him, and (3) that the difference between liberty enjoyed by the New Testament believers and Old Testament believers is one of degree rather than kind.”

- The liberty that we consider here is that liberty purchased by Christ, and bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit.
- Because of this new liberty of our ability, it is the ONLY liberty that we can accurately call, “liberty that is liberty *indeed*.”
  - John 8: 31-36- “*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ They answered him, ‘We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’’ Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.’”*
  - Romans 8:19-21- “*For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who*

*subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”*

- [Williamson]- “The unconverted man has liberty, but his liability is such that he might well cry out with Cain, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear... and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth...’ (Gen. 4:13,14). He has liberty of will, but he is not free from the law, from sin, or from death.”
- The freedom of liberty enjoyed by the Christian consists of his deliverance from all these:
  - There is freedom from the consequence of the law on account of Christ’s whole obedience to it- Grace frees us from having to keep the law perfectly ourselves.
    - Ephesians 2:1-10-“*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*”
  - There is freedom in our deliverance from the dominion of sin that we might become faithful servants of God
    - Romans 6:22-23 “*But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”
  - The kingdom of sin is no longer the place in which we reside or are constrained to abide: Satan no longer has lordship over us.
    - 1 John 2:15-17- “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*”
    - Acts 26:16-18- “*“But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”*”
  - Surely, trials and adversity, afflictions and difficulties will be visited upon believers, but now they are for our benefit, and are sanctifying graces. Even when God chastises us by these on account of besetting sins, His discipline is still for His Glory and our greater good. (cf. Rom 8:28; Job; Ps.119:71, etc.).
  - And while *bodily death itself* will not be done away with until the Resurrection, the STING of death (the penal aspect of death) is removed in Christ. The “victory of the grace” is temporary.
    - 1 Corinthians 15:51-57- “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
    - [Williamson]- “Thus even death itself, which is the end of sin, is that from which the believer is liberated. And even in death the believer does not die ‘the death’ but rather ‘sleeps’ in Jesus.”

- **SOME CLARIFICATIONS AND WARNINGS-** (G.I. Williamson)

“This liberty must not be confused with license. Some have used liberty ‘for a cloak of maliciousness’ (1 Pet. 2:16), ‘for an occasion to the flesh’ (Gal. 5:13). This is not liberty. It is bondage under the disguise of liberty. True liberty is to be made free from sin to become the servant of God. License is that vain and deceiving thing which Satan has offered as a substitute. It is the suggestion that sinful man be unrestricted in setting his own moral standards and doing his own will. ‘Be not deceived,’ says the apostle, ‘for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting’ (Gal. 6:7,8). An inner desire and ability to strive to fulfill the law of God- that is true liberty. And the desire and will to do as we please, irrespective of the law, is license, and it is sin.”

“The difference between the Old and New Testament Believer is sometimes described as if the Old Testament believer had no such liberty as belongs to the believer under the gospel. This error is the reverse of that which teaches that the Christian enjoys license (that is, complete freedom from all duty to keep the law). It teaches that the Old Testament believer enjoyed no portion of the liberty of the children of God. This view is refuted by the Scripture teaching that ‘the blessing of Abraham’ has ‘come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 3:14). Like other errors, this too is an exaggeration of an important truth, namely, that there is an increased degree of liberty belonging to New Testament believers. But this increased degree of liberty is due to the abrogation of the ceremonial law (which was borne by the Old Testament believer and not by the New Testament believer) and not because of any essential difference in the deliverance from the moral law, from sin, or death. We have a much greater degree or measure of liberty because that which was administered through types and ordinances is now administered in its complete fulness by Christ through the operation of the Holy Spirit.”

- **SOME ADDITIONAL CLARIFICATIONS -** (A.A.HODGE)

“...believers under the present dispensation have greater boldness in approaching God, and fuller communication with His Spirit. The greater boldness now enjoyed evidently results from the clearer and fuller revelation now enjoyed of the method and completeness of redemption and the greater fullness in the communications of the Holy Ghost. This divine person, as we know, inspired the Old Testament prophets and sanctified the Old Testament saints; nevertheless, the new dispensation is preemptively characterized by the clearness with which the truth with respect to the office of the Holy Ghost is revealed and the fulness with which His influence is dispensed. Christ promised the gift of the Holy Ghost in this pre-eminent measure of it after His ascension (John 15:26). Previously it was said, ‘The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified’ (John 7:39). After His ascension, on the great day of Pentecost, Peter said that in fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy (Isa. 44:3; Ezek. 36:27; Joel 2:28,29), and the promise of Christ, ‘He being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear’ (Acts 2:16,17,33).”

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 20:

Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience

**Section 2.** God alone is Lord of the conscience<sup>1</sup>, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship<sup>2</sup>. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience<sup>3</sup>; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also<sup>4</sup>.

1. Rom 14:4; James 4:12.
2. Mat 15:9; 23:8-10; Acts 4:19; 5:29; 1 Cor 7:23; 2 Cor 1:24.
3. Psa. 5:1; Gal 1:10; 2:4-5; 5:1; Col 2:20-23.
4. Isa 8:20; Jer. 8:9; Hosea 5:11; John 4:22; Acts 17:11; Rom 10:17; 14:23; Rev 13:12, 16-17.

**Section 3.** They who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty; which is, that, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life<sup>1</sup>.

1. Luke 1:74-75; John 8:34; Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 2:16; 2 Pet 2:19.

### **OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that God alone has legitimate authority over the conscience, (2) that His Word alone is the rule thereof, (3) that the doctrines and commandments of men which are either *contrary* to or *additional* to God’s Word have no authority to bind the conscience, (4) that to permit the conscience to be bound by such is sin, betrayal of true liberty of conscience, and a denial that God alone is one’s Lord, and (5) that Christian liberty must be distinguished from antinomianism (which means, ‘freedom to sin’).”

- **Antinomianism**-[Gr: ἀντί [*anti*] "against" and νόμος [*nomos*] "law"], literally “against the law.” Relating to the view that Christians are released (by grace) from all obligations to obey the moral law.

### **OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to A.A. Hodge)**

“These sections teach the following propositions:

1. God alone is Lord of the human conscience, which is responsible only to His authority.
  2. God has authoritatively addressed the human conscience only in His law, the only perfect revelation of which in the world is the inspired Scriptures. Hence God Himself has set the human conscience free from all obligation to believe or obey any such doctrines or commandments of men as are either contrary to or aside from the teachings of that Word.
  3. Hence to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments as a matter of conscience, is to be guilty of the sin of betraying the liberty of conscience and its loyalty to its only Lord; and to require such an obedience of others is to be guilty of the sin of usurping the prerogative of God and attempting to destroy the most precious liberties of men.”
- This lesson highlights one of the glorious benefits of the Reformation to which our fathers devoted themselves.
  - The Scriptural doctrine highlighted here has historically been completely eclipsed by the apostasy of the Roman Church, and was recovered only by the blood of many martyrs on account of papal tyranny.
  - [Williamson]- “The strong determination of covenanting Presbyterians in Scotland who would surrender to no man the crown rights of Jesus Christ is to be remembered reverently. They recaptured the spirit of the Apostolic Church as they answered those who tried to coerce them to believe or to do what was contrary to the Word of Christ: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men’ (Acts 5:29). We must not forget that the Reformation was much more than mere separation from the authority of the Pope and the errors of Rome. It was not, after all, a struggle *against* something so much as a glorious witness *for* Christ. It was a witness made in every sphere of life.”
  - There have been kings in the earth who were happy to see the structure of the Roman Catholic power weakened by the rise of Reformed Christianity, but some merely wished to capture the Pope’s tyrannical power for themselves.
    - When it dawned on them that Reformed Christians meant to acknowledge none but Christ as king and head of the church, they grew to realize true believers were no longer as capable of abiding terrible persecution from earthly despots.
    - Much of the suffering endured by the authors of the Confession came at the hand of kings like these, during times of challenges to Christian Liberty.

- Having consciences no longer content to be enchained, Protestant believers stood by the grand truth and mighty principle of Scripture, and so tyrants were overthrown and Christian cultures encouraged.
  - The Doctrines of Christian Liberty and the Liberty of Conscience were (literally) the wellspring from which our Christian Republic was manifest.
- God alone is Lord in His Church and in the consciences of His Bride through all her earthly endeavors.
  - We were bought with a price and must never again capitulate to becoming the servants of men (1 Cor. 7:23).
- Today we almost take for granted the legacy accrued from this principle and doctrine.
  - That is, the principle of the liberty to believe and practice one's faith without coercion by men.
  - Unfortunately, we humans have trouble consistently wielding such liberties without their descending into various tyrannies.
  - It is very common to find violations of these twin principles (even in many Reformed churches).
    - Traditions and rules grow to become imposed upon members that are intended to be binding to the conscience, but which are not secured and *required* in Scripture fall into this category.
      - Examples are prohibitions requiring total abstinence from the use of certain material things (meat, alcohol, coffee, etc.).
        - Romans 14:14 tells us that nothing is unclean of itself.
        - Romans 14:20 tells us that all things are pure.
      - If *nothing is unclean*, then no rule forbidding the temperate use of something can be truly legitimate.
      - If *all things indeed are pure*, then all things may indeed be used temperately by men without fear of a condemning conscience.
    - It is never right to do what we believe to be wrong, even when we believe a thing to be wrong without good reason.
    - But even if a person faithfully obeys his conscience and scrupulously observes a rule forbidding the use of a material thing, he is still guilty of sin.
      - He is guilty of the sin of allowing someone other than God to impose a rule upon his conscience.
      - Last week we discussed the difference between true liberty and sinful license; it is a false expectation of what freedom of the conscience should spawn.
      - This would be the obverse of license: legalistic fundamentalism promising a pathway to perfection through meritorious behavior.
- Sometimes rules are imposed that may not *contradict* Scriptural requirements, but which attempt to *add more or exaggerate* what the Word of God requires.
  - The Roman Church (for example) has in their Roman Catechism, "The chief commandments or laws of the Church." There are six:
    1. To assist at Mass on all Sundays and holy days of obligation.
    2. To fast and to abstain on the days appointed.
    3. To confess our sins (to a priest) at least once a year.
    4. To receive Holy Communion during the Easter time.
    5. To contribute to the support of the church
    6. To observe the laws of the church concerning marriage.
  - While it may not be *improper* to do these things voluntarily (in their proper Biblical format and administration), it is wrong for followers to permit the conscience to become bound to do them in the manner and at the time designated by Rome.
  - Other churches have their additives too (e.g., Baptism solely by immersion, altar calls, special offices and celebrations, dietary restrictions, etc.), which should not be permitted to bind the Believer's conscience.
- [Williamson]- "It has been said that there is 'a pope in every man's heart.' We are all tempted to think that we could improve our fellow Christians if we had charge of their conscience. We are likewise all liable to imagine that we are doing much better than others in the use of our cherished liberty. We would restrict others and relax strictures against ourselves. But the Scripture requires the reverse: charity towards others, and carefulness in the use of our own liberty. We ought to give our brother the benefit of any doubt. We should esteem others better than ourselves. And even where it appears that our brother has abused his liberty, we should correct in meekness taking heed to ourselves. Meanwhile, we should guard against the abuse of our own liberty, taking heed that we do not make it an occasion of the flesh, and exercising care that we do not cause a weaker brother to stumble by the exercise of our liberty."

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 20:

Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience

**Section 4.** And because the power which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another; they who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. And for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation; or to the power of godliness; or such erroneous opinions or practices as, either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the Church; they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the Church, and by the power of the Civil Magistrate.

1. Mat 12:25; Rom 13:1-8; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 2:13-14, 16.
2. Rom 1:32 with 1 Cor 5:1, 5, 11, 13; 2 John 1:10-11 and 2 Thes 3:14 and 1 Tim 6:3-5 and Titus 1:10-11, 13 and Titus 3:10 with Mat 18:15-17; 1 Tim 1:19-20; Rev 2:2, 14-15, 20; 3:9.
3. Deut 13:6-12; 2 Kings 23:5-6, 9, 20-21; 2 Chr 15:12-13, 16; 34:33; Neh 13:15, 17, 21-22, 25, 30; Isa 49:23; Dan 3:29; Zec 13:2-3; Rom 13:3-4 with 2 John 1:10-11; 1 Tim 2:2; Rev 17:12, 16-17.

### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“This section of the Confession teaches us (1) that God has ordained authority in Church and State which (when operating in their proper spheres) are to be obeyed as part of our duty to God, and (2) that it belongs to each of these authorities to enforce such authority within its own sphere.”

### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to A.A. Hodge)

“These sections teach the following propositions (*we covered 1-3 last week*):

4. This Christian liberty is not, however, absolute. It has its distinct end and limits. Its *end* is that every person, without hindrance of his fellow-men, should have opportunity to serve God according to His will. The *limits* of this liberty are of two kinds: (a) the authority of God, the Lord of conscience; (b) the equal liberties and rights of our fellow-men, with whom we dwell in organized societies.
5. Since God has established both the Church and the State, obedience to the legitimate authorities of either, acting within their rightful sphere, is an essential part of obedience to God.
6. The Church has the right from God of exercising its discipline upon any who maintain or practice opinions or actions plainly contrary to the light of nature, the doctrines of the Scripture, or the peace and welfare of the Christian community.”

**Romans 13:1-7-** “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”

- In the *highest*, and only absolute sense, God is alone Lord of the human conscience.
- This includes the conscience of the *Patriarch*, the *Prelate*, and the *Magistrate*.
- But the Christian NEVER has liberty to oppose that which is ordained by God and administered lawfully.
- God has given the State (civil rulers: magistrates) the power of the sword to wield in punishing crime.
- God has given His Church the power of “the keys” in order to shut out those who persist in heresy, scandal, and immorality.
  - **Matthew 16:18-19-** “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
  - **Matthew 18:15-18-** “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
- We often fail to note (or appreciate) the ‘overlap’ or condition, or administrations:
  - Church members are simultaneously citizens, whose rights as citizens can sometimes seem to stand in opposition to their responsibilities as church members under ecclesial authority.

- There is no such thing “neutrality,” so our dual responsibilities as citizens and Christians when we are embroiled in spiritual battle within our consciences regarding the right administrations of our liberties requires us to be VERY discerning.
- “Think Governmentally.” Whose authority reigns in some given situation?
  - My individual conscience?
  - The spiritual authority of my church?
  - The civil magistrate?
- Great harm results when these spheres are confused or when either usurps the authority of the other.
  - [Williamson]-“... for example, in those countries where the Pope of Rome is able to determine civil policies, there has been suppression of the Protestant witness, opposition to the distribution of the Bible, and even violent persecution. Civil authority becomes tyrannical when it becomes an instrument of religious coercion. On the other hand, when the State has imposed upon its citizens the religion it wants them to have, or makes the ‘Church’ a mere instrument of the State, the result is equally bad. For example, in Communist countries the State controls the Church. Therefore, error and immorality are not suppressed, but rather only the ‘enemies of the state.’”
  - [Hodge]-“The Erastian State Churches of Germany and England have often attempted to enforce outward uniformity in profession and worship, in spite of the conscientious scruples of multitudes of their best citizens, on the plea that the right and responsibility of regulating the ecclesiastical as well as the civil interests of the nation devolve upon the civil magistrate.”
- When civil and ecclesiastical authorities remain content to stay in their appointed ‘lanes’ of divine appointment, and exercise only their rightful authority in a legitimate manner, great blessings result.
  - LEX, REX (Samuel Rutherford, 1644) “The Law and the Prince” was published with an eye (among many other things) to oppose royal absolutism, and remind the king that he too is subject to the Lordship of Christ, and serves *sacrificially* to benefit those entrusted to his rule by God.
  - The law of God is the law of the king.
- Much of the strength of our own nation and of our churches has been due to this principle.
  - Protestants insist that:
    - God has given only one perfect rule of faith and practice
    - That the rule for spiritual matters is in the inspired Scriptures
    - That God has hence set the human conscience free from all obligation to believe or obey any doctrines or commandment of men which are contrary to, or aside from the teaching of that Word.
  - All Christians are commanded to search and know the Scripture to learn how best to steer and train their conscience.
    - To resist the authority even of legitimate church rulers when they stand oppose to the Lord, or who would unjustly bind the conscience of the believer.
    - To trust Christ to guide His Church into all truth, and away from fatal error.
    - To stand opposed to those who would claim to be successors of the Apostles or to exert apostolic authority, but who are utterly destitute of any clear Scriptural bona-fides or credential (as opposed to right Biblical perpetuation and administrations of the offices of the Eldership or Deaconate).
  - [Hodge]- “It is a great sin, involving at the same time sacrilege, and treason to the human race, for any man or set of men to arrogate the prerogative of God and to attempt to bind the consciences of their fellow-men by any obligation not certainly imposed by God and revealed in His Word. At the same time it is a sin of disloyalty to God, and a violation of our own nature as moral and rational beings, to yield to any such imposition, and to accept as a matter truly binding the conscience anything not authoritatively taught and imposed in the Scriptures.  
*...It is of the highest importance, on the other hand, clearly to understand that Christian liberty is not an absolute liberty to do as we choose, but a regulated liberty to obey God without hindrance from man. It is a freedom from usurped authority, in order that we may be the more perfectly subject to the only legitimate authority. It is hence absurd, as well as wicked, for a man to make his Christian liberty to obey only God a plea to disobey God, as he does whenever he violates any of the principles of natural right or of revealed truth which express at once the unchangeable nature and the all-perfect will of God. There can be no liberty which sets a man independent of that will; and this is always the will of God concerning us, even our sanctification. (1 Thess. 4:3)”*

### **A CLOSING THOUGHT- (with thanks to A.A. Hodge)**

“Christian Liberty is also further limited by the mutual duties we owe one another. The eating of meat offered to idols is in itself a thing indifferent, because not either commanded or forbidden. The Christian, therefore, is at liberty either to eat or not to eat. But Paul commands the Corinthians to ‘take heed lest by any means this liberty of theirs become a stumbling block to them that are weak’ (1 Cor. 8:9). To allow this would be a sin. The Christian, therefore, may be at liberty to eat or not to eat, but he is not at liberty so to use his liberty that his fellow-man is injured thereby. The liberty ceases to be liberty and becomes licentiousness, when it transcends the law of God or infringes upon the rights of our fellows.”



# **Chapter 21**

## **OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP, AND THE SABBATH-DAY**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 21:

Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath-Day

Section 1. The light of nature sheweth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is good, and doeth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might<sup>1</sup>. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited to his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture<sup>2</sup>.

1. Josh 24:14; Psa. 18:3; 31:23; 62:8; 119:68; Jer. 10:7; Mark 12:33; Acts 17:24; Rom 1:20; 10:12.

2. Exod. 20:4-6; Deut. 4:15-20; 12:32; Mat 4:9-10; 15:9; Acts 17:25; Col 2:23.

Section 2. Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and to him alone<sup>1</sup>: not to angels, saints, or any other creature<sup>2</sup>: and since the fall, not without a Mediator; nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone<sup>3</sup>.

1. Mat 4:10 with John 5:23 and 2 Cor 13:14.

2. Rom 1:25; Col 2:18; Rev 19:10.

3. John 14:6; Eph 2:18; Col 3:17; 1 Tim 2:5.

### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that natural revelation is sufficient to inform men that they are obligated to worship the true God, (2) but that it is not sufficient to tell men how to worship God, so that (3) ‘the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is *instituted* by himself, and so *limited* by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations of men” or in “any other way not *prescribed* in the Holy Scripture,’ (4) that God alone is the proper object of true worship, and (5) that he can be worshipped only through the mediation of Christ.”

- Back in Chapter 1, we learned that nature reveals the true God to men so that they can’t help but know that they owe him worship and obedience.
  - But where the worship of God by *sinless* Adam in paradise was immediate (without a mediator or savior),
  - Sin has made man incapable of such worship.
    - Sin affected man’s relationship with God in two ways: God’s presence was withdrawn (Gen. 3:22-24); Man’s heart was darkened.
    - Because of this alienation, worship, to be acceptable to God, must reckon with the alienation.
    - But there was no way in which sinful man could do anything about God’s withdrawal and his own heart’s darkness.
  - So, true worship could not exist (be restored) except by divine provision.
  - This is to say that right worship was INSTITUTED by God, LIMITED and PRESCRIBED by God.
    - Worship being INSTITUTED by God according to the Confession means worship that has been authorized, commanded, or required by Him.
      - [Williamson] “*The worship of Cain differed from that of Abel. God had not respect to Cain or to his offering. But the worship of Abel was approved of God. When Cain refused to change his worship to that which God approved or sanctioned, it was because he did not accept the principle that true worship requires explicit divine approval or sanction. When men worship God in any way not appointed or commanded by God, they worship in vain (Mark 7:7).*”
      - The sin of Israel, when they built altars and burned offerings to Baal, was that they did what God commanded them not to do (Jeremiah 19:5)
      - Nadab and Abihu were consumed by fire from the Lord, because they “offered strange fire” ...that he did not command them to do.
      - What is instituted (commanded) by God is true worship. That which is not instituted by God is for that very reason false worship.
    - The principle that true worship is instituted by God necessarily involves that it is LIMITED and PRESCRIBED by His *revealed* Will.
      - It is *limited* because God has commanded only certain things in his worship.

- In Sections 3-5 of this Chapter we will see that Scripture cites how God has *instituted* and *limited* (or prescribed) certain means of proper worship:
  - Prayer
  - The Reading and Preaching of the Word
  - The Singing of Psalms
  - The Administration of the Sacraments
  - Lawful oaths, vows, solemn vows, and fasting upon special occasions.
- God has told us to observe these things in His worship. But he has also revealed his abhorrence of anything and everything that men may presume to invent or to devise without such divine commandment.
- We cannot therefore say that true worship is *instituted* without *also* saying that it is *limited*.
- It is easy to SAY that God Institutes and Limits True Worship, but we humans have a horrible time practicing right worship, and contenting ourselves to remain within these boundaries set by God.
  - [Williamson]- “this is because of the sinfulness of the human heart which ever tends to think along the lines of the wicked Israelites of old who said, ‘We will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his own evil heart.’ (Jer. 18:12)”
  - And so, a fair amount of obfuscation, license, and myopic blurring of right perspective has taken root in modern Christendom.
    - Romans, Lutherans and Orthodox Churches have brought in images, saints, candles, incense, prayers both through living and deceased (non-divine) human intermediaries, etc.
    - Even many within the Reformed Faith (including our own presbyterian denomination) attempt to proffer the view that true worship need not only be that which God has commanded.... provided it is not expressly forbidden in the Word.
- Under this last worship paradigm, the things (positively) commanded by God are only a PART (and often only a *small* part) of “legitimate worship.”
  - Things not **commanded** are ALL considered to be Adiaphora- “*things indifferent*.” Neutral. Of little or no consequence.
  - So, various symbolic gestures become added to what God has commanded, as though they don’t matter: ceremonies, symbols, images, activities, interpretations.
  - But Scripture is clear that man is prone to mouth things foreign to the intent of our heart.
    - Matthew 15:7-9- “*You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’*”
    - “Adiaphora Worship” is NOT Worship at all, but a misnomer- altogether an **oxymoron**.
      - It is VAIN worship meant to please *our* senses and *our* sensitivities; to pluck *our own* heartstrings, not to please God with worship He intended for us to offer Him (which is, by the way, SUPPOSED to be antithetical to our *imaginings*).
      - It is FALSE worship because it has no sanction behind it other than the will of man.
    - Colossians 2:6-23 is frequently (and rather ironically) used by some to *justify* the addition of many human, cultural, topical, and “introspective” elements to worship, on the pretext that forbidding them is somehow a violation of the encouragement away from those niggling individuals yelling, “touch not-taste not,” as though *adding* ‘stuff’ to worship was being encouraged in Colossae by Paul
    - But it ACTUALLY speaks to a Christian people steeped in a culture that was humanist, polytheistic, and filled to overflowing with idolatrous worship.
    - The local congregation at Colossae was also clearly under attack from *within* by factions
    - The letter to the Colossians then, was a call back to faithful orthodoxy centered in Christ, and proper worship of Him.
      - It was a call for believers to view Old Testament holidays, festivals, practices, and Sabbaths as fulfilled in Christ (with any appropriate *Passover-to-Resurrection* interpretations; *Seventh-day-to First-day*

Sabbath observances, *Circumcision-to-Baptism* identifications, etc.) modified accordingly.

- It was a call for believers to stand firm against forces that would add “indifferent” things to their worship practices (whether by agents outside or within the congregation): vain philosophies, empty deceits, human traditions.
- It was a plea to refrain from adding foolish observances (cuttings, asceticism, fulfilled dietary laws, etc.)

Re-read Colossians 2:6-23 then from the perspective of the local church at Colossae-

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. <sup>8</sup> See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. <sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. <sup>11</sup> In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, <sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. <sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. <sup>16</sup> Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. <sup>18</sup> Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, <sup>19</sup> and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. <sup>20</sup> If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— <sup>21</sup> “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” <sup>22</sup> (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? <sup>23</sup> These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.”

- [Williamson]- “To worship in the way that we will, without proof that it is God’s will, is to worship our own will rather than God. And what must be vigorously stressed is that there is no other guardian of the purity of true worship when this principle is abandoned, as it has been, and is being abandoned, even by many who claim this Confession.”
- God will not be worshiped except as He wills.
  - Therefore, true worship is both INSTITUTED and LIMITED.
  - There are only two categories:
    - What God has commanded is legitimate worship.
    - What God has NOT commanded is illegitimate worship.
- Does this mean that there is nothing that may be done in a Reformed Church except what is commanded in the Bible? Not exactly.
  - Chapter 1-[OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURE]; Section 6: “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.”
  - [Williamson]-“...but one must be careful to distinguish between the circumstances of worship and the worship itself. For example: Scripture does not prescribe the hour of the day at which public worship of the congregation is to be held. Neither has the Lord prescribed the shape, style, or size of the place of worship. In the nature of the case, such circumstances will vary from country to country, season to season, and place to place. There is a general rule however that requires congregations assemble somewhere on the Lord’s Day. The general rule controls the particular situation according to the circumstances. But when the congregation has assembled at the agreed place the worship must then be only that which God has commanded.”
- True worship is addressed only to the True God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit (cf. Matthew 4:10; Deuteronomy 6:13)
- True worship is rendered only through the mediation of Christ (1 Timothy 2:5)- not through Mary, Apostles, Angels, Saints, Priests, Prelates, images, icons, (cf. Acts 14:14,15; Colossians 2:18, Acts 10:25,26; etc.).
- The very thought of other mediators ....even our own (egotistical) preferences, tastes, wills, tendencies, or self-enthroned idols (cf. Psalm 73:1-12; Luke 16:14ff) is derogatory of that exclusive honor belonging to Christ ALONE.
- [Williamson]- “But let us again stress this point: if we once admit that true worship is not limited by God’s revealed will -if we once allow that man can rightly add even one element to divine worship- it becomes

*exceedingly difficult to refute the devious arguments and distinctions such as those between latria and dulia and “direct” and “indirect” worship.”*

- *Latria and Dulia are bogus Roman Catholic doctrines offered at the 19<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council 1545-1563, (aka, The Council of Trent) largely in answer to the Reformed Doctrines (the so-called “Five Solas”). In pronouncing anathema on the Reformers, and specifically on Soli Deo Gloria, Trent attempted to differentiate between “highest religious worship” (Latria) due solely to God, and “inferior religious worship” (Dulia) due in various degrees to saints and angels according to their rank. “Hyperdulia” was subset of Dulia addressing a heightened degree of “inferior” veneration due solely to Mary.*
- Protestantism is standing at a crossroads of worship. All sorts of nonsense is leaking into mainstream protestant churches, in large part due to ignorance of right doctrine regarding True Worship.
  - Pictures, ceremonies, down-grading of the deity of Christ from “husband” to “boyfriend” status, coupled with worship aimed at pleasing the human senses and sensibilities has Christendom pointed down the road to Hell.
  - Rome has been pointed in the wrong direction for hundreds of years.
  - Liberal denominations have been getting more and more ‘woke’ for decades.
  - Apparently lost to most of the modern church, is *any* care or concern that God might actually CARE about the manner in which most Christians tend to worship.
  - It has become far too easy in modern churches to offer “strange fire” styles of worship with impunity.
- Sadly, too many Confessional Reformed Christians lack a robust understanding of this doctrine of, “The Regulative Principle” of true worship.
  - [Williamson]-*“There is no safeguard to purity of worship except conscious and persistent adherence to this principle: What is commanded is right, and what is not commanded is wrong.”*
  - [Hodge]- *“God in His Word has prescribed for us how we may worship Him acceptably; and that it is an offence to Him and a sin in us either to neglect to worship and serve Him in the way prescribed, or to attempt to serve Him in any way not prescribed. “‘That the whole counsel of God, concerning things necessary for His own glory and man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture’ [WCF 1.4]. It hence necessarily follows that since God has prescribed the mode in which we are acceptably to worship and serve him, it must be an offence to Him and a sin in us for us either to neglect His way, or in preference to practice our own.”*

Let’s be careful then, as we tap-dance through this minefield of Chapter 21, to remember the lessons of Chapter 20, and to properly inform our Consciences, so that our Liberty of practice comports with how God would have us behave when we come to Worship on the Lord’s Day!

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 21:

Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath-Day

**Section 3-** Prayer with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship<sup>1</sup>, is by God required of all men<sup>2</sup>; and that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son<sup>3</sup>, by the help of his Spirit<sup>4</sup>, according to his will<sup>5</sup>, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance<sup>6</sup>; and, if vocal, in a known tongue<sup>7</sup>.

1. Phil 4:6.

2. Psa 65:2.

3. John 14:13-14; 1 Pet 2:5.

4. Rom 8:26.

5. 1 John 5:14.

6. Gen 18:27; Psa 47:7; Ecc 5:1-2; Mat 6:12, 14-15; Mark 11:24; Eph 6:18; Col 4:2; Heb 12:28; James 1:6-7; 5:16.

7. 1 Cor 14:14.

**Section 4-** Prayer is to be made for things lawful<sup>1</sup>, and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter<sup>2</sup>; but not for the dead<sup>3</sup>, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death<sup>4</sup>.

1. 1 John 5:14.

2. Ruth 4:12; 2 Sam 7:29; John 17:20; 1 Tim 2:1-2.

3. 2 Sam 12:21-23 with Luke 16:25-26; Rev 14:13.

4. 1 John 5:16.

### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections of the Confession teach us that (1) prayer and thanksgiving are prescribed as part of true worship (i.e., commanded, or instituted by God), (2) that such is to be offered only through the mediator, Jesus Christ, (3) that the help of the Holy Spirit and the rule of Scripture are required to the proper offering thereof (4) and that it is to be offered in a common tongue. To say that prayer must be according to the rule of Scripture is further explained to mean that it must be (a) for things lawful (agreeable to the will of God), (b) for men living, (c) for those who are yet to be born, but (d) not for the dead, or (e) for such as may be known to have sinned the sin unto death.”

- That prayer is a prescribed element of true worship is evident throughout Scripture.
  - From patriarchal times true worship was offered with prayer and thanksgiving to God. (Gen. 20:7,17, etc.).
    - Moses prayed for the people (Numbers 21:7).
    - The book of inspired hymns and songs contains many references to the constant practice of prayer in Old Testament times (Psalms 4:1; 6:9; 17:1, etc.).
    - At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon stood before the altar of Jehovah in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and uttered a great prayer (1 Kings 8:22-53).
  - In the New Testament this aspect or element of true worship continued
    - Christ was faithful in private prayer (Matthew 14:23).
    - Christ also prayed in the assembly of the Church (John 17).
    - Prayer was a constant element in the public worship of the Apostolic Church (Acts 1:14; 2:42, etc.).
    - The Apostles commanded prayer to be made in the churches everywhere (1 Timothy 2:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18).
- With the coming of Christ to accomplish the work of redemption, the Old Testament mediatorial offices became exclusively His.
  - He alone is our Great High Priest.
  - He alone is the Seal of the Prophets
  - He alone is the King of Kings
  - All mediation is through Him.
    - John 14:6,7- “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’”
  - All access to the Father is through Him

- Ephesians 2:18- “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”
- Only through Christ are we able to give thanks to God.
  - Colossians 3:16,17- “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”
- The Atonement of Christ and His intercession on our behalf are the basis of all true prayer.
- [Williamson]- “In view of the regulative principle of true worship (what is commanded is right, what is not commanded is wrong), it may be thought that true prayer would consist only of repetition of prayers written in Scripture. This is not the case, as may be proved from the command of the Apostle, ‘I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty’ (1 Timothy 2:12). Since it is evident that many kings, and other persons in authority, are not mentioned in the prayers written in the Bible, it is evident that God would not have us to merely recite the prayers of Scripture. But this does not mean that we are left to ourselves to pray according to our will (this again would be false worship).”
- [Hodge]- “Prayer is a principal part of religious worship. The word ‘prayer’ is used constantly in a more general and a more specific sense. In its more specific sense, it is equivalent to supplication, the act of the soul engaged in presenting its desires to God, and asking God to gratify them and to supply all the necessities of the supplicant. In its general sense, prayer is used to express every act of the soul engaged in spiritual intercourse with God. In this sense the main elements it embraces are- (1) Adoration, (2) Confession, (3) Supplication, (4) Intercession, (5) Thanksgiving. Thus, prayer in its wide sense includes all direct acts of worship. And hymns and psalms of praise are in their essence only metrical and musically-uttered prayers.”
- The Confession here clearly states that prayer is required of all men, which being absolutely true, must also include those who don’t know God.
  - But these are morally unable to pray in a manner pleasing to God.
  - Neither are we able (based on our knowledge of moral truths or moral abilities) to do what is right, because our awareness alone is not the measure of our responsibility.
  - The duty of prayer is a natural duty growing out of our natural relations to God, and manifest by our natural conscience, and directed by the Scriptures upon all men indiscriminately. (1 Thess. 5:17; Acts 8:22,23; Luke 11:9-13).
- In order that prayer may be acceptable to God, and effectual, it is necessary that it should be offered:
  - Through the mediation of Christ: John 14:13,14; 16:23,24
  - With the help of the Holy Ghost: 1 John 2:1; John 14:16, Romans 8:26,27,34
  - With the heart of the worshiper in a proper state of contrition, humility, and reverence.
- [Hodge]- “It is essential to acceptable prayer that the heart of the worshiper should be in the proper state, and that his prayer be offered in reverence for the majesty and moral perfections of God; humility, because of our guilt and pollution; submission to His will; confidence in His ability and willingness to help us, and upon his covenanted grace; intelligent apprehension of the relations we sustain, the nature of the service we are engaged in, and the subject matter of our prayer and objects of petition; and real earnestness and fervency of heart, corresponding fully to all the words whereby our prayer is expressed; and with importunity and perseverance (Luke 18:1-8). And when the prayer is common between two or more persons, it is self-evident that it must be expressed in a language common to all; otherwise, it must cease to be in any sense the prayer of those who fail to understand it.”
  - Hodge seemed to believe that this point was included in the Confession to single out the Roman Church’s custom of uttering public prayers in Latin, which the vast majority of her worshippers did not understand.
  - But it also begs the question, of whether it must also apply to charismatic practices in many popular modern churches as well.
    - All of the parts, pieces, and prohibitions that Hodge and others saw applying to the Latin Mass, also appear with “praying in tongues”
      - Non-common language
      - Unknown meanings (even by the ones praying)
- [Williamson]- “There is real difficulty in the concluding statement of Section 4, which states that prayer is not to be made ‘for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death.’ If this means only

*that a person has persisted in sin and unbelief until he died, then the statement would merely repeat the prohibition of prayer for the dead. But if it means something else, it must then be asked (a) what is the sin designated, and (b) how may it be known when someone has sinned 'the sin unto death'? If there is such a sin, as distinct from persistent unbelief, it must be the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31,32). This is willful and malicious refusal of pardon upon terms of the gospel offer (Heb. 10:29, 6:6). It is to sin willfully against the knowledge of the truth (Heb. 10:26) and to suffer the infliction of divine hardening which is final and incurable (2 Thess. 2:11,12)."*

- When someone who has known the truth (like Judas), professed faith in Christ, and walked in the company of the Lord's people, makes a deliberate and open apostasy from Christ, clear for all to see, it is right to pray against, rather than for, such (Psalm 69:22-28).
- It is important to pray for all others (1 John 5:16), but there is a sin unto death (says John) and the Lord does not say that we should pray for those who are guilty of it.



# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 21:

Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath-Day

Section 5- The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear<sup>1</sup>; the sound preaching<sup>2</sup>; and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God with understanding, faith, and reverence<sup>3</sup>; singing of psalms with grace in the heart<sup>4</sup>; as, also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God<sup>5</sup>; besides religious oaths<sup>6</sup>, vows<sup>7</sup>, solemn fastings<sup>8</sup>, and thanksgivings upon several occasions<sup>9</sup>; which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner<sup>10</sup>.

1. Acts 15:21; Rev 1:3.
2. 2 Tim 4:2.
3. Isa 66:2; Mat 13:19; Acts 10:33; Heb 4:2; James 1:22.
4. Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; James 5:13.
5. Mat 28:19; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 11:23-29.
6. Deut 6:13 with Neh 10:29.
7. Isa 19:21 with Ecc 5:4-5.
8. Est 4:16; Joel 2:12; Mat 9:15; 1 Cor 7:5.
9. Est 9:22; Psa 107 throughout.
10. Heb 12:28.

Section 6- Neither prayer, nor any other part of religious worship, is now, under the gospel, either tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed<sup>1</sup>: but God is to be worshipped everywhere<sup>2</sup> in spirit and truth<sup>3</sup>; as in private families<sup>4</sup> daily<sup>5</sup>, and in secret each one by himself<sup>6</sup>, so more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or willfully to be neglected or forsaken, when God, by his Word or providence, calleth thereunto<sup>7</sup>.

1. John 4:21.
2. Mal 1:11; 1 Tim 2:8.
3. John 4:23-24.
4. Deut 6:6-7; 2 Sam 6:18, 20; Job 1:5; Jer 10:25; Acts 10:2; 1 Pet 3:7.
5. Mat 6:11.
6. Mat 6:6; Eph 6:18.
7. Isa 56:6-7; Prov 1:20-21, 24; 8:34; Luke 4:16; Acts 2:42; 13:42; Heb 10:25.

### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections teach us (1) that divinely prescribed elements of true worship (in addition to prayer) are (a) *ordinary* (the preaching of the Word, singing of psalms, administration of the sacraments), and (b) *occasional* (oaths, vows, fasting, thanksgiving on special occasions), (2) that true worship is not attached to any special place as if it were more holy than other places, (3) that true worship is spiritual, truth being the essence of it, and (4) that God requires personal, family, and public worship, none of which are to be neglected or forsaken.”

- Previously we noted that there are two views as to what constitutes worship acceptable unto God.
  - According to one view (the CORRECT view), only what God has commanded is legitimate.
  - According to the other view (the INCORRECT view), some elements may be added without divine commandment to those elements that are commanded by God, which together constitute acceptable, or legitimate, worship.
- The Confession limits “True Worship” to that which can be proved from Scripture to be the will of God, which is generally referred to as the *Regulative Principle of Worship*.
  - The elements of true worship acknowledged by the Confession (supplemented by Question 108 of the Larger Catechism) are:
    - Prayer
    - Reading of Scripture
    - Preaching of the Word
    - Administration of the Sacraments
    - Church Discipline
    - Singing of Psalms

- Receiving of offerings for the maintenance of the ministry (these being elements of the ordinary worship of God)
- There are also elements of a more occasional (but nevertheless ‘true’) worship are:
  - Religious oaths and vows
  - Thanksgiving upon special occasion
  - Religious fasting.
- We already discussed prayer in Sections 3 and 4, [Williamson]- *“But first in the order of importance for true worship is assuredly the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word of God. In the apostolic church the ministry of the Word of God had the pre-eminent place. Paul says, ‘Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel... for the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God’ (1Cor. 1:17,18). Important as are the other elements of true worship, it is to be remembered that ‘faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God’ (Rom. 10:17).”*
- This is why the Larger Catechism mentions, “especially the word... and especially the preaching of the word” as the means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation.
- True worship of God depends upon this element beyond all of the others.
  - Despite other defects and impurities that may exist in a particular church, we believe that true worship cannot altogether perish from that place in which there is yet a faithful preaching of God’s Word.
- The Sacraments duly administered and properly received are also a part of Scriptural worship, which we know because they were instituted directly by Christ and commanded by Him (cf. Matt. 28:19, 1 Cor. 11:24).
  - The Sacraments are not a means of converting sinners to Christ, as is true of the Word of God, but they are- together with the Word - a means of strengthening and confirming faith in the hearts of believers.
  - Because they have been instituted by Christ with the requirement that they be continued in his Church until He comes, there can be no pure worship where the Sacraments are either eliminated or altered.
- Another element of true worship is “the singing of psalms with grace in the heart.”
  - [Williamson]- *“It will be observed that the Confession does not acknowledge the legitimacy of the use of modern hymns in the worship of God, but rather only the psalms of the Old Testament. It is not generally realized today that Presbyterian and Reformed Churches originally used only the inspired psalms, hymns, and songs of the Biblical Psalter in divine worship, but such is the case. The Westminster Assembly not only expressed the conviction that only the psalms should be sung in divine worship, but implemented it by preparing a metrical version of the Psalter for use in the churches. This is not the place to attempt a consideration of this question. But we must record our conviction that the Confession is correct at this point. It is correct, we believe, because it has never been proved that God has commanded his Church to sing the uninspired compositions of men rather than or along with the inspired songs, hymns, and psalms of the Psalter in divine worship.”*
- [Williamson] *“In contrast to these divinely-ordained elements of true worship, it is not difficult to see the extent to which many modern churches have departed from the principle of the purity of worship set forth in the Confession. In many churches today the preaching of the Word of God has lost the central place. The pulpit is often moved to one side. Formalism, elaborate liturgy, and invented ceremonies increase as the preaching of the Word decreases. Even in churches that adhere to the fundamentals of the Christian Faith the sermon is often set aside for a motion picture or a religious drama. No doubt, sincere Christians who are used to such things would be shocked at the suggestion that these things are in principle the same as the false elements of worship sanctioned by the Church of Rome. Yet such is the case. It is our conviction that the whole mass of superstition and error in Romish worship can be traced back to departure from the simple rule: What God has not commanded is forbidden.”*
- True worship resides in the beauty of holiness and truth. That which originates from a human source contradicts the glory of this spiritual worship.
  - It is for this reason that the Confession does not allow for human art and imagination in its conception of worship.
    - [Acts 17:29]- *“Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.”*
- True worship is not attached to any particular place under the New Testament as it was under the Old (John 4:21,23; Dan. 6:10, etc.)
  - God has not commanded His people to assemble at any special place, or at any specific hour, on the Lord’s Day.

- Consequently, there are certain things pertaining to true worship which *are* left within the province of human determination.
  - There is a profound difference then between the *elements* of worship, and *circumstances* of worship.
  - As the Confession said in Chapter 1, Section 6, “There are circumstances concerning the worship of God... common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.”
  - Circumstances of worship are such as these: the time; the place; the length of time to be engaged; and the frequency.
  - These things God has not regulated by specific command, but has left to the Church to determine.
- But the elements of worship, those precise things that constitute it, he has regulated by express command, and we have no liberty to confuse these distinct matters.
- The Confession also mentions what might be called occasional elements of true worship.
  - Such elements as “religious oaths and vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasions” are indeed warranted by the Word of God.
  - Why then are things like fasting not listed among the *ordinary* elements of worship?
    - It is because they are proper only upon certain occasions, but not when they arise out of mechanical regulation (Cf. Mark 2:18-20; Matt. 6:16-18).
    - For this reason, Christ condemned the fasting of the Pharisees.
    - He also stated that his disciples could not legitimately fast while the bridegroom was with them -inferring that fasting motivated out of an inward spiritual desire (like mourning for sin, an earnest seeking of divine favor, and urgent personal crises etc.)... after His ascension would be an acceptable element of occasional worship.
    - Notably, Christ Himself famously engaged in fasting, but never declared it essential for worship by His followers.
    - Fasting is therefore an element of true worship only if it remains spontaneous or occasional, rather than being made a fixed part of the ordinary worship of God.

Programming Note- we will get into more detail regarding oaths and vows when we get to Chapter 22.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 21:

Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath-Day

Section 7- As it is of the law of nature that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto him<sup>1</sup>: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week<sup>2</sup>, which in Scripture is called the Lord's day<sup>3</sup>, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath<sup>4</sup>.

1. *Exod. 20:8, 10-11; Isa 56:2, 4, 6-7.*

2. *Gen 2:2-3; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1-2.*

3. *Rev 1:10.*

4. *Exod. 20:8, 10 with Mat 5:17-18.*

Section 8- This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts, about their worldly employments and recreations<sup>1</sup>; but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy<sup>2</sup>.

1. *Exod. 20:8; 16:23, 25-26, 29-30; 31:15-17; Isa. 58:13; Neh. 13:15-22.*

2. *Isa. 58:13; Mat. 12:1-13.*

### OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that God has (by natural and special revelation) bound all men to observe the Sabbath, (2) that the weekly Sabbath was the seventh day in order of succession from creation to the resurrection of Christ, (3) that it was the first day in order from the resurrection onward, (4) and that God requires that the Sabbath be kept holy by (a) due preparation, (b) resting from worldly employments and recreations (and whatsoever pertains thereto), (c) private and public exercises of divine worship, and (d) works of piety, necessity, and mercy.”

- [Williamson]- “Some have vainly tried to eliminate the Fourth Commandment from the sphere of Christian obligation while retaining the other nine commandments. The basis of this attempt is usually the contention that the Sabbath was ‘Jewish’ and that it ‘went out’ with the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. The truth is that the Sabbath was instituted long before there was any ceremonial legislation (Gen. 2:2,3). It belongs to the order of things which God established for man at the beginning. Even sinless man had the duty of observing the Sabbath. He was made in the divine image. His duty was laid down by divine example.”
- [John Murray]- “The sequence for man of six days of labor and one day of rest is patterned after the sequence which God followed in the grand scheme of His creative work.”
- It is hard to legitimately conceive that anything could make God's example irrelevant to the conduct and responsibility of man.
- The Fourth Commandment is moral and not merely ceremonial.
  - God is not a God of confusion, but order.
  - God himself inscribed the moral law on tablets of stone *before* He ever revealed the ceremonial law by his servant Moses.
  - Since God, who cannot err, set this commandment down with those other commandments (which are without question moral) it is necessary to regard it too as moral.
  - God didn't mistake the character of this commandment, and He set it among other moral laws so that we could not mistake it as having any other character than as a moral absolute.
- Sometimes an argument is posited that since Christ appeared to disregard the Sabbath.
  - Mark 2:23-3:6 “*One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’ And he said to them, ‘Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?’ And he said to them, ‘The*

*Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath'. Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Come here'. And he said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand'. He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him."*

- Note, please a few things:
  - When the Pharisees accused Christ of violating the commandment, Christ pointed out that He had merely disregarded certain false restrictions that the Pharisees considered binding.
  - He pointed out that the commandment was not abrogated, but that the Pharisees were mistaken in the misinterpretation of it, and proceeded to prove from the Old Testament that they were wrong indeed.
    - In Leviticus 14:4-9, the priests performed cleansings (healings) of lepers on the Sabbath Day, and required the one cleansed to shave and cut their hair on the subsequent Sabbath Day.
    - In 1 Samuel 6:1-6, the high priest Ahimelech served the bread of the presence to David and his men on the Sabbath without (apparently) violating any moral precepts.
  - Christ proved that the priest gave David the shew-bread in order to preserve his life, even though it was a technical violation of the law.
  - Similarly, He proved from Scripture that certain specific types of work were legitimate on the Sabbath: works of piety (work that must be done in order that God may be worshipped, like the work of a pastor in preaching on the Lord's Day), works of necessity (work that cannot be delayed without harm to life or property, such as rescuing an ox that falls in the ditch or helping to put out a fire), and works of mercy (works of kindness to a sick person, or someone in distress).
- Jesus said on the subject (Matthew 12:7,8): *"I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."*
  - [Williamson]- *"The Pharisees put duty to the Sabbath in place of duty to the Lord, and in doing so perverted the Sabbath. Christ did not eliminate the Sabbath, but placed it where it belonged, that is, subordinate to his own Lordship. The disciples kept the Sabbath in a different way than the Pharisees, because they served Christ."*
  - But they did "keep the Sabbath."
  - Their so-called 'failure' to keep the Sabbath was NOT for selfish reasons meant to free them from an obligation to devote the day to the Lordship of Christ.
- If there was no sin or misery in the world, there would be no need for works of necessity and mercy on the Sabbath to compete for mankind's devoted attention to the Lord on His Day.
  - God's Sabbath began when Creation was finished, but man's sin and misery required that this Sabbath be "broken" if man was to be redeemed.
  - This came about when Christ did the work of redemption.
    - (Heb. 4:3-6) *"For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, 'As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest,"' although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.' And again in this passage he said, 'They shall not enter my rest.' Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience."*
  - The work of Christ did not do away with the Sabbath, rather it secured the Sabbath.
    - (Heb. 4:7-10) *"Again he appoints a certain day, 'today', saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts'. For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his."*
  - The example of Christ showed us that the Sabbath allows for, or rather requires, works of piety, necessity, and mercy.
    - Christ never failed to justify His actions from Scripture.
    - John 7:22-24- *"Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are*

you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

- Most people who push for a variance from a proper observance of the Sabbath ("a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days, and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 60), are primarily looking to appease themselves, and engage in recreations after their own desires.
- Refer also to Larger Catechism Questions 115-120.
- According to Williamson presents a brief statement of principles for our consideration:
  - The basic meaning of the word *Sabbath* is cessation. To rest, in terms of the meaning of the commandment, does not mean to sleep. It does not mean to cease performing our work and to continue our favorite recreations. What it means is to cease from the whole compass of things which engross us during the other days of the week whether it be our employments or our recreations. It means that we are not free to do sinful things on other days, but not on the Sabbath; but it means that even good things that occupy our attention on other days, ought to be set aside on this day. Television, reading newspapers and magazines, sports, excursions are all proper to the Christian life on the other days, but they are not proper to the Sabbath day, which should instead be devoted to worship and the reading of God's Word, etc.
  - The meaning of necessity is frequently misinterpreted in dealing with this commandment. Works of necessity are not such as are required only by our convenience. For example, what should a Christian do if his employer asks him to work on the Lord's Day? Choosing to exercise the option of working the regular job on the Sabbath does not make it a *necessity*; it may only be a *convenience*. If a physician must perform an operation lest his patient die, he speaks of a work of *necessity and mercy*. To argue that a work is necessary on the Sabbath merely because of personal inconvenience or hardship if it is not done is not legitimate reasoning.
- What of the seventh/first day distinction?
  - The Fourth Commandment does not say, "remember the seventh day," but to, "remember the sabbath day.
  - The difference is the distinction between proportion and order.
    - When the commandment specifies that six of our days are for one duty, and the remaining portion of the week (one seventh) for another duty.
      - This (not coincidentally) avoids what the Seventh Day Adventists require.
      - It avoids commanding us to remember the seventh day in the order of time that it might command us to observe the seventh day in the proportion of time.
    - Since the Fourth Commandment directs us to observe the seventh part of our time as a sabbath, there is nothing in this commandment that does not apply full force to the first day of the week as to the order of days.
    - The first day of the week is still the seventh as far as the proportion of time is concerned.
  - The Apostolic Church observed the first day of the week (as to the order of days) as the seventh portion, or Sabbath (cf. Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1, John 20:1,19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Mark 16:9; Rev. 1:10).
  - Christ declared that the Sabbath is a perpetual sign of the people of God (Ex. 31:13-16; Ezek. 22:26).
  - Christ promised that there would be an unbroken continuance of His true Church until the end of the world. This guarantees that the Sabbath has not, and will not be, lost to men.

# **Chapter 22**

## **OF LAWFUL OATHS AND VOWS**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 22:

### Of Lawful Oaths and Vows

**Section 1-** A lawful oath is a part of religious worship<sup>1</sup>, wherein, upon just occasion, the person swearing solemnly calleth God to witness what he asserteth or promiseth; and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he sweareth<sup>2</sup>.

1. Deut. 10:20.

2. Exod. 20:7; Lev. 19:12; 2 Chr. 6:22-23; 2 Cor. 1:23.

**Section 2-** The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear, and therein it is to be used with all holy fear and reverence<sup>1</sup>; therefore to swear vainly or rashly by that glorious and dreadful name, or to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful, and to be abhorred<sup>2</sup>. Yet as, in matters of weight and moment, an oath is warranted by the Word of God, under the New Testament, as well as under the Old<sup>3</sup>, so a lawful oath, being imposed by lawful authority, in such matters ought to be taken<sup>4</sup>.

1. Deut 6:13.

2. Exod 20:7; Jer 5:7; Mat 5:34, 37; James 5:12.

3. Isa 65:16; 2 Cor 1:23; Heb 6:16.

4. 1 Kings 8:31; Ezra 10:25; Neh 13:25.

**Section 3-** Whosoever taketh an oath ought duly to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and therein to avouch nothing but what he is fully persuaded is the truth<sup>1</sup>. Neither may any man bind himself by oath to anything but what is good and just, and what he believeth so to be, and what he is able and resolved to perform<sup>2</sup>. Yet it is a sin to refuse an oath touching anything that is good and just, being imposed by lawful authority<sup>3</sup>.

1. Exod. 20:7; Jer. 4:2.

2. Gen. 24:2-3, 5-6, 8-9.

3. Exod. 22:7-11; Num. 5:19, 21; Neh. 5:12.

**Section 4-** An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation or mental reservation<sup>1</sup>. It cannot oblige to sin; but in anything not sinful, being taken, it binds to performance, although to a man's own hurt<sup>2</sup>; nor is it to be violated, although made to heretics or infidels<sup>3</sup>.

1. Psa. 24:4; Jer. 4:2.

2. 1 Sam. 25:22, 32-34; Psa. 15:4.

3. Ezek. 17:16, 18-19; Josh. 9:18-19 with 2 Sam. 21:1.

### **OBSERVATIONS-** (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

"These sections of the Confession teach us (1) the nature of a lawful oath, (2) the only name in which it is lawful to swear, (3) the propriety and duty of taking oaths upon proper occasions, (4) the sense in which an oath is to be interpreted, and (5) the extent to and ground upon which it has binding obligation."

- [A.A. Hodge]- *"A lawful oath consists in calling upon God, the occasion being of sufficient seriousness and importance, to witness the truth of what we affirm as true, or our voluntary assumption of an obligation to do something in the future -- with an implied imprecation of God's disfavor if we lie or prove unfaithful to our engagements. This last is generally expressed by the phrase forming the concluding part of the formula of most oaths, 'So help me God;'- i.e., Let God so help me as I have told the truth, or as I will keep my promise. Hence an oath is an act of supreme religious worship, since it recognizes the omnipresence, omniscience, absolute justice and sovereignty of the Person whose august witness is invoked, and whose judgment is appealed to as final."*
- Some question whether we should swear at all.
  - Jesus said (Matthew 5:33-37), *"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil."*
  - But a careful read of the above text in light of its context doesn't support that view.
  - Christ is not destroying the law (cf. Matthew 5:17,18) but clearing it of false interpretations.
    - One false interpretation of the Jews was that only some oaths are binding, depending on what men swore by.



- Matthew 23:16-22 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.”
- Christ said that (to the contrary) such distinctions were vain and immoral.
- Christ insisted that men’s words ought to be true and binding even without oaths (which is actually the basis of this chapter- oath makers ought to be oath keepers with God the invoked judge of their veracity),
- If men were inherently truthful, they would simply speak the truth without feeling the need for constantly adding oaths as their imprimatur.
- Oaths exist because men are liars.
- [A.A.Hodge]-“It hence follows that it is a sin equivalent to that of worshipping a false god if we swear by any other than the only true and living God; and a sin of idolatry if we swear by any thing or place, although it be associated with the true God. Those who swear with uplifted hand swear by the God who created, preserves, and governs all things. Those who swear with hand upon or kissing the Bible, swear by the God who reveals himself in the Bible -- that is, by the true Christian God. It is evident that none who believe in the true God can, consistently with their integrity, swear by a false god. And it is no less evident that it is dishonest for an atheist to go through the form of swearing at all; or for an infidel to swear with his hand upon the Christian Scriptures, thereby professing to invoke a God in whose existence he does not believe. This principle is fully recognized in Scripture. We are told to swear by the true God: “Unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear,” Isa. xlv. 23; “He that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth,” Isa. 1xv. 16; “Thou shalt fear JEHOVAH thy God and serve him, and shalt swear by his name,” Deut. vi. 13. We are forbidden to swear by the name of false gods: “How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods.” Jer. v. 7; Josh. xxiii. 7. 3. The literal meaning of the Third Commandment is, “Thou shalt not take the name of thy God in that which is false” -- that is, to confirm an untruth. The command not to take a false oath, or any oath upon a trifling occasion, by implication carries with it the permission to call upon the God of truth to confirm the truth upon all worthy occasions.”
- The proper occasions upon which an oath may be taken are:
  - Those in which serious and lawful interests are involved,
  - In which an appeal to the witness of God is necessary to secure confidence and end strife,
  - Whenever the oath is imposed by competent authority upon those subject to it.
- The taking of an oath is a duty, and its refusal is a sin.
- Perjury is the act of willfully making a false oath, and is a serious crime that the Bible calls *swearing deceitfully* (cf. Psalm 24:4).
- The taking of an oath with secret intention of double meaning not disclosed to others (or with mental reservations) whereby the mind silently voices dissent form part or all of what is being sworn, is an enormous sin.
  - [A.A. Hodge]- “The literal meaning of the Third Commandment is, “Thou shalt not take the name of thy God in that which is false” -- that is, to confirm an untruth. The command not to take a false oath, or any oath upon a trifling occasion, by implication carries with it the permission to call upon the God of truth to confirm the truth upon all worthy occasions. Hence the oath is enjoined in the Old Testament as a recognized religious institution. Deut. vi. 13; x. 20, etc. Christ himself, when put upon oath in the form common among the Jews, did not hesitate to answer. Matt. xxvi. 63, 64. Paul often appeals to God for the truth of his statements - - thus: “God is my witness;” “I call God for a record upon my soul.” Rom. i. 9; 2 Cor. i. 23. In Heb. vi. 13 - - 18, Paul declares that God, in order “to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath;” and that, “because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself.”
- [Williamson]- “It is imperative that Christians carefully consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, being certain that he swears to do no more than he is able and resolved to do. Yet when it is discovered that much more hardship and affliction will be entailed than was at first anticipated, one cannot disavow that which is not contrary to the Word of God without being guilty of sin (Ezek. 17:19; Josh. 9:19).”
- [A.A. Hodge] “An oath cannot bind to that which is in itself unlawful, because the obligation of the law is imposed upon us by the will of God, and therefore takes precedence of all obligations imposed upon us by the will of men or by ourselves; and the lesser obligation cannot relieve from the greater. The sin is in taking the oath to do the unlawful thing, not in breaking it. Therefore Luther was right in breaking his monastic vows. Neither can an oath to do that which is impossible bind, for its impossibility is an expression of the will of God. But an oath to do what is in itself right and binding imposes an additional obligation to perform it -- the obligation imposed by the law, and the obligation voluntarily assumed by ourselves. And an oath to do anything which is lawful binds both for truth’s sake and for God’s sake. And -- This obligation evidently does not depend upon the goodness or badness of the persons imposing the oath. An oath to an infidel or a heretic binds as much as an oath to a saint.”

# Chapter 23

# OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 23:

### Of the Civil Magistrate

Section 1- God, the Supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under him, over the people, for his own glory and the public good, and to this end hath armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil-doers<sup>1</sup>.

1. Rom 13:1-4; 1 Pet 2:13-14.

Section 2. It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate when called thereunto<sup>1</sup>; in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth<sup>2</sup>, so, for that end, they may lawfully, now under the New Testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasion<sup>3</sup>.

1. Prov 8:15-16; Rom 13:1-2, 4.

2. 2 Sam 23:3; Psa 2:10-12; 82:3-4; 1 Tim 2:2; 1 Pet 2:13.

3. Mat 8:9-10; Luke 3:14; Acts 10:1-2; Rom 13:4; Rev 17:14, 16.

#### OBSERVATIONS (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that God has ordained civil government on earth, (2) that the purpose of it is His glory and our good, (3) that He has given civil officers the power of the sword, (4) that Christians may lawfully hold civil office and exercise the power of the sword upon just and necessary occasions.”

[A.A. Hodge]- Commentary on the Confession of Faith

Section One teaches us:

*“Civil government is a divine institution, and hence the duty of obedience to our legitimate rulers is a duty owed to God as well as to our fellow men. Some have supposed that the right or legitimate human government has its foundation ultimately in the ‘consent of the governed’, ‘the will of the majority’, or in some imaginary ‘social compact’ entered into by the forefathers of the race at the origin of social life. It is self-evident, however, that the Divine Will is the source of all government; and the obligation to obey that will, resting upon all moral agents, is the ultimate ground of all obligation to obey human governments. This is certain:*

1. *Because God is the Creator and absolute Possessor of all men.*
  2. *Because He has formed their constitution as intelligent, morally responsible, free agents, and is the Lord of the conscience.*
  3. *Because He is the supreme moral Governor of all moral agents, and because his all-embracing moral law of absolute perfection requires all that is morally right of every kind and forbids all that is morally wrong. Hence every moral obligation of every kind is a duty owed to God.*
  4. *Because God has constituted man a social being in his creation, and has providentially organized him in families and communities, and thus made civil government an absolute necessity.*
  5. *Because as the providential Ruler of the world God uses civil government as his instrument in promoting the great ends of redemption in the upbuilding of his kingdom in the world.*
  6. *This is explicitly affirmed in Scripture: ‘There is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God’ (Romans 8:1,2). To the good the magistrate is ‘the minister of God for good’, and to the evil he is a ‘minister of God, and avenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil’ (Romans 13:4).”*
- God has not prescribed a single, particular form, or order of succession of civil government for all mankind across all of time.
    - He laid the general foundation for the duty and necessity of government within the consciences and social natures of all men at creation.
    - In the circumstances of all communities, while He has left every people free to choose their own form of government in their own way, He has made it abundantly evident that some form of government is necessary for the restraint of tempers, passions, and overt sin.

- According to our various degrees of civilization, our social condition, our historical heritage, and as we are instructed in His Word, Civil Government, by God's Providence (and through its various magistrates) leads and sustains our societies, cultures, and civilizations.
- [Hodge]- *"In this sense God as Creator, as revealed in the light of nature, has established civil government among men from the beginning, and among all peoples and nations, of all ages and generations. But in the development of the plan of redemption the God-man as mediatorial King has assumed the government of the universe."* (cf., Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9-11; Ephesians 1:17-23).
- Because the created universe is comprised of one physical and moral system, it is necessary that the headship and mediation of the One who created it all must stretch through every *part* of it unto the extent of the *whole* of it.
  - The Creator/Mediator of it all must be Lord and Sovereign over all of it too.
  - All things must work together for the good of His people and for His glory, that all of his enemies become subdued and (finally) judged and punished.
  - All creatures must come to worship Him, as the Father has determined. (cf. Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:8-13, 10:12-13; Revelation 5:9-13).
- [Hodge]- *"Hence the present providential Governor of the physical universe and 'Ruler among the nations' is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, to whose will all laws should be conformed, and whom all nations and rulers of men should acknowledge and serve."*
- [Hodge]- *"The immediate end for which God has ordained magistrates is the promotion of the public good, and the ultimate end is the promotion of His own glory. This evidently follows from the revealed fact that the glory of manifested excellence of the Creator is the chief end He had in the general system of things, and hence the appointed chief end of each intelligent agent."* (cf., Romans 9:22-23, 11:33-36; Colossians 1:16,17; Ephesians 1:5,6; 1 Peter 4:11).
  - If God's glory is the ultimate, or "chief end" of every man, it follows that the ultimate duties of all communities and nations of men must *collectively* be the same.
  - God's glory ought to be the governing purpose of every citizen in all of our actions and interactions.
  - It ought too, to be the chief duty of every magistrate, in all of their public and official acts (as well as in their own personal and private ones) to glorify God and vouchsafe the liberties of those over whom they are ordained to preside.
    - If the Glory of God is the Civil Magistrate's chief end, it is that same end to which all statutes and laws must similarly be subordinated.
    - [Hodge]- *"The specific way in which the civil magistrate is to endeavor to advance the glory of God is through the promotion of the good of the community (Romans 13:4) in temporal concerns, including education, morals, physical prosperity, the protection of life and property, and preservation of order."*
- Magistrates, acting in their various positions of influence, should always seek to promote piety as well as order.
  - 1 Timothy 2:1,2 *"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way."*
  - This they are to do, not by taking over the rightful duties and functions of the Church, nor by attempting to patronize, influence, or control the Church, but instead to model Christ:
    - Personally, by their example of godliness, uprightness, and faithfulness.
    - Officially, by giving impartial protection and due accommodation for the Church in its work, cooperatively.
  - The Christian magistrate ought to be free to openly and explicitly recognize God and Jesus Christ as ruler of the nations by his:
    - Enactment and enforcement of laws conceived in the true spirit of the Gospel.
    - Referring all questions upon the Scriptures to indicate the will of God specifically or in general principle to the expressed circumstances.
    - Special concern for preservation of man's duties as touch the Sabbath, religious oaths and vows, marriage and divorce, enforcement of laws and penal incarceration, capital punishment and duties of restitution, etc.
  - See Westminster Larger Catechism, Questions 123-133 for amplification of these principles expanded from the Decalogue.

Section Two teaches us:

- [Hodge]-*"It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate. This is evident enough. Indeed, in the highest sense, it is lawful for none other than Christians to be magistrates or anything else, since it is a violation of God's will that any man is not a Christian. And the greater the number and importance of the relations a man assumes, the greater becomes his obligation to be a Christian, in order that he may be qualified to discharge them all for the glory of God and good of all concerned."*
- Christian magistrates may lawfully, under the New Testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasions.
  - The right and duty of self-defense is clearly established within the instincts of nature, by reason, conscience, the Word of God, and mankind's nearly unanimous consensus.
  - It is right for an individual to take another's life in self-defense and is sometimes entirely necessary to protect the life of others. (cf.: WLC Q. 99.4; 135; 136)
  - [Hodge]-*"If it is right for an individual to take life in self-defense, it must equally right for a community to do so on the same principle."*
- In particular cases, especially at the outset, it may be extremely difficult to decide whether it is right for a Christian nation to go to war. It is beyond the scope of the Confession to opine on all the possible questions which may arise about this.
- History is frequently the only objective judge about whether actions taken were ultimately justified.
  - But there are general principles, which Reformed theologians have historically accepted as valid:
    - War is an incalculable evil, because of the lives it takes, misery it occasions, and property it destroys. There is nearly always a moral degradation that occurs on all sides, both vanquished and victorious succumb to increased depravity.
    - In every war, one party at least must be in the wrong, stubbornly and unrepentantly involved in some tremendous guilt that can only be remedied by open warfare.
    - All parties (being prone to the fallenness common to mankind) may be guilty themselves of engaging in unjustifiable warfare. Not all wars are just wars.
    - In the vast majority of cases, both parties are in the wrong in some greater or lesser degree. There are very few pristine declarations of war against clearly guilty nations, and within every nation on the earth a godly remnant of true believers surely reside.
    - [Hodge]- *"No plea of honor, glory or aggrandizement, policy or profit, can excuse, much less justify, war; nothing short of necessity to the end of the preservation of national existence."*
  - In order to make a war right in God's sight, it is not only necessary that our enemy should aim to do us a wrong, but also:
    - That the wrong he attempts must directly or indirectly threaten our very existence as a nation.
    - That war is the only means remaining to avert sure and imminent destruction.
    - Just warfare is necessarily defensive in *nature*, if not entirely in its *prosecution*.
      - A war may be purely defensive in spirit and intent, even while it is aggressive in the manner in which it is conducted.
      - Warfare need not be conducted on our own "national doorstep" in order to be justified, and may indeed require that it be taken to the "inner chamber" of the enemy in order to be effectual.
      - *Isolationism* is no more valid of a reason to refrain from warfare as is the empire-building motivation of *imperialism* to justify war.
  - Every means of securing justice and preserving national sovereignty and safety should be exhausted before the recourse of warfare is employed. War should always remain the last and only resort.
  - The question of right depends upon the defensive spirit of its intent, not upon the aggressive manner in which it is fought.
  - The *purpose* for which the war is conducted is paramount, less so is the order or theatre within which attack is made.

**Chapter 24**

**OF**

**MARRIAGE**

**AND**

**DIVORCE**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 24:

### Of Marriage and Divorce

**Section 1.** Marriage is to be between one man and one woman: neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at the same time<sup>1</sup>.

1. Gen 2:24; Prov 2:17; Mat 19:5-6.

**Section 2.** Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife<sup>1</sup>; for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed<sup>2</sup>; and for preventing of uncleanness<sup>3</sup>.

1. Gen 2:18.
2. Mal 2:15.
3. 1 Cor 7:2, 9.

**Section 3.** It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry who are able with judgment to give their consent<sup>1</sup>. Yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord<sup>2</sup>. And therefore, such as profess the true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, Papists, or other idolaters: neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies<sup>3</sup>.

1. Gen 24:57-58; 1 Cor 7:36-38; Heb 13:4; 1 Tim 4:3.
2. 1 Cor 7:39.
3. Gen 34:14; Exod. 34:16; Deut. 7:3-4; 1 Kings 11:4; Neh. 13:25-27; Mal 2:11-12; 2 Cor 6:14.

#### **OBSERVATIONS - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that God has ordained monogamous marriage, (2) that it serves various purposes, (3) that celibacy is not to be regarded as a holier state than marriage, and (4) that Reformed Christians should not marry unbelievers or even those who subscribe to dangerous errors.”

#### **FURTHER OBSERVATIONS- (with thanks to A.A. Hodge)**

“It is taught in these sections that (1) marriage was ordained of God, and is therefore a divine institution, involving a religious as well as a civil contract. (2) The ends designed to be promoted by marriage are specified. (3) It is affirmed that the law of marriage allows it to be contracted only between one man and one woman, and that a man can have by one wife and a woman but one husband at the same time. (4) The pre-eminent sanctity of a life of celibacy is denied, and the lawfulness of marriage for all classes of men is affirmed. (5) It is taught that persons of different religions should not intermarry, and that true believers should not be unequally yoked with the ungodly.”

- That marriage was ordained by God and should be considered by us a divine institution is beyond question.
  - Genesis 2:18-25- “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”
- Marriage was the divine provision for mankind’s good because God made mankind Male and Female, and structured the creation narrative so that it was made plain that man was never intended to be alone, seek comfort in any creature not of his own kind, and find no suitable and satisfying one-flesh relationship other than with a singular woman in whom he finds his own completion.
- God made for the (first) man, one woman only. It was therefore evident from the beginning that marriage was intended to be between **one** man (who was lonely, and who had not found suitable comfort in any other creature) and **one** woman.

- Matthew 19:5- “He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?” So they are no longer two but one flesh’.”
- [Hodge]- *“Marriage was ordained of God because God created man male and female, and so constituted them, physically and morally, that they are mutually adapted to each other and are mutually helpful to each other under the law of marriage, and not otherwise; and because the law of marriage, the conditions of its contract, continuance and dissolution, are laid down in the Word of God.”*
- [Williams]- *“Marriage fulfills a manifold purpose. One of these is the satisfaction of the sex desire. The Scripture says that in order to avoid sinful and improper satisfaction of the sex desire every human being is to have the right to marriage (1 Cor. 7:2).”*
- The main ends designed to be promoted by marriage are stated to be:
  - The mutual help of husband and wife.
    - As the Genesis narrative shows, no other union is capable of attempting the Dominion Mandate.
  - The increase of mankind with a “legitimate issue.”
    - No other union is capable of procreation
    - No other union is able to nourish and protect its household
  - The increase of the Church of Christ with a holy seed.
    - Husbands and wives do not merely copulate and procreate, they also raise their progeny in the nurture and admonition of God.
    - Marriage itself (according to the Apostle Paul) is a fit picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church (His Bride).
  - The prevention of uncleanness.
    - Monogamous, heterosexual relations between faithful partners curtail or (minimally) confine all manner of disease, idolatry, and immorality.
- Any departure from this original (heterosexual) monogamy only appears in the history of people who departed from God.
  - Genesis 4:16-19-“Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.”
  - Polygamy was the result and evidence of man’s depravity and a contradiction of the divine institution.
- Because marriage is ordained by God, it also logically follows that marriage is a religious as well as a civil contract.
  - No state has any right to change the law of marriage, or the conditions upon which it is lawfully constituted or dissolved.
  - Neither has any man or woman a right to contract any relation different in any respect as to its character or duration from that which God has ordained as marriage.
  - Marriage is a civil contract under the limits and sanctions of a divine constitution, and the parties contracting it pledge their vows of truth and constancy to God as well as to each other and to society.
  - [Hodge]- *“...every state is bound to protect the foundations upon which social order reposes, and every marriage involves many obvious civil obligations and leads to many civil consequences touching property, the custody of children, etc. The State must therefore define the nature and civil effects of marriage, and prescribe conditions upon which and modes in which it shall be publicly acknowledged and ratified or dissolved. It is of the highest importance that the laws of the State do not contravene the laws of God upon this subject, but be made in all respects to conform to them.”*
  - Christians and Christian ministers must obey God rather than men in any case when the purposes of the State conflict with the clear and stated purposes of God for the marriage institution.
  - The law of the land is to be obeyed for conscience’ sake whenever it does not breach the HIGHER law of God.
  - Our Confession teaches that marriage is lawful for all sorts of people who have intelligence sufficient to consent.



- Rome wrongly teaches that marriage is lawful for the great mass of men, but only as a concession to the weakness of the flesh, but maintains that a life of celibacy is both meritorious and more conducive to spiritual elevation.
  - For Rome, a life of celibacy was recommended by Christ (Matthew 19:10-12) as one of His “evangelical counsels.
  - By remaining celibate, Rome teaches one can gain supererogatory (excess) merit, and so it places it as a universal imperative obligation upon its clergy.
- Our Confession teaches that professors of the true should not intermarry with professors of the false, and that true believers should not intermarry with the ungodly.
  - [Hodge]- *“...this touches not that which is essential to the validity of marriage, but that which is essential to its perfection, and brings in question not the reality of the marriage when formed, but the propriety of forming it. Paul teaches that if one of the parties of a previous marriage becomes a Christian, the other remaining a heathen, the Christian brother or sister remains bound by the marriage-tie as before, unless the heathen party voluntarily abandon them, and so dissolve the relation, when the Christian is no longer bound. (1 Cor. 7:12-15). On the same principle, the marriages at present so common between the converted and the unconverted are unquestionably valid, and to be respected as such.”*
  - Christians owe it both to Christ and to their own souls not to contract such alliances.
    - How can one who possesses the mind and the spirit of Christ, whose affections are as a practical fact set upon things above, whose motives, aims and aspirations are heavenly...
    - ... become one flesh and heart, dwell in the most intimate of all possible communion, with a soul dead in trespasses and sins?
    - 2 Cor. 6:14-18 *“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.’”*
  - If such a union is formed, it *must* follow, either that:
    - The sacred ordinance of marriage is desecrated by a union of bodies where there is no union of hearts, or
    - In the intimate fellowship of soul with soul the believer will be greatly depressed in his inward spiritual life, and greatly hindered in his attempts to serve his Master in the world.
    - [1 Cor. 7:39] *“A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.”*

[Williamson]-“A person’s faith cannot be judged apart from his profession and walk, and in this case {discerning ‘who are able with judgment to give their consent’} the profession and walk cannot be contrary to the judgment {testimony, walk, witness} that he is a believer ... Finally, we must admit that the problem of deciding whether or not a person is sufficiently Christian to marry is a difficult one in some instances. There are errors that are of various degrees of seriousness. In any case we believe that the believer who knows the true Reformed religion is obligated to enter upon marriage only if such requires no compromise of God’s truth.”

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 24:

### Of Marriage and Divorce

**Section 4.** Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden in the Word<sup>1</sup>; nor can such incestuous marriages ever be made lawful by any law of man, or consent of parties, so as those persons may live together as man and wife<sup>2</sup>. The man may not marry any of his wife's kindred nearer in blood than he may of his own, nor the woman of her husband's kindred nearer in blood than of her own<sup>3</sup>.

1. Lev 18 throughout; Amos 2:7; 1 Cor 5:1.
2. Lev 18:24-28; Mark 6:18.
3. Lev 20:19-21.

**Section 5.** Adultery or fornication, committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract<sup>1</sup>. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce<sup>2</sup>, and after the divorce to marry another, as if the offending party were dead<sup>3</sup>.

1. Mat 1:18-20.
2. Mat 5:31-32.
3. Mat 19:9; Rom 7:2-3.

**Section 6.** Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments, unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage; yet nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage<sup>1</sup>; wherein a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it, not left to their own wills and discretion in their own case<sup>2</sup>.

1. Mat 19:6, 8-9; 1 Cor 7:15.
2. Deut 24:1-4.

### **OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

"These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that there are certain divine restrictions as to whom a Christian can marry because of already existing relationships, (2) that there are two possible grounds for legitimate divorce: (a) adultery and fornication, and (b) desertion of a Christian by an unbeliever, and (3) that even though the wickedness of man is such that it ever seeks to overthrow the divine ordinance, yet it is the duty of both Church and State to uphold the divine ordinance."

### **FURTHER OBSERVATIONS**- (with thanks to A.A. Hodge)

"These sections teach the divine law of marriage as to incest and as to divorce. [1] Incest consists of sexual intercourse between parties forbidden by the divine law to marry, because of their relationship. Marriage between these parties is impossible; and no matter what may be the provisions of human laws or the decisions of human courts, such pretended marriages are void *ab initio* {from the beginning}-invalid in essence as well as improper and injurious."

### **INCEST**

- **Consanguinity**- from the latin *consanguinitas*- "*from the same blood*" or blood relationship, that of being descended from the same ancestor. Generally, the **degrees** of consanguinity are calculated by the number of generations of separation between two individuals from their nearest common ancestor.
- The Bible also annexes non-biological, covenantal relationships between individuals as well (i.e., in-laws, step-relationships, etc.).
- In Scripture, Leviticus provides us the only **law** on the subject of incest... but it has a LOT to say on the particulars of the subject:
  - **Leviticus 17: 6-23** "*None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether brought up in the family or in another home. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son's daughter or of your daughter's daughter, for their nakedness is your own nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, brought up in your father's family, since she is your*

sister. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's relative. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's relative. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother, that is, you shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and of her daughter, and you shall not take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter to uncover her nakedness; they are relatives; it is depravity. And you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive."

- *Leviticus 20:10-21* "If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. If a man lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed perversion; their blood is upon them. If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. If a man takes a woman and her mother also, it is depravity; he and they shall be burned with fire, that there may be no depravity among you. If a man lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal. If a woman approaches any animal and lies with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace, and they shall be cut off in the sight of the children of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness, and he shall bear his iniquity. If a man lies with a woman during her menstrual period and uncovers her nakedness, he has made naked her fountain, and she has uncovered the fountain of her blood. Both of them shall be cut off from among their people. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or of your father's sister, for that is to make naked one's relative; they shall bear their iniquity. If a man lies with his uncle's wife, he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness; they shall bear their sin; they shall die childless. If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity. He has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless."
- [Williamson]- "...when we have once contracted marriage, we are thereafter subject to the same limitations with regard to those who have become our relatives through husband or wife as was already the case by blood relation."
- Thus, sexual intercourse is forbidden within a specific circle of relatives, and the compass of that relationship includes those who are our kin by marriage as well as those who are our kin by blood.
- Consequently (if the only law on this subject in Scripture is found in the Leviticus passages), we must logically consider that:
  - If this law is still binding, it carries with it the principle that it is incest for a man to cohabit with any one of his deceased wife's relations nearer in blood than it is lawful for him to do of his own.
  - If this law is not binding now, there is no other law of God remaining on the subject of incest except what the law of nature reveals.
- The Greek and Roman Catholic Churches, as well as all branches of the Protestant Church have maintained the same principle in their Confessions of Faith or canons of discipline, although there have been sects and denominations within the Protestants that have expressed diversity in sentiment and practice, but all have for the most part followed it as God's law still binding upon our consciences, although leaving enforcement to the discretion of more local church courts.
- [Hodge]- "Since the degrees of relationship within which marriage is excluded differ in nearness, so the crime of incest differs, according to these varying degrees, from the highest to the least measure of criminality. The obligation to avoid intermarriage between near blood-relations is a dictate of nature as well as the Word of God."
- [Williamson]- "It is an age-old observation that the first marriages cannot have observed the limitation set forth in Leviticus. This cannot be denied. Adam's children must have married one another. How can this be explained? We believe that the explanation is that man's duty is conditioned by divine provision. It was Adam's duty to cleave unto his wife, but not until God made a woman for him to cleave unto. It was the duty of human beings to marry beyond the degrees of consanguinity and affinity, but not before there was a sufficiently wide development of the human race to permit the operation of this duty. When the human race was again reduced to one family (i.e., by the flood) there was again a consequent impossibility to observe this duty. But as soon as Noah's family had increased beyond these degrees of relationship, it was their duty to marry beyond them."

## DIVORCE

- [Hodge]-“The divine law of Divorce is, that marriage is a contract *for life* between one man and one woman, and that it is *ipso facto* {by the fact itself}, dissolved only by death (Romans 7:2,3); and that the only just causes upon which the civil authority can dissolve the union of those whom God has joined together are adultery (*fornication* or *sexual sin*), and desertion (*abandonment*).”

Matthew 5:31-32- “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:3-9- “And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?’ He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?” So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.’ They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?’ He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.’”

- In Matthew 19:9 Christ clearly uses two distinct Greek terms for *fornication* and *adultery*; they are not identical, and they are in a progression:
  - If “fornication” is not the reason for the divorce, He says, “adultery” will be the consequence. [Cf. the distinct use of the two terms in I Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19; Heb. 13:4]
  - The Old Testament Hebrew terms for “fornication” and “adultery” are also distinct.
    - זְנוּנִים (zenunim) “fornication” used throughout the Old Testament to refer to sexual immorality, including extramarital sex and prostitution- sometimes translated as *harlotry* or *whoredom*.
    - נָאֵף (naaph) “to commit adultery” used in the Old Testament to describe various types of unfaithfulness, but always from within the context of a marriage union.
- The scope of “adultery” in Biblical usage is broader than *fornication* and even broader than *illicit sexual intercourse*.
  - One nearly always tends to lead to the other, but there is no hard and fast rule about the order of occurrence, or that both aspects must be present for there to have been infidelity.
  - Divorce is a death caused by willful unfaithfulness: murder of a one-flesh being.
- There is nearly always some element or aspect of fornication involved in marital adultery, but not all fornication IS adultery
  - All sex outside of marriage is fornication,
  - Adultery within a marriage does not require sexual fornication.
  - Emotional infidelity without fornication is still adultery
- “Fornication” can refer *specifically* to sexual sins of all sorts -
  - Pre-marital unchastity (Ezek. 23:11-19; John 8:41),
  - Sex outside of marriage by a widow (Gen. 38:24),
  - Returning to a divorced spouse after an intervening sexual union (Jer. 3:2),
  - Adultery (Jer. 13:27; Hos. 2:2),
  - Prostitution (Deut. 23:18; Micah 1:7; 1 Cor. 6:16-18),
  - Incest (1 Cor. 5:1),
  - Homosexuality (Jude 7),
  - Marrying foreign wives (Heb. 12:16; cf. Gen. 26:34-35),
  - Or inter-religious sexual union (1 Cor. 10:8; cf. Num. 25:1-9)
- In Scripture “*fornication*” can also be used more generally for moral rebellion and unfaithfulness, when there is no figurative suggestion of intercourse (as with idols) - for instance:
  - Arrogance (Isa. 47:10),
  - Disbelieving God (Num. 14:11, 33),
  - Departure from God’s standards of righteousness (Isa. 1:21; 57:3; 2 Kings 9:22).
  - “Fornication” also appears to be part of a *synecdoche* for *all* sins:
    - In Ezek. 43:9, ‘whoring’ is used to describe defiling of the temple by behaviors in the land.
    - Hos. 6:10, ‘whoredom’ is used to describe Ephraim’s idolatries.

- In Paul's epistles "fornication" is sometimes run together with uncleanness, covetousness and idolatry as a way of covering all forms of immoral conduct (e.g., Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3-7).
- Perhaps this explains why many translations render the Greek word *Porneia* more generally as "impurity" or "immorality."
- Our Confessional standards refer to Adultery and Fornication as two similar but disparate things:
  - WLC- 139
  - WSC- 70-72
- A broader use of the word "Fornication" covers:
  - All of the defilements and abominations represented by ungodly Rome (Rev. 17:4; 19:2),
  - False teachings and idolatrous associations of heresy in the church (Rev. 2:21).
  - And in a sense, the whole of *sanctification* can be typified as abstaining from "fornication" (1 Thess. 4:3; cf. Heb. 12:14, 16).
- In addition to the specific and general uses of "fornication" for moral rebellion, we can observe the figurative use of the term (against the background of sexual looseness) for:
  - Religious unfaithfulness (Jer. 2:20; Hos. 4:11-12)
  - Apostasy (Ezek. 6:9; 23:35; Ps. 73:27),
  - Idolatry (Isa. 57:9; 1 Chron. 5:25; Ezek. 16:15, 25)
  - Foreign allegiance (Ezek. 23:11-19).
- [Dr. Greg Bahnsen, *Theses on Divorce and Spousal Abuse*] *"Thus 'fornication' need not connote sinful sexual intercourse. This is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that desertion of a marriage (apart from any issue of adultery) counts as fornication in Biblical teaching: 'But if the unbelieving [spouse] separates him/herself, let him/her be separated; in such cases the brother or the sister do not remain bound' (1 Cor. 7:15). Yet on the authority of Christ we may recognize only one just ground for divorce, namely 'fornication.' Therefore, unless Paul be pitted against Christ, the Pauline permission of divorce for desertion must imply that desertion is a form of fornication in God's evaluation, regardless of any accompanying issue of illicit sexual intercourse."*
- Just cause for divorce does not in itself dissolve the marriage bond, but only gives the innocent party the right, if they so select, to demand that it be dissolved by competent authority on Biblical grounds: Repentance, Forgiveness, and Restoration are ALWAYS the "Nuclear Option."
- The civil law has no authority to grant divorces upon any grounds other than those defined and allowed by the law of God.
  - Whenever they do so, the civil authorities put themselves into direct conflict with the law of God.
  - Hence all Christians and church courts are bound to disregard the judgement of the civil authority when they usurp God's law, and to regard and treat all biblically unlawful divorces as null and void.
  - And if the parties to an unrighteously dissolved union marry again, they are to be regarded and treated by those who fear God as living (in their new marriages) under the burden of sin and adultery.

[Williamson]- *"Our study of the depravity of man fully supports the Confession when it says that sinners are apt to study ways to circumvent the limitations of God's laws. Even Christians, by reason of the sinful propensities remaining in them, are apt to invent arguments to justify divorce for other than these two reasons only. For example, when fidelity to the marriage requirements entails heartache and suffering, many a Christian has tried to justify separation and divorce on such grounds as 'mental suffering' and 'incompatibility.' Others have secured divorces from spouses that are imprisoned or hospitalized. But as in the case with other laws of God, so in this, the path of obedience is often the way of self-denial and the bearing of reproach and suffering for the glory of God."*

# **Chapter 25**

# **OF THE CHURCH**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 25:

### Of The Church

**Section 1.** The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all<sup>1</sup>.

1. Eph. 1:10, 22-23, Eph. 5:23,27,32, Col. 1:18

**Section 2.** The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion<sup>2</sup>; and of their children<sup>3</sup>; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>3</sup>, the house and family of God<sup>4</sup>, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation<sup>5</sup>.

1. 1 Cor. 1:2, 1 Cor. 12:12-13, Ps. 2:8, Rev. 7:9, Rom. 15:9-12

2. 1 Cor. 7:14, Acts 2:39, Ezek. 16:20-21, Rom. 11:16, Gen. 3:15, Gen. 17:7

3. Matt. 13:47, Isa. 9:7

4. Eph. 2:19, Eph. 3:15

5. Acts 2:47

#### **OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

*“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) the nature of the Church from the divine point of view, and (2) the nature of the Church from the divine point of view, but it is not as if there were two different Churches, the visible and the invisible.”*

[Hodge]- “The word catholic means universal, and therefore is the proper title of the true Church of Christ, viewed as one body, composed of many members, existing in different places and at different times; and is consequently very improperly applied to that corrupt and schismatical body, the Church of Rome. The word in the New Testament corresponding to the English word church is *ecclesia*; this is derived from the word *calein*, to call, to call out, and thus constitute a separate body; which word is used to express the *effectual call* of the Holy Spirit, whereby he brings dead souls to life in the work of regeneration. Roma. 8:28-30; 1 Pet. 2:9. 5:10. The word “church” therefore, is a collective term including the whole body of the “called” or the “elect,” or of “believers.” Rev. 8:14; 1 Cor.1:2,24.”

- To this church, or collective body of the *effectually called* all the promises of the Gospel are addressed.
  - It makes no sense to try and apply the promises of salvation and eternal life to the entirety of fallen humanity, because Scripture refers to the membership of this body as something completed, intact, in relationship:
    - “The household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” [1Tim. 3:15]
    - “His body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” [Eph. 1:23]
    - “..A bride adorned for her husband.” [Rev.21:2]
    - “..The city (that) has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” [Rev.21:23]
  - [Hodge] “As every part of the entire body possesses the common nature of the whole, the common term ‘Church’ is naturally applied sometimes to the entire body, of all nations and ages, conceived of as a unit (Col. 1:18); and sometimes to the church of a particular province of city, as ‘the church of the Thessalonians,’ or ‘the church of Ephesus,’ (2 Thess. 1:1; Rev. 2:1); or in the plural for the several individual churches of a province, as ‘the churches in Asia.’ Or ‘the churches of Macedonia,’ or of ‘Galatia’ (1Cor.16:1; 2Cor.8:1; Rev.1:4); and sometimes the word is applied to designate some Christian family, as ‘the church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila.’ Rom.6:5; Col.4:15; Philem.2.”
  - But when Scripture speaks of the church, it speaks of, or to the Elect, the Called, the Assembled, the Justified, and not to some amorphous mass of huddled and sin riddled humanity.
- There is then, a collective body, comprising all the elect of God of all nations, and generations, called the CHURCH INVISIBLE.
  - The fact that there is such a body, in its ideal completeness, contains no *true* member wanting, not a single *false* member marring its eternal symmetry, and *constantly* forefront in the mind of God from eternity to eternity.

- The INVISIBLE CHURCH is the territory of divine foreknowledge, fore-ordination, predestination, and election.
- [Hodge]-*"This body, seen in its absolute fulness and perfection by God from eternity, will be at last revealed to the universe in all its completeness and glory, so that it will transcend all the other works of God in its visible excellences. And it is seen in part by us now in the successive ages as it is gathered in, because every member of it is a man or woman living and acting in the world, and the spiritual life whereby they are constituted members of the Church makes itself manifest by its fruits."*
- This Church is called *invisible* however, because:
  - Because the *portions* of it in any time or place visible are incalculably small in comparison to the body as a *whole* (in its full company of saints and nations and generations).
  - Because even in the sections of the body visible to our eyes, its outlines and borders are uncertain and blurry:
    - Many may *appear* to us to belong numbered among the faithful but they do not really belong,
    - Many may *really* belong to it, but their union with the Body has not yet been made manifest,
      - either because their calling has not yet been *made effectual* by the Holy Spirit
      - or because they are not yet manifest sufficient fruit of their personal sanctification to be "fruit inspected."
  - [Hodge]-*"In the meantime, the true Church, not yet perfectly developed and manifested, lurks in the phenomenal Church, as the grain of the growing corn lurks in the ear, and in this sense it is invisible. For that which constitutes the essence of this Church is not the visible profession or fruitfulness, but that invisible indwelling divine life, from which the profession and the fruitfulness proceed."*
- These sections teach that there is also a catholic or universal VISIBLE CHURCH, consisting of those persons of every nation (and their children) who profess the true religion.
  - This design involves:
    - The conceptual truth that the *True Church*, consists of persons,
      - A part of whom are always living.
      - Who walk among us in apparent faithfulness, with greater or lesser clarity and consistency (i.e., evidencing visible fruits of holiness) while tabernacled in the earth.
    - [Hodge]-*"The universal visible Church is therefore not a different Church from that which has just been described as invisible. It is the same body, as its successive generations pass in their order and are imperfectly discriminated from the rest of mankind by the eye of man."*
    - In other words, the TRUE VISIBLE and TRUE INVISIBLE Church(es) are the same Church, identical to God's eye in truth, but discriminated imperfectly by the finite eye of man:
      - God sees ONE church, momentarily in-fleshed but eternally one.
      - Our eyes see only what is humanly visible, and we only discern finite evidence.
        - Our physical eyes fallibly SEE a Visible Church in the world
        - Our eyes of faith believe in an infallible Invisible Church in Eternity.
  - God has commanded his people to organize themselves into distinct visible ecclesiastical communities, with constitutions, laws and officers, badges, ordinances and discipline.
    - For the purpose of GIVING visibility to His Kingdom
    - For the purpose of GATHERING His subjects in.
  - It is important to stress here that the Visible Church is an objective thing, with physical bounds, discernable rules and standards. It is not an amorphous, or emotional concept that one merely feels, and may walk into and out from on a whim, as it the belief in many modern systems.
  - [Hodge]-*"Each one of these distinct organized communities which is faithful to the great King is an integral part of the Visible Church; and all together, of all names and nations, constitute the catholic or universal Visible Church. The conditions of human life, physical, political, and social, and the imperfections of Christians, render impossible a practical organic union of all these organized bodies; yet that they are all one visible Church is self-evident, for the fact that they are all visible parts of the true spiritual and Invisible Church, which, being 'the body of Christ,' can never be divided."*



- It is also true that the Church is rendered *visible* by the outward obedience and professions of its members.
  - No class of men is ever endowed with the immutable ability to accurately discriminate between the genuineness of “Christian characteristics” or the absolute validity of any profession of faith.
  - It necessarily follows, that terms like credible profession , visible fruit, apparent godliness, etc. are employed within the assemblies.
  - These entirely human professions and ‘testimonies’ are used within the Visible Church as presumptive evidence of real religion (and therefore legitimate membership in the Visible Church).
  - [Hodge]-“*By credible profession is meant a profession of the true religion sufficiently intelligent and sufficiently corroborated by the daily life of the professor to be credited as genuine. Every such profession is ground for the presumption that the person is a member of the true Church, and consequently constitutes him a member of the Visible Church, and lays an obligation upon all other Christians to regard and treat him accordingly.*”
- [Hodge]- “*This visible Church is called the ‘kingdom of heaven’ on the earth; and its nature and progress are set forth in the parables of The Sower and the Seed, The Wheat and the Tares, The Mustard Seed, The Leaven, The Net Which Was Cast Into the Sea and Gathered Fish of Every Kind (Matthew 13), etc. Also, the truth at the children of all professors of the true religion are, on that account, fellow-members with their parents of the Visible Church<sup>1</sup>.*”

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<sup>1</sup> This principle will be better developed and discussed when we get to Chapter 27 “Of the Sacraments”

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 25:

### Of The Church

**Section 3.** Unto this catholic visible Church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto<sup>1</sup>.

1. Isa 59:21; Mat 28:19-20; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11-13.

**Section 4.** This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible<sup>1</sup>. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them<sup>2</sup>.

1. Rom 11:3-4; Rev 12:6, 14.

2. 1 Cor 5:6-7; Rev 2-3 throughout.

**Section 5.** The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error<sup>1</sup>; and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth to worship God according to his will<sup>3</sup>.

1. Mat 13:24-30, 47; 1 Cor 13:12; Rev 2-3 throughout.

2. Rom 11:18-22; Rev 18:2.

3. Psa 72:17; 102:28; Mat 16:18; 28:19-20.

#### **OBSERVATIONS - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

*“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that the degree to which the Church is visible varies; (2) that we are to judge each particular church by its (a) doctrine, (b) worship and (c) discipline; (3) that no church is entirely pure; (4) that some churches become apostate; (5) that there will always be some visible manifestation of the true Church.”*

*(with thanks to A.A. Hodge- “[Section 3] teaches that God has given to this universal visible Church, in all its branches and constituent elements (1) the inspired Scriptures as an infallible oracle and rule of faith and practice; (2) the Gospel ministry- on order not qualified and indicated by manual contact, but by the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost; (3) the ordinances, such as preaching. Prayer, singing of praise, and the holy sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and discipline; and (4) that the great end designed to be accomplished by this grant is (a) the gathering in of the elect from the children of the Church or from the world, and (b) the perfecting of the saints when thus gathered (Eph.4:11-13); and (5) that the success of these agencies is attaining this end is secured beyond peradventure by the promise of Christ to be with them and to render them effectual until the end of the world (Matt.28:20).”*

*“...[Sections 4-5] All that is taught in these sections necessarily follows from what we have above ascertained as to the nature of the visible church: (1) Since the catholic or universal visible Church consists of all the professors of the true religion in the world, and all of the particular ecclesiastical organizations which continue loyal to the Head, and maintain doctrines essentially sound, it must necessarily follow that the Church as a whole is in any age more or less visible, and any particular church pure in [some] proportion to the purity of the doctrine they profess, the worship they maintain, their zeal and spiritual character and energy, and the purity of their membership maintained by discipline.”*

- To the degree that individual member churches within the visible Church are *each* advancing in their righteousness (and to the proportion by which they prevail at), the *entire* Church will be seen as more distinct from the world and more *truly* manifest in her place within the invisible church.
- It follows that the very nature of the visible Church and its condition in this world is a matter of degree, which has varied throughout time, in every nation.
- The teaching of Scripture as to the nature of the kingdom, is that man is always imperfectly sanctified and needing growth through the means of various means of grace.
- It necessarily follows that:
  - The very purest of churches are yet very imperfect, and will continue so to the end,
  - And some will become so corrupt as to lose their character as true churches of Christ altogether.

- This was the case with the ancient church under the case of Ahab when the children of Israel had apostatized from the service of the true God to such an extent that Elijah thought he was the only one left faithful. Yet even in that state of affairs the Lord declared that there remained seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed their knees to Baal (1 Kings 19:18).
- Even more entire deterioration has occurred in the ancient churches founded by the Apostles in the East, and by their successors in Northern Africa (e.g., the churches in Revelation 2 and 3).
- The churches which have acknowledged the supremacy of the Pope at Rome have obscured the glory of God in one direction, while many *professedly* protestant churches (e.g., Socinians, Unitarians, other non-Trinitarians, Rationalists, etc.) have committed equal apostasy in another direction.
- [Hodge] *“But the Church whose infallible orthodoxy and purity is guaranteed by the divine promise is no outward visible organization or succession of bishops and priests; it is the particular Church of no nation or generation, but it is the true invisible body of the elect or of true believers of all nations and ages.”*
- [also Hodge] *“It follows, nevertheless, from the relation which the visible Church sustains to the invisible Church, that since, according to divine promise, the latter can never entirely fail from the earth (Matthew 16:18), so likewise, however the former may be obscured by heresies or lessened by defection, it can never be entirely wanting. Wherever the true Church is, it will be more or less visible; not in proportion, however, the size or pretension of the organization with which it may be associated, but in proportion to the purity of its faith and the spiritual activity and fruitfulness of its membership.”*

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 25:

### Of The Church

Section 6. There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God. <sup>2</sup>.

1. Col. 1:18, Eph. 1:22

2. Matt. 23:8-10, 2 Thess. 2:3-4, 8-9, Rev. 13:6

#### **OBSERVATIONS - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

*“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that the degree to which the Church is visible varies; (2) that we are to judge each particular church by its (a) doctrine, (b) worship and (c) discipline; (3) that no church is entirely pure; (4) that some churches become apostate; (5) that there will always be some visible manifestation of the true Church, but (6) that this cannot be the Roman Church because the Papacy is anti-Christian.”*

(with thanks to A.A. Hodge)-

*“The churches which acknowledge the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome have abandoned the faith and obscured the glory of their Lord... The church of Rome maintains that the promise of Christ secures the infallible orthodoxy and purity of the visible organization, in subjection to apostolically-ordained bishops, to the end of the world. But the Church whose infallible orthodoxy and purity is guaranteed by the divine promise is no outward visible organization or succession of bishops and priests; it is the particular Church of no nation or generation, but is the true invisible body of the elect or of true believers of all nations and ages.”*

- According to Hodge, these observations are proved from the fact that for eighteen hundred years the promise has never been fulfilled in the sense that Rome demands.
- Rome has actually LED the defection from the faith by the apostolic church.
- He also observes that various visible ecclesiastical organizations among the Romanists and Protestants alike are continually changing their characters and playing fast and loose with objective, orthodox truth.
- Several of the Epistles are addressed to “the Church,” and their salutations explain the phrase using equivalents like, *the saints*.
  - A look at Paul’s Corinthian, Ephesian, and Colossian letters; of Peter’s and Jude’s letters shows the use of the same attributes ascribed to members of the true Church in the bodies of the Epistles.
  - Attributes ascribed to the true Church in Scripture, prove it to be spiritual in nature, and in the sense the authors explain it, *invisible* and not an *outward* or *organized* succession of some particular assembly.
- It follows from the relation which the visible Church sustains to the invisible Church, that since according to divine promise, the visible can never entirely fail from the earth
  - Matthew 16:18- “*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*”
  - Although Rome has completely misjudged and mishandled this revelation, it nevertheless remains true in its essence.
  - However the visible Church may be obscured by heresies or lessened by defection, it can never be entirely wanting.
- Wherever the true Church is, it will be more or less visible; not in proportion to the size or pretension of the organization with which it may be associated, but in proportion to the purity of its faith and the and the spiritual activity and fruitfulness of its membership.
- [Hodge]- “*That the Lord Jesus Christ ins the only absolute and supreme Head of the Church is self-evident, is abundantly asserted in Scripture, and has never been denied by any Christians.*”
  - Colossians 1:15-20- “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to*

*reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”*

- *Ephesians 1: 15-22-“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”*
- [Hodge]-“Many have, however maintained that, as the visible Church on earth has a government and laws, and since these must be administered by a visible authority, so the Church must have an earthly visible head, acting upon authority delegated by Christ and as his representative.
  - The Church of Rome claims this for the Pope.
    - *Roman Catechism, Part 1, Chapter 10, Question 11: “So has Christ- the Head and Spouse -placed over his Church, which he governs by his most inward Spirit, a man to be the vicar and minister of his power; for as a visible church requires a visible head, our Savior appointed Peter head and pastor of all the faithful.”*
  - Similarly, the Erastian State Churches of Germany and Great Britain have acknowledged their respective kings and emperors to be the supreme heads of the Church as well as the State.
    - Henry the Eighth was recognized as ‘Supreme Head of the Church of England,’ and it was enacted that his heirs and assigns, “shall be taken, accepted, and reputed the only supreme head on earth of the Church of England, called *Anglicana Ecclesia*; and shall have and enjoy, annexed and united to the imperial crown of this realm, as well the style and title thereof, as all honors, dignities, immunities, profits and commodities to the said dignity of supreme head of the said Church belonging and appertaining.” [26 Henry VIII,. Cap.i].
    - The Thirty-seventh Article of the Church of England states, “The Queen’s majesty has the chief power in this realm of England, and other her dominions; unto whom the chief government of all estates of this realm, whether they be *ecclesiastical* or civil, in all cases doth appertain.”
  - [Hodge]- *“...in all like claims to ecclesiastical supremacy, it is a mere question of fact and evidence. If, as a matter of fact, Christ delegated his authority either to the Pope or to national Sovereigns, and made them, as his vicars, visible heads of his Church, then we ought to obey them, and our disobedience is treason to Christ. On the contrary, if they have no such authority, and are unable to prove their claims by unquestionable credentials, then their assumption of such power is a blasphemous intrusion upon divine prerogatives and treason to the human race. It is obvious that neither party can show any plausible foundation for their claims, and that upon the slightest interrogation they fall of their own weight.”*
- Lacking any duly accredited visible head of the Church, we are bound back to the Church’s INVISIBLE head (Christ) for all true definitions of *law* (and its administrations); and of *redemption* (with its due applications).
  - Christ *invisibly* presides over and governs his church.
    - Through his inspired Word, which we have seen is infallible, is complete and is the clearest authority of faith and practice.
    - Through the means of grace transmitted to us, such as administration of the sacraments, ordinances of preaching and prayer, etc. (cf., Eph. 4:11-14).
    - Through His active intercession on our behalf, seated in Session at the Right Hand of the Father.
    - Through His own spiritual presence extending to all his members, enduring to the end of the world (cf., Matt 18:20; 28:20).

#### Full disclosure about “THE ANTICHRIST”-

- Please note for our purposes in this class, that many Reformed denominations have taken exception since the Westminster Assembly, to the phrase in Section 6 referring to the Pope of Rome as *“...Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God.”*
- [Williamson]- *“When the Westminster Confession of Faith was written it was the papal claim to the crown prerogatives of the Lord Jesus Christ that was at the forefront of conflict. Inasmuch as the Westminster Assembly had been called into session by the Parliament for the express purpose of establishing the true Reformed religion as the form of religion for the Church of England there did*

not appear to be any danger that a king or queen would be called the supreme head of the Church. Subsequent events demonstrated, however that the Pope is not the only anti-christ (that is, one who seeks to stand in Christ's place). And so we regard the revision of this section of the Confession, as maintained by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as having one advantage over the original formulation. It preserves the point made by the Westminster Assembly, that the Pope of Rome is not the head of Christ's Church in any sense, but also expressly and equally it denounces all other who would lay such a claim for themselves."

- The OPC then, renders Section 6 thus: "The Lord Jesus Christ is the only head of the Church, and the claim of any man to be the vicar of Christ and the head of the Church, is unscriptural, without warrant in fact, and is a usurpation dishonoring the Lord Jesus Christ."
  - Our own denomination (the PCA) has rendered Section 6 thus: "*There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof.*"
- [Hodge]- "*The word 'Antichrist' occurs in the New Testament in 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7. The coming of the 'man of sin' the 'son of perdition' is predicted in 2 Thess. 2:3,4. Interpreters have differed as to whether these phrases were intended to designate a personal opponent of the Lord, or principles and systems antagonistic to him and his cause. The authors of our Confession can hardly have intended to declare that each individual Pope of the long succession is the personal Antichrist, and the probably meant that the Papal system is in spirit, form, and effect, wholly antichristian, and that it marked a defection from apostolical Christianity foreseen and foretold in Scripture. All of which was true in their day, and is true in ours.*"
- It is important for us to remember that as the forms of evil change, and the kingdom of Christ is continually buffeted by the purposes of Satan and the progress of events, there are even now MANY Antichrists.
- We know from the text of Scripture that "antichrist" was not wholly a person or concept in the future, but an abiding and besetting problem in all ages, and in many spiritual forms.
- 1 John 4:1-3- "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.*"
- Every spirit manifests itself through some kind of false prophet or teacher of error and the error is a fundamental failure to recognize, acknowledge, and proclaim Christ.
  - Antichrist denies that Jesus is the anointed prophet, priest and king.
  - Antichrist denies that Jesus is the anointed one.
  - Antichrist denies the Father and the Son.
- [Williamson]- "*Evidently, the Westminster Assembly saw in the papal system the forces of evil working to just such a fulfillment of iniquity. To them, the papal system marked the defection from apostolic Christianity foreseen and foretold in Scripture. Because each Pope represented this antichristian system, he was therefore personally an antichrist. And the Papacy as an institution emerged as the historic framework from which a final 'man of sin' would arise, taking the final step of practical self-deification.*"

It has always been controversial to identify the Pope as THE Antichrist. In their rush to seem more orthodox and literally accurate, many denominations have sought to change the language offered at Westminster. What remains for us, regardless of which version of this section we formally adopt, is to recognize that "antichrist" is something we must remain careful to isolate ourselves from.

1 John 2:18,19- "*Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*"

**Vigilance is the Necessary!**

# **Chapter 26**

## **OF THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 26:

### Of Communion of Saints

**Section 1.** All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory<sup>1</sup>; and being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces<sup>2</sup>, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man<sup>3</sup>.

1. John 1:16; Rom 6:5-6; Eph 2:5-6; 3:16-19; Phil 3:10; 2 Tim 2:12; 1 John 1:3.
2. 1 Cor 3:21-23; 12:7; Eph 4:15-16; Col 2:19.
3. Rom 1:11-12, 14; Gal 6:10; 1 Thes 5:11, 14; 1 John 3:16-18.

**Section 2.** Saints, by profession, are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification<sup>1</sup>; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus<sup>2</sup>.

1. Isa 2:3; Acts 2:42, 46; 1 Cor 11:20; Heb 10:24-25.
2. Acts 2:44-45; 11:29-30; 2 Cor 8-9 throughout; 1 John 3:17.

**Section 3.** This communion which the saints have with Christ, doth not make them in any wise partakers of the substance of his Godhead, or to be equal with Christ in any respect: either of which to affirm is impious and blasphemous<sup>1</sup>. Nor doth their communion one with another, as saints, take away or infringe the title or propriety which each man hath in his goods and possessions<sup>2</sup>.

1. Psa 45:7 with Heb 1:8-9; Isa 42:8; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:18-19; 1 Tim 6:15-16.
2. Exod 20:15; Acts 5:4; Eph 4:28.

#### **OBSERVATIONS - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

*“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that believers have vital union with Christ in his work of mediation, (2) that as a consequence they also have communion with each other and in each other's gifts and graces, (3) that this communion entails certain mutual duties and obligations among believers, and (4) that the union and communion with Christ which are enjoyed by believers does not mean that they become divine, or equal with Christ, nor does the communion of believers with each other destroy the right of private property.”*

**(with thanks to A.A. Hodge)**

*“Communion is a mutual interchange of offices between parties, which flows from a common principle in which they are united. The nature and degree of the communion will depend upon the nature and intimacy of the union from which it proceeds. This chapter teaches: (1) Of the union of Christ to his people; (2) the fellowship between him and them resulting therefrom; (3) the union between the people of Christ growing out of their union with him; (4) the communion of saints growing out of their union with each other; (5) the mutual duties of all who profess to be saints with regard to all their fellow-professors.”*

- All saints are united to the Lord Jesus, and we need to know what is the foundation and nature of this union, as well as how it is proved.
- Union with Christ is variously described in Scripture as:
  - A **representative union**. As Adam represented all men under the so-called “covenant of works” so Christ represented his elect people under the covenant of grace. [Cf. WCF Chapter 7].
  - A **vital union**. Scripture (e.g., John 15:1f; 1Cor.12:13f; Eph. 5:23f) compares our union with Christ to the union of the vine with the branches, the various parts of the body with the head, and the union of husband and wife. In each of these there is the principle that the life found in one is found in and dependent upon the other. What Christ experiences, we experience. What He possesses we possess. What he does, we do.
    - [PLEASE NOTE: *there IS a sense in which we cannot say that his sufferings, death, and resurrection are ours. We do not physically experience what He experienced physically. But real experience is not only physical, it is also spiritual. GOD did not suffer and die. But God, in Christ's divine nature, was united with man, in Christ's human nature, so the person who suffered and died was the God-man. God and man in one person experienced one life (1 John 1:1,2; John 1:4)*]



- [Williamson]- *“If God and man can be one person and have one life, then why may not many men have one living existence as truly as a vine and branches, or the members of a physical body? We do not explain it. We do assert it. Christ and his believing people have one life, and they share together suffering, death, resurrection, and glory.”*
  - A **spiritual union**. It is made manifest through the Holy Spirit:
    - Who is of one substance with Christ as to his deity.
    - Who dwells in him without measure as to his humanity.
    - Who also dwells in believers, thus creating, sustaining, and determining in them that life which is the life of Christ.
    - Scripture (Eph.3:16,17) affirms not only that believers have this life by His Spirit in the inner man, but also that in this manner Christ Himself dwells in our hearts by faith.
- Theologians call this entire phenomenon a MYSTICAL UNION.
  - It is a truth, but we can only know it because God reveals it to us.
  - We could not know it through self-examination.
  - We cannot know it merely through insight gained by experience.
  - We cannot learn it by observation.
  - It is “mystical” because it transcends all other union and communion we know.
  - [Williamson]- *“How can it be said that ‘our old man is crucified with him’ (Rom. 6:6)? And how can we explain how we have been ‘raised up together and made to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6)? How can the Psalmist (Ps.22) describe his own experiences in the very words that Christ used to describe he suffering on the cross of Calvary? We frankly confess that this is a great mystery (Eph. 5:32). But we believe that it is so because the Word of God says that it is so. In some mysterious way which we cannot describe or even comprehend we have a real participation with Christ in these things which he wrought for our salvation.”*
  - This does not mean that we are MERGED into him, or that the WORK is done by us.
  - He alone is the God-man; he alone accomplished the work of redemption in which we share.
- Our union with Christ necessarily leads to the corollary that we believers have union with one another.
  - The union and communion of believers with one another can only be explained by (and is an outgrowth of) our primary union with Christ.
  - This union however, does NOT dissolve our individual personalities and differences; it is manifest through our individual personalities and gifts, and highlighted by our differences.
  - When one member of the body has a spiritual gift, it is conferred for the benefit of the whole church, and not just for the one member (1 Cor.12:18ff).
  - Even those members of the Church lacking in ability, knowledge, or usefulness serve a purpose benefiting all believers (1 Cor. 12:23,24): those members whom we perceive to have less honorable usefulness are to have bestowed upon them *abundant* honor by us; we are to use our spiritual gifts for the benefit of those lacking them. God uses disparate abilities not to divide His Church, but to abolish schisms through this mystical union and unite us in one common purpose.
  - [Williamson]- *“Every member of Christ is, therefore, by the nature of the case under obligation to perform certain duties which conduce to the good of all members of the body.”*
- And so, our Confession maintains that the duty of “fellowship and communion in the worship of God” is at least in part the outcome of this union.
  - For example, the Fourth Commandment teaches that we are to worship God on the Sabbath.
    - Some argue that they can truly worship God while alone, or at least without any commitment to membership in the Visible Church.
    - Others feel no obligation to loyal or faithful attendance in any particular congregation on the Lord’s Day.
    - Some believe that Sabbath Day is merely a concept, and that any day and time will do as well as the Lord’s Day.
    - Many argue that there remains no positive duty on any grounds to urge any Sabbath duties, even those annexed specifically to the fourth commandment.
  - There may be legitimate *occasional*, or *immediate* needs to withhold oneself from the assembly, but this section of the Confession would condemn the attitudes and abiding excuses listed above as violating the spiritual union with His Body that Christ bought for us at the cost of his precious blood.
  - [Williamson]-*“Membership in the Church of Christ is part and parcel to union with Christ. He who is united to Christ is united to other believers. And being united with other believers necessarily entails solemn obligations to them. Thus, in the matter of worship, we are not only to consider the Fourth Commandment (which requires the individual to worship God on the*

*Sabbath), but also ‘let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is’ (Heb. 10:25).”*

- Faithful assembly with other true believers is a distinct and compelling consideration.
  - We are necessarily related to them by virtue of our common union with Christ.
    - When we reside in a particular place, we have the obligation to seek fellowship and communion with a particular people, at a particular assembly, on a particular day and time.
    - This requirement of union and communion ought also to extend in its expression, unto all those who, in every place call upon the name of Christ.
  - Where the Spirit dwells, the body of Christ is.
- [Williamson]- *“To say that the saints have union with Christ and communion with one another does not mean, however, that they have all things in common. Believers have union with Christ, but they do not partake of deity. They do not become of one substance with God. Christ ‘only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto’ (1 Tim. 6:16). Nor does the communion of believers with one another wipe out all differences among them. In history there have been many attempts by Christians to create a society in which all things were common, including the possession of goods and property. Scripture warrant for such is sought in the well-known reference in the book of Acts which says that ‘all that believed were together, and had all things in common.’ Concerning this, three comments may be made. First, there is no indication that this practice was commanded of God as normative for believers. Second, there is evidence that the right of private property was recognized by the Apostles (Acts 5:4). And finally, this attempt at communal property did not work out satisfactorily even in the apostolic church (Acts 6:1ff).*
- [Hodge]-*“If all saints are one, and are embraced in this ‘holy communion’ then all who profess to be saints should regard and treat all their fellow-professors on the presumption that they are ‘heirs together with them in the grace of life.’ ....surely we should be also one in all the charities, sympathies, and helpful offices possible, in these short and evil days of earthly pilgrimage. These mutual duties are, of course some of them public- as between different evangelical churches- and many of them are private and personal. Many of them relate to the souls, and many also to the bodies of the saints. The rule is the law of love in the heart, and the principles and examples of saints recorded in Scripture applied entirely to the special circumstances of every individual case. But while these mutual relations and offices of the saints sanctify, they are not designed to supersede the fundamental principles of human society, as the rights of property and the family tie.”*

**Chapter 27**

**OF  
THE  
SACRAMENTS**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 27:

### Of The Sacraments

Section 1. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace<sup>1</sup>, immediately instituted by God<sup>2</sup>, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him<sup>3</sup>: as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world<sup>4</sup>; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word<sup>5</sup>.

1. Gen 17:7, 10; Rom 4:11.
2. Mat 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23.
3. 1 Cor 10:16; 11:25-26; Gal 3:27.
4. Gen 34:14; Exod 12:48; Rom 15:8.
5. Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 10:16, 21.

#### **OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

*“This section of the Confession teaches us (1) what the sacraments essentially are, (2) by whom and how instituted, and (3) for what end they were established.”*

- In its classic usage, *sacrament* designated anything that bound or obligated a person to a cause, like a money given in pledge, an oath taken for loyalty, or an enlistment for military allegiance.
- The word *sacrament* does not appear in Scripture, and so it must be defined in a manner consistent with Scripture if it is to have any kind of meaningful use in Christ's Church.
- What is important is the doctrine; if the doctrine is taught in the Bible, it is merely and economy of speech to coin a term for it.
  - [John Calvin]- *“...we must not be bound to a confession woven and sewn superstitiously with Biblical words.... It is only necessary to have words truly in conformity with the Biblical truth and offering the least possible of those asperities [harshness qualities or conditions] which can offend pious ears.”*
- According to our Confession, sacraments are “holy signs and seals of the covenant or grace.”
- The Confession states four reasons for which the sacraments were given:
  - Christ and His benefits are represented (SIGN)
  - The sacraments put a visible difference between those who belong to the Church and the rest of the world; it makes evident that the benefit belongs to believers (SIGN)
  - The believer's interest in Christ is confirmed (SEAL)
  - The sacraments solemnly engage believers to the service of Christ, and are received as a means of grace exclusively for the receivers (SEAL)
- A SIGN is something by means of which something else is made known.
  - As Scripture says, (Romans 4:11) circumcision as a sign was given as a seal of righteousness through faith.
  - [Hodge]- *“The first section of this chapter says that a sacrament is an ordinance ‘immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ,’ etc. This is true if the word ‘sacrament’ is used in its general sense to include also the Old Testament sacraments of Circumcision and the Passover. But it is an important distinction of the New Testament sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper that they were both immediately instituted by Christ himself.”*
    - Moses' rod (Ex.4:150)- *Then Moses answered, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you.’” The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A staff.” And he said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. But the LORD said to Moses, “Put out your hand and catch it by the tail”—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand—“that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”*
    - The destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:29,30,33,34)- *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.... So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at*

*the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”*

- [Williams]- *“To say that a sacrament is a sign is to say that it is that which makes a declaration. It does not make a declaration concerning itself. If it did it would not be a sign of something else. A sacrament is a sign because it makes known or declares the saving grace of Christ. But for this reason the saving grace is to be distinguished from the sacrament which declares it.”*
- Rome has said that baptism (itself) *regenerates*. This confuses the sign with the thing signified.
  - [Hodge]-*“In its ecclesiastical usage, the word, while retaining its general sense of something binding as sacred, was at an early period used as the Latin equivalent of the Greek word mysterion, that which is unknown until revealed; and hence any symbol, type, or rite having a latent spiritual meaning. Hence the word naturally came to be applied in a general and vague sense to the Christian ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and with them also to many other religious doctrines and ordinances. It is plainly, therefore, impossible to determine the nature or the number of the sacraments from either the etymology or the usage of the word ‘sacrament.’ We want a thorough definition of the THING, not the NAME. This we can get only by taking Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which all men acknowledge to be genuine sacraments, and, by a strict examination of their origin, nature, and uses, determine the true character of the class of ordinances to which they belong, and whether any other ordinances belong to the same class or not. In this way the definition of a sacrament given in our Standards was formed.”*
- A Sacrament then is an ordinance immediately instituted by Christ.
  - This necessarily excludes most of the pretended sacraments of the Church of Rome from having any right place in this classification of *Christian* ordinances.
    - Rome recognizes seven “sacraments” adding these five to Baptism and the Lord’s Table (some national conferences add even more):
      - Confirmation- receiving of a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit to increase the ability to practice deeper communion with Christ.
      - Penance- Regular confession of sins to a priest and receiving of his absolution upon completion of some imposed works.
      - Extreme Unction- Anointing of the sick by a priest with oil, receiving “last rites,” etc.
      - Holy Orders- ordaining of men as priests, and women as nuns.
      - Marriage- union of baptized Catholics in marriage in an authorized church by an authorized church officer.
    - Rome even finds a way to misinterpret and mis-apply the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Table by confusing the signs with the things signified:
      - Baptism- Rome makes the *practice* into the actual point of regeneration.
      - The Lord’s Table- Rome makes Christ the actual, real, and present object partaken of (pointing to the practice) rather than spiritual communion, which it the thing the Table signifies.
    - There is no clear Scriptural warrant for any Sacrament except the two specifically initiated by Christ in the New Testament as treatment of Old Testament practice of Circumcision and the Passover celebration.
  - [Williamson]-*“If God may be worshiped in any way whatsoever apart from specific scriptural warrant, then there does not seem to be any good reason why such “sacraments” [as ROME] may not be added. But if God is to be worshiped within the precise limits of divine commandment, then the position of Rome is overthrown and that of the Confession is invulnerable when it says that there are only two sacraments.”*
- A Sacrament always consists of two signifying elements:
  - An outward, sensible sign.
  - An inward, spiritual grace, thereby signified.
  - Declares the saving grace of Christ.

- [Hodge]-“*The sign in every sacrament is sacramentally united to the grace which it signifies; and out of this union the Scriptural usage has arisen of ascribing to the sign whatever is true of that which the sign signifies.*”
  - The Sacraments were designed (by God) to *represent, seal, and apply* the benefits of Christ and the New Covenant to believers. (Cf. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 92).
  - Practice of the Sacraments are designed to be pledges of our fidelity to Christ, binding us to His service, and at the same time be badges of our profession, visibly marking the body of professors and distinguishing us from the world.
- A SEAL is something which authenticates or confirms that to which it is affixed or appended.
  - The seal is of benefit to the *recipient*, not the *giver*.
    - Sacraments are a confirming testimony to the believer concerning what he has received by grace through Christ.
    - Sacraments are of benefit to the receiver because they publicly make known or declare and identify to others the salvation in Christ which the believer receives *distinct* from the sacrament itself.
  - The seal does not *cause* grace, neither is grace dependent *upon* the sacraments.
- IN SUMMARY-
  - [Hodge]-“*Every sacrament consists of two elements-(1) an outward, sensible sign; and (2) an inward, spiritual grace thereby signified.*  
*“In Baptism the outward sensible sign is-- (1) Water, and (2) The water applied in the name of the Triune God to the person of the subject baptized. The inward, spiritual grace, thereby signified is--(1) Primarily, spiritual purification by the immediate personal power of the Holy Ghost in the soul; and hence, (2) Secondarily, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, hence the union of the baptized with Christ, hence regeneration, justification, sanctification, perseverance to the end, glorifications, etc. (i.e., all the benefits of the new covenant.*  
*“In the Lord’s Supper, the outward, sensible signs, are -(1) Bread and wine; and (2) The consecrations, and the bread broken, and the wine poured out, distributed to, and received and eaten and drunk by, the communicants. The inward, spiritual grace, thereby signified is-- (1) Primarily, Christ crucified (his flesh torn and blood shed) for us, and giving himself to us to be spiritually received and assimilated as the principle of a new life; and hence, (2) Secondarily, union with Christ, the indwelling of the Spirit, regeneration, justification, sanctification, etc. (i.e., all the benefits secured by the sacrificial death of Christ.”*

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 27:

### Of The Sacraments

**Section 2.** There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass that the names and the effects of the one are attributed to the other<sup>1</sup>.

1. a. Gen 17:10; Mat 26:27-28; Titus 3:5.

**Section 3.** The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it<sup>1</sup>, but upon the work of the Spirit<sup>2</sup>, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers<sup>3</sup>.

2. a. Rom 2:28-29; 1 Pet 3:21.
3. Mat 3:11; 1 Cor 12:13.
4. Mat 26:27-28.

**Section 4.** There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord: neither of which may be dispensed by any but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained<sup>1</sup>.

5. Mat 28:19-20, 19; 1 Cor 4:1; 11:20, 23; Heb 5:4.

**Section 5.** The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New<sup>1</sup>.

6. 1 Cor 10:1-4.

#### **OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

*“These sections of the Confession are designed to refute certain errors of the sacerdotal system.”*

- **“Sacerdotal”** (adj.)-Relating to priests or the priesthood; priestly, priestcraft. In theology, sacerdotalism relates to or denotes a doctrine that ascribes sacrificial functions, and spiritual or supernatural powers to ordained priests, or generally speaks of their presumed mediatorial office between mankind and God.
- **ERRORS & ANSWERS:**
  - 1941 Baltimore Catechism #3 (Roman Catholic Church),
    1. “The sacraments give grace through a power which they possess to sanctify the souls of men as the instruments of God.”
    2. “The one administering a sacrament must have the intention of doing what the Church does in giving the sacrament.”
    3. “There are seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation , Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.”
  - *Sacerdotal writers frequently appeal to portions of texts like Acts 22:16; and 1 Peter 3:21-*
    - [Acts 22:16]-(Ananias, speaking to Paul at the restoration of his sight following his Damascus Road meeting with the risen Christ) “*“And now why do you wait? Rise and **be baptized and wash away your sins**, calling on his name.”*”
    - [1 Peter 3:21]- “***Baptism**, which corresponds to this, **now saves you**, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*”
  - In these texts, the Apostles clearly use a form of expression which attributes a *spiritual effect* to a *material sign*.
  - But our Confession contends that the relation between the invisible and the visible (the thing signified and the sign) is such that the “names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.”
  - A more complete reading of 1 Peter 3:21 amply supports our Confession against the view of Rome- Baptism as a *sign* or a *figure* corresponds to the salvation as testimony of a good conscience toward God. The washing away of the filth of sin by the water does not itself save anyone.

- [Williamson]- *“Why would Peter call such a statement a figure if it was meant to be taken literally? And why would he take the trouble to deny that baptism saves us by cleansing away the filth of the flesh, unless he was aware that his mode of expression had led some to suppose that the outward sign itself could save? The real cleansing accomplished by the work of grace is ‘the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost’*
  - (Titus 3:4-7)- *“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”*
  - Baptism is spoken of by Titus, only because it is a *figure* of “the real thing.”
  - Sacramental union may be compared with (but is not the same as) the union that exists between two natures of Christ.
    - Because divine and human natures are united in His person, it happens that the names and effects of the one nature are attributed to the other.
  - [Williamson]- *“In Acts 20:28 we read of ‘the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.’ The divine nature has not flesh and blood. Yet Christ, who had flesh and blood is God. It is therefore proper to speak of the ‘divine-human person’ according to terminology and descriptions applicable to either nature. And there is a similar reason to speak of the sign and the grace signified together by means of terminology derived from either one.”*
  - Baptism is efficacious, but it does not regenerate.
- The central distinction between *Sacerdotalism* and our Confession, *“is just whether it is God the Lord who saves us, or it is men, acting in the name and clothed with the powers of God, to whom we are to look for salvation. This is the issue which divides sacerdotalism and evangelical religion.”* [B.B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*].
  - The sacerdotal view is that the saving grace of God is contained in the sacraments and conveyed by their administration.
  - The Reformed view is that God the Holy Ghost works when, where, and how He wills to confer saving grace, and that the sacraments are dependent upon and subordinate to His sovereign operations.
  - It is because He is pleased to use the sacraments to exhibit and to confer grace that they become efficacious.
- Roman Catholics believe that they are more certain of receiving divine grace through their understanding and practice of sacerdotal priestcraft than Reformed Christians.
- Reformed Christians believe that we are completely dependent upon the grace of God.
- Rome believes that divine grace is conditioned and controlled by the uncertain states and conditions of men.
  - Even if a person could convince himself that he possessed the right disposition and motive, it would never be possible to be sure that he had not received the sacraments from the hand of a Judas with the wrong intention.
  - (1 John 4:1-3)- *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.”*
- The Reformed Faith *subordinates* the sacrament to grace, thus making the validity and efficacy of the sacraments *independent* of men.
  - The sacrament is valid and efficacious because it is appointed by Christ, and is made effectual when and where he is pleased to confer saving grace by his Holy Spirit,
  - (1 Corinthians 12:13)- *“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and were made to drink of one Spirit.”*
- Rome has always seemed compelled to (virtually) grant that all of its Church members are, in *some degree*, sacerdotal priests.
  - No Roman Catholic *other than a priest* would be permitted to administer the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, or conduct Mass.
  - But since saving grace is only contained in and conveyed by the sacraments, *“if there is danger that someone will die without Baptism, anyone else may and should baptize.”* (Baltimore Catechism, Q.824).



- *Only the priests* of Rome can really administer the sacraments-yet *anyone* may administer the sacrament of Baptism.
- Rome's is an incomplete system of doctrine, and a schizophrenic system of practice.
- The Reformed view is that neither sacrament may be administered by any but a minister of the Word who has been lawfully ordained.
  - This is not based in preserving the interests of any priestly office, or to bear up a superstitious view of the ministry.
  - The Confession maintains this view because:
    - Scripture testifies that ministers of Christ are:
      - To be stewards of the mysteries of God (1Cor. 4:1ff);
      - Convinced that no man takes that honor upon himself, likening the office to that of the Old Testament priesthood (Heb. 5:4).
    - [Williamson]- *"There is no evidence in Scripture to show that other than church officers ever administered the sacraments in the apostolic church."*
    - The Sacraments are not containers and conveyers of automatic grace, or that they are themselves instruments of conversion.
      - [Williamson]- *"God has called all believers to witness because none can be converted without the gospel. If the sacraments were, as the Roman Catholic Church claims, possessed of inherent power to take away original sin and give our souls new life, then it would be expected that every believer would administer them at every opportunity."*
      - The Confession safeguards the truth that the sacraments are merely *signs* and *seals* of God's grace bestowed wholly without Himself depending upon them- it is not as if true salvation is absolutely impossible apart from the sacraments.
- The Confession teaches that there have only been two essential sacraments throughout the history of the Church (both Old and New Covenants).
- Circumcision and Baptism are substantially the same thing, and signify the same things spiritually.
  - Both are *initiative* rites: administered one time only.
  - Both are marks of *inclusion* within the elect, to the elect (to believers and to our children).
  - Both picture the inception of union with God: of cleansing, justification
  - Both are marks of *distinction* from the world, to the world.
  - Both grant *entrance* into an *objective* body, with rights, privileges, and behavioral responsibilities.
  - Both are wholly passive- the initiate receives what another performs.

#### BAPTISM IS THE SUBJECT OF CHAPTER 28

- Passover and the Lord's Supper are substantially the same thing as well.
  - Both are administered repeatedly to each member.
  - Both are administered to believers only
  - Both point to Christ's substitutionary sacrifice and atonement.
  - Both portend our constant need for spiritual nourishment, growth, and sanctification only possible from the Lamb of God.
  - Both signify our inclusion in Christ's Body.
  - Both mark us as protected from reprobation and damnation by covenant in Christ's Blood.
  - Both are active- the participant partakes by his own actions.

#### THE LORD'S SUPPER IS THE SUBJECT OF CHAPTER 29

- The Old Testament ordinances have become our New Testament Sacraments.
  - "The New is in the Old concealed, the Old is in the New revealed." (*attributed to Augustine of Hippo, 354-430*)
  - "The bloody signs were superseded by two bloodless signs, but the significance remains the same" (G.I. Williamson)
- One often overlooked observation about the comparison of the Old and New Testament identifications of the Sacraments:
  - The Apostle Paul sometimes uses the name of an Old Testament sacrament when speaking to those who were not Jews, and who had received only the New Testament sacrament, and vice versa.
    - He says that the Israelites were baptized, whereas they were actually circumcised (1 Cor. 10:1-3).
    - He speaks of the Colossians as circumcised, though in fact they were baptized (Col. 2:11).

- He speaks of the Passover as belonging to the Corinthians, though they observed the Lord's Supper, not the Passover. (1 Cor. 5:6ff).
- The Passover became the Lord's Supper once and for all on the night in which he was betrayed (Matt. 26:17f; Luke 22:15f).
- [Williamson]-*"How are we to explain this interchange of sacramental terminology in the New Testament? It is because of (1) 'a spiritual relation... between the sign and the things signified; when it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other,' This means that there is such a relationship between sacrament and grace that we may speak of the sacrament as if it were the grace, and vice versa. (2) 'The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified... were, for substance the same with those of the New.'*"
  - The meaning is that circumcision and baptism are linked together because they both sustain the same kind of spiritual relation to the same grace.
  - The grace can be spoken of by means of the name of the sacrament related to it, so it follows that the name of the one sacrament can be applied to the other sacrament.
  - If the same grace can be called circumcision and also baptism, then there seems to be no reason why the Apostle could not speak of baptism as if it were circumcision (e.g., Col. 2:11,12).

So, there seems to be great Scriptural warrant for the doctrine presented in these sections of the Confession.

**Chapter 28**

**OF  
BAPTISM**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 28:

### Of Baptism

Section 1. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church<sup>2</sup>, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace<sup>3</sup>, of his ingrafting into Christ<sup>4</sup>, of regeneration<sup>5</sup>, of remission of sins<sup>6</sup>, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life<sup>7</sup>: which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in his Church until the end of the world<sup>8</sup>.

1. Mat 28:19.
2. 1 Cor 12:13.
3. Rom 4:11 with Col 2:11-12.
4. Rom 6:5; Gal 3:27.
5. Titus 3:5.
6. Mark 1:4.
7. Rom 6:3-4.
8. Mat 28:19-20.

Section 2. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the gospel lawfully called thereunto<sup>1</sup>.

1. Mat 3:11; 28:19-20; John 1:33.

#### OBSERVATIONS - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

*“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that baptism is a sacrament (according to the definition made in the preceding chapter), (2) what baptism means, (3) how it is to be administered, and (4) how long this sacrament is to continue in the Church of God.”*

- As has already been shown, the sacraments are “holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace” instituted by Christ.
  - This establishes that baptism is a sacrament.
  - It does not save us, but is a figure of that which does save us.
  - (1 Peter 3:21-22)- *“Baptism, which corresponds to this [referring to Noah's family being brought safely through the flood of God's judging the world with the flood], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but was an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.”*
  - It was instituted by Jesus himself in the Great Commission
    - (Matthew 28:19)- *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”*
- What is the meaning of baptism?
  - [Williamson] - *“The Confession indicates that the meaning of baptism is not to be found in one single aspect of the doctrine taught in Scripture but in a complex or manifold concept. Baptism signifies (1) admission into the visible Church, (2) the grace of the covenant, (3) regeneration, (4) the remission of sins, and (5) the duty of new obedience. In other words, the meaning of baptism is rich. It is a sign and seal, not of this or that part of a certain great work of divine grace, but of the whole complex wonder of it.”*
  - Baptism is not a static thing then... it is rather dynamic, and shows the great work of God whereby dead sinners are brought into living union with Christ and with God.
  - It is efficacious, because it is a sign and a seal of a sovereign act of regeneration by God.
  - The central concept expressed by baptism is the union with Christ itself, which is clearly shown in the Matthew 28:19 rendering.
- Believers and their children are to be baptize INTO the name of the Triune God- Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Baptism is in this manner, RELATIONAL.
  - When Paul said to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 10:1&2) that the children of Israel, *“...were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,”* he meant that:
    - They left Egypt and all the *relationships* they had there.
    - They entered a new *relationship* with Moses, and identified once again as Israelites.
  - And so it is with those who are baptized into *relationship* with the Triune God.

- When Paul said earlier in his epistle (1Cor. 1:11-13), *“For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”* He was correcting a wrong understanding of *baptismal relationship* among the Corinthians.
    - No Christians were especially united to Paul through the waters of their baptisms.
    - Nor were they especially united to Apollos, or Peter.
- Paul’s arguments would have no relevance if union (or intimate and special relationship) are not the central *significance* of baptism.... As long as that union and *relationship* is properly anchored to Christ.
  - [Willimson]- *“Yet union with God through Jesus Christ is a relationship which involves a whole complex of integral matters. One cannot have union with God except there be a removal of the guilt and defilement of sin. There can be no relationship of intimate concord with God on the part of one who is yet under the dominion of sin. So it is that Scripture focuses now upon one and not upon another of the several subordinate aspects of the union. Peter speaks of baptism with special reference to ‘the remission of sins’ and the ‘gift of the Holy Ghost’ (Acts 2:38). Paul emphasizes ‘washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Titus 3:5). And again, he specifies the duty to walk in newness of life which belongs to those who are baptized (Romans 4:12). But the predominant theme of Scripture’s references to baptism is union with Christ and the Triune God which embraces and transcends all other subordinate aspects of the meaning of the sacrament.”*
  - (1 Corinthians 12:12&13)- *“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”*
  - (Galatians 3:26-29)- *“for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”*
  - (Romans 6:3&4)- *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”*
- As we previously discussed in Chapter 27, the sacraments simply express the verbal content of the gospel in a non-verbal form.
- Baptism, and its saving reception, expresses and represents the aspect of the gospel pertaining to:
  - EFFECTUAL CALLING. Out from eternal death.
  - REGENERATION. Into eternal life
  - CONVERSION. Out of one condition into one infinitely better.
  - JUSTIFICATION. Legally forgiven and set free from the guilt of sin.
  - ADOPTION. Brought into a familial relationship with the Triune God.
- In these comparisons, we see:
  - Why baptism is rightly administered only once to any individual person.
  - Why baptism is representational of a sovereign act of grace upon passive individual persons.
  - [Williamson]- *“This is in accord with that work of God if which baptism is a visible representation or ‘picture.’ Regeneration is the act of God alone. The sinner is dead. Regeneration is that which makes him alive. We cannot say that the sinner is active in his regeneration. He is wholly passive. But as soon as he is regenerated, he is alive. And this means that he is in union with Christ. For IN Christ is life. It is true that he will now be able to repent and to believe. And he will be active in repentance and faith. But he can do this only because the seeds of repentance and faith are already present in him by virtue of regeneration and union with Christ.”*
- Baptism then, represents a rite of *passage* from death, into life, in which man is essentially passive, as testified by the Apostles:
  - “Buried with him in Baptism” (Colossians 2:12). We did not bury ourselves.
  - “Planted with him in the likeness of His death” (Romans 6:5). We did not plant ourselves.
  - “Our old self was crucified with Him” (Romans 6:6). Christ did not crucify Himself, and neither did we.
- [Williamson]-*“When baptism is [wrongly] described as if it were a symbol of an activity performed by man (rather than a union created) by God, its true meaning is contradicted. This is the ultimate objection to the Baptist view of this ordinance.”*
  - Baptists say:
    - That baptism should only be given to adults, because only adults are capable of performing that activity which baptism signifies.
    - That baptism signifies the activity by which a man *joins himself* to Christ.
    - [A.H. Strong] (American Baptist theologian, 1836-1921, *Systematic Theology*)- *“The essence of it is the joining of ourselves to another before the world.”*
  - The answers to the Baptist view are:

- Baptism should be given to children of believers as well as believers because God is capable of creating that union in children of which baptism is a sign and seal.
- Baptism signifies that union which is created between God and sinners by God's power ALONE.
- Baptism is not the *activity* of God, directly causing this union by baptismal regeneration.
- Baptism is not the *activity* of Man that results from this union, a mere response to his "credible profession."
- It is the union itself which is the result of God's work alone, and which effects the entirety of man's gracious activity.
- And, because this union is created only once, there can be only one baptism. Repeated "baptisms" would not represent God's grace in the efficacy that belongs to it.
- [B.B. Warfield]- *"Baptism, as circumcision, is a gift of God to his people, not of his people to God. Abraham did not bring circumcision to God: he received it from God. God gave it to him as a 'sign' and a 'seal,' not to others but to himself. It is inadequate, therefore, to speak of baptism as 'the badge of a Christian man's profession.' By receiving it, we do make claim to be members of Christ, and our reception of it does mark us out to the observation of our fellowmen as his followers. But this is only an incidental effect. The witness of baptism is not to others but to ourselves; and it is not by us but by God that the witness is borne. We have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and God gives us this sign as a perpetual witness that this faith is acceptable to him, and as a seal, an abiding pledge, that he will always treat it as such. He who has been baptized bears in himself God's testimony and engagement to his salvation."*
- There is no real argument among Christian denominations that the outward element to be used in the sacrament is water, or that the party to be baptized is to be baptized into the Triune Name.

*[Means and modes of baptism will be discussed in following sections.]*

- Baptism is to be administered to the end of the world, precisely because Christ, in the Great Commission deemed it to be so.
  - [Williamson] - *"Since the scope of this great commission is world-wide and age-long, and since the promise of the Savior is to sustain his church in the engagement of this duty to the end of the age, it follows that this sacrament is to be continued until the end has come."*



# SELECTED SHORTER WRITINGS VOL.1

## BBWarfield

Edited by John E. Meeter

### CHRISTIAN BAPTISM\*

No rite or ceremony enters into the essence of Christianity. There were some in Paul's day who thought that the blessings of salvation could be enjoyed only by those who performed certain ritual acts. But Paul defended with the utmost vigor the gospel of salvation by faith alone. He made it perfectly clear that he meant to exclude not merely moral but also religious acts. He took Abraham for his example. Abraham, he said, was justified by faith, by faith apart from all works — all works of the moral law, of course, but also all works of religious ceremonial. God, of set purpose, gave Abraham the rite of circumcision not before but after his justification, for the precise purpose of making it plain that justification is by faith alone and is not secured or conditioned by the performance of any rite.

Here is Paul's argument in one of its briefest expressions, Rom. iv. 9-12: "For we say, To Abraham his faith was reckoned for righteousness. How then was it reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision: and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be in uncircumcision, that righteousness might be reckoned unto them; and the father of circumcision to them who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham which he had in uncircumcision." According to this all those that believe are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise given to him, whether they are circumcised or not. But not all those who are circumcised are his children and

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heirs, but only those among them that believe. In other words, it is not circumcision but faith which counts. For, as Paul wrote elsewhere, Gal. iii. 7, 9, with crisp exclusiveness, "they that are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham," and are blessed with him.

From the fact that no rite or ceremony enters into the essence of Christianity, however, it does not follow that all rites and ceremonies may be safely neglected by the Christian, if not positively despised. Paul who set circumcision summarily aside as in no sense a condition or procuring cause of salvation, did not treat it as of no value. In the wider sweep of this same argument he found occasion to ask the question, "What is the profit of circumcision?" Rom. iii. 1. The answer was "Much every way." Precisely what the nature of this great and varied profit was Paul did not here state. But this is sufficiently intimated in the passage already considered. According to this passage circumcision had no function whatever in the procuring or reception of salvation, whether as a means of securing it, or as a condition of its gift, or as a channel of its bestowment. It did not precede salvation as, in one way or another, obtaining it or facilitating its reception; it followed upon it, as presupposing its existence already. Its actual function is declared in the two words, "sign" and "seal": "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision." While yet uncircumcised, Abraham believed. Through this faith he received a righteousness bestowed on him by the God who "justifieth the ungodly." God in his grace gave him circumcision as a sign and a seal of this righteousness. The value of circumcision consisted therefore just in this: that it marked Abraham out, by a visible sign, as one who had received this righteousness from God and was henceforth to be the Lord's, and it sealed that righteousness to him under a covenant promise.

Baptism is the form that the circumcision which God gave Abraham in the old covenant takes in the new. The apostle therefore called it "the circumcision of Christ," Col. ii. 11, the circumcision, that is, which we have received in this new dispensation in which Christ is now Lord and Master. In the pas-

sage from the old covenant to the new the form of the rite was changed, not its substance. It remains a "sign" which God has given his people, marking them out as his, and a "seal" binding them indissolubly to him and pledging them his unbroken favor. Baptism, as circumcision, is a gift of God to his people, not of his people to God. Abraham did not bring circumcision to God; he "received" it from God. God gave it to him as a "sign" and a "seal," not to others but to himself. It is inadequate, therefore, to speak of baptism as "the badge of a Christian man's profession." By receiving it, we do make claim to be members of Christ, and our reception of it does mark us out to the observation of our fellowmen as his followers. But this is only an incidental effect. The witness of baptism is not to others but to ourselves; and it is not by us but by God that the witness is borne. We have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and God gives us this sign as a perpetual witness that this faith is acceptable to him, and as a seal, an abiding pledge, that he will always treat it as such. He who has been baptized bears in himself God's testimony and engagement to his salvation.

It is thus that Paul could write of God's people being buried and raised again with Christ in baptism. Col. ii. 12; Rom. vi. 4. This does not mean that they acquire an interest in Christ by subjecting themselves to baptism. It means that by receiving baptism they indicate that they are in Christ, participants in the benefits of his death and resurrection; and that these benefits are now sealed to them under the sanction of a covenant promise. We are now like documents to which the seals have been attached. We may think that a signet ring with the name of the Lord upon it has been impressed upon us to authenticate us as his forever. What has happened to us is that we are called by the "honorable name" (James ii. 7). The meaning of that is that we have been marked as the peculiar possession of our Lord, over whom he claims ownership, and to the protection and guidance of whom he pledges himself.

There is nothing in the whole history of the people of God which they value more highly, on which they more deeply felicitate themselves, on which they more securely depend, than



that they are called by the name of the Lord. It was to this fact that they appealed when in their affliction they turned to the Hope of Israel, the Savior thereof in time of trouble: "Thou, O Jehovah, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not" (Jer. xiv. 9). It was in this that their jubilation reached its height: "I am called by thy name, O Jehovah, God of hosts" (Jer. xv. 16). When our Lord commanded his disciples to baptize those whom in their world-wide mission they should draw to Christ "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," precisely what he bade them do was to call them by the name of the Triune God, that they might be marked out as his and sealed to him as an eternal possession.

Naturally, therefore, this sign and seal belongs only to those who are the Lord's. Or, to put it rather in the positive form, this sign and seal belongs to all those who are the Lord's. There are no distinctions of race or station, sex or age; there is but one prerequisite — that we are the Lord's. What it means is just this and nothing else: that we are the Lord's. What it pledges is just this and nothing else: that the Lord will keep us as his own. We need not raise the question, then, whether infants are to be baptized. Of course they are, if infants, too, may be the Lord's. Naturally, as with adults, it is only the infants who are the Lord's who are to be baptized; but equally naturally as with adults, all infants that are the Lord's are to be baptized. Being the Lord's they have a right to the sign that they are the Lord's and to the pledge of the Lord's holy keeping. Circumcision, which held the place in the old covenant that baptism holds in the new, was to be given to all infants born within the covenant. Baptism must follow the same rule. This and this only can determine its conference: Is the recipient a child of the covenant, with a right therefore to the sign and seal of the covenant? We cannot withhold the sign and seal of the covenant from those who are of the covenant.

The baptism of infants, no doubt, presupposes that salvation is altogether of the Lord. No infant can be the Lord's unless it is the Lord who makes him such. If salvation waits on anything we can do, no infant can be saved; for there is nothing that an infant can do. In that case no infant can have

a right to the sign and seal of salvation. But infants in this do not differ in any way from adults; of all alike it is true that it is only "of God" that they are in Christ Jesus. The purpose of Paul in arguing out the doctrine of signs and seals, was to show once for all from the typical case of Abraham that salvation is always a pure gratuity from God, and signs and seals do not precede it as its procuring cause or condition, but follow it as God's witness to its existence and promise to sustain it. Every time we baptize an infant we bear witness that salvation is from God, that we cannot do any good thing to secure it, that we receive it from his hands as a sheer gift of his grace, and that we all enter the Kingdom of heaven therefore as little children, who do not do, but are done for.

Surely it is only a curious question how exactly baptism is to be administered. Our concern is in its significance, not in the mode of its performance. The New Testament leaves us in no doubt as to its meaning. But we may search the New Testament in vain if we are seeking minute instructions how we are to perform it. It is, no doubt, not merely a sign and a seal, but also a symbol, and the symbolism it embodies cannot be a matter of indifference to us. It is a washing of the body with water to symbolize the absolute cleansing of the soul in the blood of Jesus Christ. We must not lose this symbolism. But it does not follow that in order to preserve it we must enact a complete bath in the manner in which we administer the rite. Complete cleansing may be symbolized by the washing of the feet only, John xiii. 10, or of the hands only, Mark vii. 2. It was God himself who declared, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean" (Ezek. xxxvi. 25). It is not the amount of water which we employ but the purpose for which we employ it that is of moment. In Jesus Christ we are washed clean of all our sins. He has given us a sign that our sins are washed away and a pledge that we shall be clean in him. Any application of water which will symbolize this cleansing will serve as such a sign and seal.

It is important that we should not narrow the symbolism of baptism. Baptism does not symbolize any section or part of salvation, but the whole of salvation. Baptism and the Lord's



Supper, for instance, do not divide the field between them, each symbolizing one element in the broad process of salvation or one exercise in the complex enjoyment of salvation. They are two ways of symbolizing salvation as a whole. Salvation is cleansing, salvation is ransoming. Baptism represents it from the one point of view, the Lord's Supper from the other. Whichever sign and seal we are thinking of, it marks us out as sharers in all the benefits of Christ's redemption and pledges them to us. Baptism therefore symbolizes not merely the cleansing of our sins but our consequent walk in new obedience. This, let us never forget, is not only symbolized for us but sealed to us, for baptism is given to us by God as an engagement on his part to bring us safely through to the end. In receiving it, we receive upon our persons the seal of his covenant promise.

It is not only our duty, then, but our high privilege, to receive baptism. We not only obey God's command in receiving it, but lay hold of his covenant promise. Having his mark upon us, and resting upon his pledge, we may go forward in joy and sure expectation of his gracious keeping in this life and his acceptance of us into his glory hereafter. Under this encouragement we are daily and hourly and momently to work out the salvation thus sealed to us, in the blessed knowledge that it is God who, in fulfilment of his pledge, is working in us both the willing and the doing. Thus we shall, as our fathers expressed it, "improve our baptism." We improve it "by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavoring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those

that have therein given up their names to Christ, and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body." Surely, he who does these things shall never stumble, but shall be fully girded for entrance into that eternal Kingdom for which we are marked and sealed in our baptism.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 28:

### Of Baptism

**Section 5.** Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance<sup>1</sup>, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it<sup>2</sup>, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated<sup>3</sup>.

1. Luke 7:30 with Exod. 4:24-26.
2. Acts 10:2, 4, 22, 31, 45, 47; Rom 4:11.
3. Acts 8:13, 23.

**Section 6.** The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered<sup>1</sup>; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time<sup>2</sup>.

1. John 3:5, 8.
2. Acts 2:38, 41; Gal 3:27; Eph 5:25-26; Titus 3:5.

**Section 7.** The sacrament of baptism is but once to be administered to any person<sup>1</sup>.

1. Titus 3:5.

#### **OBSERVATIONS - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

*“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that it is an error to neglect the ordinance of baptism, (2) that salvation is not absolutely inseparable from it, (3) that salvation is not guaranteed by it, (4) that the efficacy of baptism is not tied to the moment of administration of it, and (5) that it is a means of grace when rightly administered (but once, and according to the Word of God).”*

- If baptism is truly ordained by Jesus Christ as a sacrament of the New Testament, and it is supposed to be continued in His church to the end of the world (Section 1), then it necessarily follows that it would be great error to neglect it, condemn it, or censure its importance.
- If neglect of circumcision resulted in the wrath of God and His displeasure against Moses (Ex. 4:24-26), and if snubbing John's baptism by the Pharisees and lawyers was likewise condemned (Luke 7:30), then how much more should we also consider the gravity of neglecting something commanded by the Lord?
- God's wrath against Moses was not because Moses neglected the ordinance of circumcision for himself, but because he had neglected the circumcision of his children.
- Basically, we are only saying that all error is inherently sinful, and neglect or wrong practice is error.
  - [Williamson]- *“Presbyterians as well as Baptists, are sinful and thus not free from error in varying degrees in every area. It should be noted in this connection that it is less heinous in the sight of God when it is not caused by conscious disobedience or neglect. He who knows the truth and then disobeys is guilty to a greater degree than he who obeys a misinformed conscience.”*
  - Hebrews 10:26-29 *“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?”*
- Baptism is a moral duty, and a person who could be baptized (or who could present his children for baptism) but would not is in a very different position from a person who would be baptized but could not.
  - [Williamson]- *“There may be instances in which it is physically impossible for a believer to receive this sacrament (e.g., the thief on the cross). Because such an individual neither deprecates nor neglects the ordinance, we cannot say that he errs merely because divine providence prevents his baptism. But if a person is not baptized for the reason that he either condemns or neglects the ordinance he is guilty of sin.”*
- But to say that baptism is required by the law of God for believers and their children, is NOT the same thing as saying that baptism is required for salvation itself.
  - [Williamson]- *“What man must do as a moral duty must not be confused with what God may do. Scripture shows that it is possible to have everything signified and sealed by baptism without*

having baptism itself. Everyone knows that the thief on the cross was saved. And he was saved in that era when John the Baptist and Jesus himself required that men be baptized for the remission of sins. But he was prevented from being baptized by providential circumstances over which he had no control. God did not change these circumstances preventing baptism but saved him without baptism.”

- [Hodge]- “Baptism cannot be the only or ordinary means of regeneration, because faith and repentance are the fruits of regeneration, and the prerequisites of Baptism.”
  - Acts 2:38-39- “And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”
  - Acts 8:34-38- “And the eunuch said to Philip, ‘About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.”
  - Acts 10:44-48- “While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, ‘Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.”
- On the other hand, Scripture also shows that men may have been baptized (circumcised under the Older Covenant- Cf, Romans 9) under proper administration without actually experiencing the saving grace that it signifies and seals.
  - Simon Magus (Acts 8) was baptized by the Philip, yet he remained, “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity,” (v23).
  - But those who are really in union with Christ cannot be in the “bonds of iniquity”
    - Romans 6:11- “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”
    - Romans 6:14- “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”
  - [Williamson] “(one) could not have had rightly administered baptism together with a sin-bound heart if it were not true that baptism is separable from the grace of which it is a sign and seal, and if it were not also true that baptism may be rightly administered to those who do not really possess the grace of which it is a sign and seal.”
- Neither can it be argued that baptism may be administered only on the presumption that the one baptized is (or will necessarily become) united with Christ (e.g., Esau, Judas, Simon, etc.).
  - Baptism never causes union with Christ, and that is not its purpose.
  - The purpose of baptism is not to effect union with Christ, but to confirm and testify such, in the full light and profession of God’s Sovereign Grace in His predestinating, decretal election of us and our covenant children in eternity-past.
- It can only be argued that God commanded believers to give the sign and seal of the covenant to their children, even if it could not be presumed that they were, or would be, in union with Christ, but because of our faithful profession of His election.
  - [Williamson]-“The Bible does not teach that the proper administration of the sacrament of baptism requires that those who receive it actually possess union with Christ. There is, in other words, a real discrepancy between the proper administration of baptism and the working of saving grace. God has given orders which do not provide for the baptism of all true believers (Luke 23:33, 43) and which do provide for the baptism of some who are not destined to eternal life.”
- We must not therefore limit the efficacy of baptism to the moment of its administration.
  - Baptism does NOT end at the moment of its administration, but effects the entire life of the person thereafter
  - To say that the impact of baptism is only immediate, is to deny that we will necessarily spend our lives being brought back to it for comfort, exhortation, or admonition (Cf, Luke 3:15-17, 21-22).
- God gives union with Christ to whom HE wills, AS He wills, and WHEN He wills.
  - The effect of baptism is not that it causes union with Christ, but that it testifies of this union.

- Baptism, like circumcision, may have no effect on some people, but infant baptism (like infant circumcision) does have a profound and life-long effect upon those who are actually saved long after the incident of initiation.
- How might all of this be “flow-charted” or ordered? There are really only two legitimate ways:
  - Physical baptism, followed (at some point in time) by Effectual Calling into union with Christ, and then the realization of the *efficacy* of the baptism.
  - Effectual Calling into union with Christ, then physical baptism, and the realization of the efficacy of the baptism.
- No other order works.
  - No one can experience the efficacy of baptism prior to their physical baptism.
  - No one can experience the efficacy of baptism prior to their effectual calling.
- Baptism is never to be administered more than one to any person:
  - [Hodge]- *“That baptism is never to be administered more than once to any person appears (1) from the symbolical signification of the rite. It signifies spiritual regeneration- the inauguration of the divine life. Of course, it can have but one commencement. (2) It is the rite of initiation into the Christian Church, and as there is no provision made for getting out of the Church when once in, so there is no provision made for coming in more than once. (3) The Apostles baptized each individual but once.”*

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 29:

### Of The Lord's Supper

**Section 1:** Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein he was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of his body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in his Church, unto the end of the world; for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death, the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body<sup>1</sup>.

1. 1 Cor 10:16-17, 21; 11:23-26; 12:13.

#### **OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

*"This section of the Confession teaches us (1) that the Lord's Supper is a sacrament instituted by Christ, (2) that it was instituted on the night in which he was betrayed, (3) that it was to be observed in his Church until the end of the world, (4) that it was given for (a) the perpetual remembrance of his sacrifice, (b) the sealing of all benefits thereof to true believers, (c) their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, (d) their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe him, and (e) a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his body."*

#### **FURTHER OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to A.A. Hodge)

*"This section teaches us (1) of the time in which, and the person by whom, the Lord's Supper was instituted, (2) of its perpetual obligation, (3) of its design and effect."*

- The Lord's Supper is recorded in three Gospels and one of Paul's epistles.
  - In these, we are repeatedly told that Jesus commanded our participation.
  - Our duty is to practice it at specific times and manners (e.g., when *gathered*).
  - It is clearly connected to the eating of the Passover Lamb.
  - It is to be practiced "frequently" although the frequency is not specifically dictated.  
[Note here that John Calvin strongly urged for its weekly observance]
- [Williamson]- *"We note that in Christ's words of institution, as is true of baptism, there is warrant to continue this sacrament until the end of the world. For he said, 'As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.' If this sacrament is observed till he comes, it will be observed until the end of the world, because that is when he will come."*
- The Lord's Supper was called by Thomas Watson (in his book, The Ten Commandments), "a visible sermon, wherein Christ crucified is set before us."
  - The sacrament of the Lord's Supper represents salvation through the one perfect sacrifice of Christ, who is exhibited through the elements.
  - The central emphasis is the remembrance of the Lord's death.
  - The elements recall the body and blood rendered to God in the sacrifice of Himself.
  - The words instill within us the *remembrance* of him whose body and blood it was, and of the amazing fact that he gave himself for us.
  - Even the actions call to mind the suffering and pain endured by the Savior in rendering unto God this great sacrifice.
- As was true with Baptism, actual union with Christ is not gained through the simple participation in this ordinance.
  - [Williamson]- *"When Christ distributed the elements of this sacrament to his disciples, he did not, by that sacramental act, actually give them salvation. In the case of all but one they already had salvation. In the case of one there was never to be salvation. What then did the sacrament do for them? It signified and sealed the benefits of His sacrifice. It represented them. It vividly 'pictured' them. It showed them what they possessed. And it testified to them that they possess it. It assured them of this great salvation that was theirs in Christ."*
  - But that is not all-
    - Unlike baptism, the Lord's Supper does not signify something that is fully accomplished,
    - It doesn't merely signify a finished state of existence (union with Christ which never changes essentially).
    - It doesn't represent the Christian's saving interest in that work of God as if it were already fully received.



- It won't be "finished" until He shares it with us again at the consummation of all things (cf. Revelation 19:6-10).
  - Luke 22:16-*"For I tell you I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."*
- The Lord's Supper is to be frequently observed, simply because it represents a work of God that continues throughout the life of the believer.
  - [Williamson]-*"Again and again the believer is to eat, drink, and remember, because the Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of that work of God's grace whereby a believer continually derives spiritual nourishment and strength, forgiveness, cleansing, and sanctification, from the benefits of Christ's one sacrifice and his present mediation of those benefits to believers."*
- The believer does not derive this benefit (Christ's direct mediation) from the sacrament itself, but from Christ Himself and His sacrifice.
  - In that sense, the benefits do not depend upon the elements themselves, the manner or time in which they are received, or any sacerdotal influences of some Priest or intermediary Minister.
  - The Minister's sole purpose is to pray that God might set aside (or consecrate) the elements to their sacramental purposes, fence the Table from usurpers, the unbaptized, and those who would eat and drink it in an "unworthy manner" lest they receive condemnation. The Minister protects the participants from themselves and judgment, he does not sanction or 'make' the practice efficacious.
  - [Hodge]- *"The Lord's Supper is a commemoration of the death of Christ. This is evident from the fact that the bread is an emblem of his body broken, and the wine of his blood shed upon the cross for us..... From the fact that the act of eating the bread and of drinking the wine is declared, both by Christ and by Paul, to be done 'in remembrance' of Christ, and to 'shew his death till he come.'*(Luke 22:19; 1Cor. 11:26).

*"...In its use Christ ratifies his promise to save us on the condition of faith, and to endow us with all the benefits of his redemption. We, in taking this pledge, solemnly bind ourselves to entire self-consecration and to all that is involved in the requirements of the gospel of Christ, not as we **understand** them but as he **intends** them. It is a universal principle that all oaths bind in the sense in which they are understood by the persons who impose them."*

- Hence the Lord's Supper is a badge or banner of our Christian profession- our oath of allegiance as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.
- If Baptism is emblematic of the Grace of God that SAVES, the Lord's Supper may be likened to the Grace of God that SANCTIFIES:
  - Both are sovereign acts of mercy by a Predestinating God toward the undeserving Elect.
  - Both are purposed by God in Eternal contexts:
    - God Predestinating and Electing in Eternity-past
    - With a Triune eye toward Glorification in Eternity-future.
  - One (Baptism) more symbolizing the once-for-all-time *Calling, Regenerating, Faith-confessing, Justifying, and Adopting* Grace of God upon **passive obedience** of its recipients.
  - The other (Lord's Supper) symbolizing the continuous *Sanctifying, and Preserving* Grace of God by the **active obedience** of *baptized* believers.

**[SIDE NOTE]-** These are all technical and dogmatic Protestant terms used to denote the sense in which the phases (or steps) of salvation are sequential. In Latin, it is called the Ordo Salutis (literally, "the order of salvation").

Some of the elements are considered to occur progressively but others instantaneously. Some are regarded as OBJECTIVE (Monergistic) and performed only by God, others regarded as SUBJECTIVE (synergistic) and involving human interactions.

In Calvinism, the Ordo Salutis schema is:

- Predestination
- Election
- Calling
- Regeneration
- Faith
- Repentance
- Justification
- Adoption
- Sanctification
- Perseverance
- Glorification

- The Lord's Supper is also declared in our Confession to be a bond and a pledge, "with each other, as members of his body."
  - The Bread is *distributed*, but it was a single loaf representing Christ's Body that was broken for distribution.
    - 1 Corinthians 10:17- *"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."*
  - The Cup is *shared*, but it is one cup that is the New Covenant in Christ's blood.
    - Luke 22:17- *"And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, 'Take this, and divide it among yourselves.'"*
    - 1 Corinthians 10:16(a)- *"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?"*
  - The many are one.
    - Under the Lordship of the Second Adam, we have more in common with each other than the First Adam had with his entire posterity.
    - [Hodge]- *"It [The Lord's Supper] was designed to show forth and to effect the mutual communion of believers with each other, as members or one body and of one blood... union with the common Head necessarily implies communion with each other in that Head."*

[Williamson]- *"Thus, through this sacrament, we receive testimony and assurance of the fact that we have become members of a new race in Christ. We are strengthened in our realization and assurance of this blessed fellowship and communion with Christ and His people which is ours by virtue of our union with Him."*



# **Chapter 29**

## **OF THE LORD'S SUPPER**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 29:

### Of The Lord's Supper

**Section 1:** Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein he was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of his body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in his Church, unto the end of the world; for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death, the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body<sup>1</sup>.

1. 1 Cor 10:16-17, 21; 11:23-26; 12:13.

#### **OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

*"This section of the Confession teaches us (1) that the Lord's Supper is a sacrament instituted by Christ, (2) that it was instituted on the night in which he was betrayed, (3) that it was to be observed in his Church until the end of the world, (4) that it was given for (a) the perpetual remembrance of his sacrifice, (b) the sealing of all benefits thereof to true believers, (c) their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, (d) their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe him, and (e) a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his body."*

#### **FURTHER OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to A.A. Hodge)

*"This section teaches us (1) of the time in which, and the person by whom, the Lord's Supper was instituted, (2) of its perpetual obligation, (3) of its design and effect."*

- The Lord's Supper is recorded in three Gospels and one of Paul's epistles.
  - In these, we are repeatedly told that Jesus commanded our participation.
  - Our duty is to practice it at specific times and manners (e.g., when *gathered*).
  - It is clearly connected to the eating of the Passover Lamb.
  - It is to be practiced "frequently" although the frequency is not specifically dictated.  
[Note here that John Calvin strongly urged for its weekly observance]
- [Williamson]- *"We note that in Christ's words of institution, as is true of baptism, there is warrant to continue this sacrament until the end of the world. For he said, 'As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.' If this sacrament is observed till he comes, it will be observed until the end of the world, because that is when he will come."*
- The Lord's Supper was called by Thomas Watson (in his book, The Ten Commandments), "a visible sermon, wherein Christ crucified is set before us."
  - The sacrament of the Lord's Supper represents salvation through the one perfect sacrifice of Christ, who is exhibited through the elements.
  - The central emphasis is the remembrance of the Lord's death.
  - The elements recall the body and blood rendered to God in the sacrifice of Himself.
  - The words instill within us the *remembrance* of him whose body and blood it was, and of the amazing fact that he gave himself for us.
  - Even the actions call to mind the suffering and pain endured by the Savior in rendering unto God this great sacrifice.
- As was true with Baptism, actual union with Christ is not gained through the simple participation in this ordinance.
  - [Williamson]- *"When Christ distributed the elements of this sacrament to his disciples, he did not, by that sacramental act, actually give them salvation. In the case of all but one they already had salvation. In the case of one there was never to be salvation. What then did the sacrament do for them? It signified and sealed the benefits of His sacrifice. It represented them. It vividly 'pictured' them. It showed them what they possessed. And it testified to them that they possess it. It assured them of this great salvation that was theirs in Christ."*
  - But that is not all-
    - Unlike baptism, the Lord's Supper does not signify something that is fully accomplished,
    - It doesn't merely signify a finished state of existence (union with Christ which never changes essentially).
    - It doesn't represent the Christian's saving interest in that work of God as if it were already fully received.

- It won't be "finished" until He shares it with us again at the consummation of all things (cf. Revelation 19:6-10).
  - Luke 22:16-*"For I tell you I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."*
- The Lord's Supper is to be frequently observed, simply because it represents a work of God that continues throughout the life of the believer.
  - [Williamson]-*"Again and again the believer is to eat, drink, and remember, because the Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of that work of God's grace whereby a believer continually derives spiritual nourishment and strength, forgiveness, cleansing, and sanctification, from the benefits of Christ's one sacrifice and his present mediation of those benefits to believers."*
- The believer does not derive this benefit (Christ's direct mediation) from the sacrament itself, but from Christ Himself and His sacrifice.
  - In that sense, the benefits do not depend upon the elements themselves, the manner or time in which they are received, or any sacerdotal influences of some Priest or intermediary Minister.
  - The Minister's sole purpose is to pray that God might set aside (or consecrate) the elements to their sacramental purposes, fence the Table from usurpers, the unbaptized, and those who would eat and drink it in an "unworthy manner" lest they receive condemnation. The Minister protects the participants from themselves and judgment, he does not sanction or 'make' the practice efficacious.
  - [Hodge]- *"The Lord's Supper is a commemoration of the death of Christ. This is evident from the fact that the bread is an emblem of his body broken, and the wine of his blood shed upon the cross for us..... From the fact that the act of eating the bread and of drinking the wine is declared, both by Christ and by Paul, to be done 'in remembrance' of Christ, and to 'shew his death till he come.'*(Luke 22:19; 1Cor. 11:26).

*"...In its use Christ ratifies his promise to save us on the condition of faith, and to endow us with all the benefits of his redemption. We, in taking this pledge, solemnly bind ourselves to entire self-consecration and to all that is involved in the requirements of the gospel of Christ, not as we **understand** them but as he **intends** them. It is a universal principle that all oaths bind in the sense in which they are understood by the persons who impose them."*

- Hence the Lord's Supper is a badge or banner of our Christian profession- our oath of allegiance as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.
- If Baptism is emblematic of the Grace of God that SAVES, the Lord's Supper may be likened to the Grace of God that SANCTIFIES:
  - Both are sovereign acts of mercy by a Predestinating God toward the undeserving Elect.
  - Both are purposed by God in Eternal contexts:
    - God Predestinating and Electing in Eternity-past
    - With a Triune eye toward Glorification in Eternity-future.
  - One (Baptism) more symbolizing the once-for-all-time *Calling, Regenerating, Faith-confessing, Justifying, and Adopting* Grace of God upon **passive obedience** of its recipients.
  - The other (Lord's Supper) symbolizing the continuous *Sanctifying, and Preserving* Grace of God by the **active obedience** of *baptized* believers.

**[SIDE NOTE]**- These are all technical and dogmatic Protestant terms used to denote the sense in which the phases (or steps) of salvation are sequential. In Latin, it is called the Ordo Salutis (literally, "the order of salvation").

Some of the elements are considered to occur progressively but others instantaneously. Some are regarded as OBJECTIVE (Monergistic) and performed only by God, others regarded as SUBJECTIVE (synergistic) and involving human interactions.

In Calvinism, the Ordo Salutis schema is:

- Predestination
- Election
- Calling
- Regeneration
- Faith
- Repentance
- Justification
- Adoption
- Sanctification
- Perseverance
- Glorification

- The Lord's Supper is also declared in our Confession to be a bond and a pledge, "with each other, as members of his body."
  - The Bread is *distributed*, but it was a single loaf representing Christ's Body that was broken for distribution.
    - 1 Corinthians 10:17- "*Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*"
  - The Cup is *shared*, but it is one cup that is the New Covenant in Christ's blood.
    - Luke 22:17- "And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, 'Take this, and divide it among yourselves.'"
    - 1 Corinthians 10:16(a)- "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?"
  - The many are one.
    - Under the Lordship of the Second Adam, we have more in common with each other than the First Adam had with his entire posterity.
    - [Hodge]- "*It [The Lord's Supper] was designed to show forth and to effect the mutual communion of believers with each other, as members or one body and of one blood... union with the common Head necessarily implies communion with each other in that Head.*"

[Williamson]- "*Thus, through this sacrament, we receive testimony and assurance of the fact that we have become members of a new race in Christ. We are strengthened in our realization and assurance of this blessed fellowship and communion with Christ and His people which is ours by virtue of our union with Him.*"

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**Section 2:** In this sacrament Christ is not offered up to his Father, nor any real sacrifice made at all for remission of sins of the quick or dead<sup>1</sup>, but only a commemoration of that one offering up of himself, by himself, upon the cross, once for all, and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God for the same<sup>2</sup>; so that the Popish sacrifice of the mass, as they call it, is most abominably injurious to Christ's one only sacrifice, the alone propitiation for all the sins of the elect<sup>3</sup>.

1. Heb 9:22, 25-26, 28.
2. Mat 26:26-27; 1 Cor 11:24-26.
3. Heb 7:23-24, 27; 10:11-12, 14, 18.

#### **OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

*"This section of the Confession teaches us (1) that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is not a sacrifice but only a commemoration of that one all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ, and (2) that the Romish doctrine of the Mass is nothing less than an attack against the glory and efficacy of the one true sacrifice of Christ."*

#### **FURTHER OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to A.A. Hodge)

*"The form in which the statements made in [this] section [is] put is rather negative than positive-rather designed to oppose certain Romish and Ritualistic errors than to make a simple statement of the true doctrine of the sacrament."*

- In the Roman Church's Baltimore Catechism it says,
  - (#925)-*"The Mass is the sacrifice of the New Law in which Christ, through the ministry of the priest, offers Himself to God in an unbloody manner under the appearances of bread and wine."*
  - (#929)-*"In the New Law there is no other sacrifice acceptable to God save the sacrifice of the Mass."*
  - (#931)-*"The Mass is the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross, because in the Mass the victim is the same, and the principle priest is the same, Jesus Christ."*
- So, we see that the official teaching of Rome is that to be saved, it is not because Christ *died* for him, but because Christ *continually dies* for him.
  - The sacrifice is never accomplished, and the sinner is never done needing a fresh sacrifice.
  - [Williamson]- *"As often as the sinner sins, so often must Christ also die. According to the Romish dogma this is what Christ does. He does not appear to do so. But this is only because He presents Himself under the appearance of bread and wine."*
  - Jesus looks like bread and wine, but He is really physically present in human flesh and blood in order to suffer and die again.
  - Rome says that there is no salvation except by this repetitive sacrifice of Christ.
- [Williamson]- *"It would be difficult to invent a doctrine more detrimental to the true glory of the work of Jesus Christ. For the Scripture says that 'by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified' (Heb. 10:14). When he died, he said, 'it is finished' (John 19:30). And, unlike the Old Testament priests, Christ 'needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices' (Heb. 7:27). If daily forgiveness of sin required daily sacrifice of Christ 'then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world' (Heb. 9:29)."*
- Forgiveness was actually given before Christ's sacrifice was even made.
- So, logically, we must also conclude that forgiveness can be given AFTER His sacrifice has been finished.
- Now, once, and to the end of the world has Christ put away sin by his one sacrifice (Hebrews 9:26,28).
- [Williamson]- *"Well might we say of the supposed physical presence of Christ at the Mass, what the angel once said to the disciples: 'He is not here, but is risen' (Luke 24:6)"*
- Jesus himself told his disciples as he instituted this sacrament:
  - Luke 22:14-16 *"And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.'"*

- Christ's one absolutely perfect, once forever sacrifice of Himself has an infinite worth that no earthly priest can do anything but unsuccessfully attempt to sully and denigrate through his priest-craft.
  - 1 Peter 1:13-21- Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.
  - Ephesians 5:1-2- Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
  - 1 Peter 3:18- For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison..
- [Williamson]- "If one death of the God-man is not sufficient for all human need, how many such deaths suffice? Of course, Rome teaches that the death which Christ dies in the Mass is not another but somehow the same death as that which he died on the cross. But if this be so, how can we regard it as a real death? If the death that Christ died on the cross is no more 'real' than that which he is supposed to die in the Mass, then it is not of much value. And again, one does not really die one death man die one death many times. But even if we try to follow the incredible logic of the Romish dogma, we still must say that the death of Christ is of no value, because (on their own testimony) he is not through dying. A sacrifice has no value until the death is finished. But if Christ has not finished dying after two thousand years, how can we be sure that he ever will finish dying? Then what becomes of our hope of the resurrection: indeed, how can there be a resurrection from a death that is perpetual? In a word: the Romish doctrine is as absurd as it is unbiblical and detrimental. "

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**Section 3:** The Lord Jesus hath, in this ordinance, appointed his ministers to declare his word of institution to the people, to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to set them apart from a common to an holy use; and to take and break the bread, to take the cup, and (they communicating also themselves) to give both to the communicants<sup>1</sup>; but to none who are not then present in the congregation<sup>2</sup>.

1. Mat 26:26-28 and Mark 14:22-24 and Luke 22:19-20 with 1 Cor 11:23-27.
2. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 11:20.

**Section 4:** Private masses, or receiving this sacrament by a priest, or any other, alone<sup>1</sup>; as likewise the denial of the cup to the people<sup>2</sup>; worshipping the elements, the lifting them up, or carrying them about for adoration, and the reserving them for any pretended religious use, are all contrary to the nature of this sacrament, and to the institution of Christ<sup>3</sup>.

1. 1 Cor 10:6.
2. Mark 4:23; 1 Cor 11:25-29.
3. Mat 15:9.

#### **OBSERVATIONS - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)**

*"In these sections of the Confession we learn (1) that Christ has appointed his ministers to administer the sacraments with the word of institution, prayer, and blessing, (2) that the elements to be used are bread and wine, (3) that both elements are to be received by ministers and members of the Church alike, and (4) that it is to be given to none who are not present in the congregation at the time of the administration of the sacrament."*

- Bread and Wine are the elements to be used.
  - When Christ instituted the sacrament, he specifically pointed to bread and wine.
  - The bread used must have been unleavened because the Disciples were celebrating the Passover Meal together.
    - Mark 14:12-16- *"And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, 'Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?' And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us.' And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover."*
  - Leavened bread (leaven even on the premises) was prohibited at Passover.
    - Exodus 12:14-20- *"This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread."*
  - It has been the historical conviction of the Reformed Church that the wine at the Lord's Table is fermented,
    - That it was fermented wine is a concept that is fully supported by Scripture.
    - The Greek word used for the wine of the Sacrament is Oinos.

- It is the same Greek word used in Matthew 9:17; John 2:3-10; Romans 14:21; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Timothy 3:8,23; and Titus 2:3. These uses run the gamut of referring to sacramental use, temperance in dealing with unbelievers, drunkenness, and other uses of wine that is always fermented.
- The historical custom has been to see the sacrament involving fermented wine too:
  - “*Modern custom in Palestine, among a people who are traditionally conservative as far as religious feasts are concerned, also suggests that the wine was fermented*” [Eerdman’s New Bible Dictionary].
  - “*The contention that it was unfermented wine is not worth serious discussion.*” [Eldersheim, Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah].
- That it might *instead* have just been “grape juice” defies logic, history, and lacks textual support.
  - Grape juice *begins* fermenting the second the grapes are crushed. Yeasts on the outside of the grape are blended with the sugars inside.
  - Only filtration and a process of killing the yeast bacteria and refrigeration can stop (actually merely slow) the process, but once it has begun it **WILL** result in fermentation, eventually becoming *vinegar* (literally “sour wine”).

“Do not suppose that abuses are eliminated by destroying the object which is abused. Men can go wrong with wine and women. Shall we then prohibit and abolish women?” Martin Luther

- Are there exceptions to the *unleavened* bread and *fermented* wine norms?
  - [Williams] “We would not argue that the sacrament cannot be valid without unleavened bread and fermented wine. We can readily envision circumstances under which it might be necessary to use either leavened bread, or grape juice, or even both. Though technically irregular, we would not maintain that the sacrament may not be observed under such conditions. Even those who ordinarily use leavened bread and grape juice out of mere convenience we will not condemn. But if the decision to use grape juice instead of wine is based on the influence of the Temperance Movement, we must regard this as seriously unbiblical. It is a false doctrine, a legacy of the ancient Gnostics, to locate sin or evil in material things. The cause of the sin of drunkenness was located by Christ in man’s depraved heart (Mark 7:14-23), not in wine.”
  - The error of using “temperance” type arguments requires believing that either:
    - Christ must have used unfermented grape juice at the last supper, or
    - That Christ must have been ignorant of the evil character of wine.
  - Too many Evangelicals succumb to the idea that the Last Supper must have served unfermented grape juice, AND that there must be some truth to the Gnostic argument that material things are evil in themselves.
- In essence, those who would argue against unleavened bread and fermented wine, usually do not do so for reasons of compromise or convenience.... They argue against any possibility that there could legitimately be unleavened bread and fermented wine at the table.... Usually, they only have issues with the wine.
- What is clearly essential to the proper observance? What are the non-negotiables?
  - The Consecration- repetition of Christ’s words of institution and a prayer in which divine blessing is requested upon the worshippers (and the minister) in the use of the ordinance, and whatever *portion* of the *common* elements are set apart for *sacramental use*. (cf., Luke 22:19, Matt. 26:26; 1 Cor. 10:16).
  - The Breaking of the Bread- The symbolic rending of Christ’s body on the cross, and of all the many communicants feeding upon ONE Christ, as upon ONE bread. (cf., Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24).
  - The Distribution and Reception of the Elements- not technically completed when they are consecrated, but only upon their receipt and consumption by the people.
  - Christ says to do these things in remembrance of Him to show His death until He comes. (cf., Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:26).
  - So the essence of the sacrament consists in the eating and the drinking.
- Some Errors
  - It is not proper to admit to the Lord’s Table those who do not receive it in the midst of the congregation of believers.
    - Private administration of the sacrament is contrary to Christ’s ordinance.
    - This used to be only associated with the Priests of Rome.
    - Today, many Protestant ministers have “private communion sets” and are not bashful about visiting people in their homes.



- Some media ministers have even administrated over communion services over television, radio, and (recorded) internet means, where listeners gather elements within their homes and partake.
- The example of Christ is not consistent with these practices.
  - The Sacrament was instituted in a physical gathering of believers.
  - They were commanded to divide the cup and partake together of a common loaf.
  - Every New Testament reference to the observance was an ordinance of the visible church, administered when and where the saints were gathered.
  - The Lord's Supper is an expression and representation of the communion between believers.
  - The Sacrament is nowhere in Scripture severed from the preaching of the Word: Word and Sacrament *together*.
  - The Sacrament is nowhere celebrated apart from the right and consistent administration of Biblical Church Discipline. The right discerning of the body and blood of Christ is requisite.
  - Private administration of the Sacrament obscures or even denies that there is necessarily an interrelated and interdependent relationship with Christ as our Priest and King.
- None of this means that the Sacrament must be administered inside a church building, or cannot be administered in a private home (example the early church- Acts 2:46, 5:42; Rom 16:5).
  - It only means that there is an assembly of the believers there, gathered AS A CHURCH, with the preaching of the Word accompanying and otherwise proper administration also.

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**Section 5:** The outward elements in this sacrament, duly set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, have such relation to him crucified, as that truly, yet sacramentally only, they are sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, to wit, the body and blood of Christ<sup>1</sup>; albeit, in substance and nature, they still remain truly, and only, bread and wine, as they were before<sup>2</sup>.

1. Mat 26:26-28.
2. Mat 26:29; 1 Cor 11:26-28.

**Section 6:** That doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine, into the substance of Christ's body and blood (commonly called transubstantiation) by consecration of a priest, or by any other way, is repugnant, not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason; overthroweth the nature of the sacrament; and hath been, and is the cause of manifold superstitions, yea, of gross idolatries<sup>1</sup>.

1. Luke 24:6, 39; Acts 3:21 with 1 Cor 11:24-26.

#### **OBSERVATIONS - (with thanks to A.A. Hodge)**

*"The form in which the statements made in these sections are put rather negative than positive-rather designed to oppose certain Romish and Ritualistic errors than to make a simple statement of the true doctrine of the sacrament. The errors which are here [in Sections 5&6] are- ...the doctrine of transubstantiation, or the change of the entire substance of the bread and wine into the body, blood, soul, and divinity of the Lord Jesus."*

- What are the **true** doctrines?
- What are the elements and actions essential to the relationship between the **sign** and the **grace signified**?
  - The Bread is, and stays, BREAD.
    - As we discussed last time, bread is in the institution of the sacrament, and at the command of our Lord.
      - The First Communion occurred during Passover, on the first day of Unleavened Bread (cf., Mark 14:12)
      - Mark 14:22 *"And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body'."*
    - Bread is historically connected with the Body of Christ during the Eucharist, but except for Romans and the Lutherans was not made by some incantation made to undergo some mystical transformation from bread into the actual body of Jesus (the Roman/Lutheran doctrine of "The Real Presence."
      - [Hodge]-*"...bread, as the staff of life for the body, is the proper symbol of that spiritual food that nourished the soul. Christ instituted the Supper at the Passover, when the only bread at hand was unleavened. The early Church always used the common bread of daily life. The Romish and Lutheran Churches hold that unleavened bread should be used: the Reformed Churches have uniformly held that the bread intended, and that best fulfils the conditions of the symbol, is the common bread of daily life- not the sweet cake used in so many of our old churches.*
      - Whether leavened or unleavened, whether sour, rustic, sweet, or savory.
        - Actual BREAD has universally and historically been the **sign signifying the grace** as the nexus of the sacrament.
        - Truth or error in the practice comes afterward.
  - The Wine stays, WINE.
    - Also as discussed last time, wine is in the institution of the sacrament, and at the command of our Lord.
      - The First Communion occurred during Passover, symbolizing the blood sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb as the sign for the Angel of Death to 'pass over' the dwellings marked by the blood on the lintel (cf., Mark 14:12).

- Mark 14:23-24 “And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many’.”
  - Whether *pasteurized and refrigerated grape juice* after the custom of the Temperance Movement, or fermented wine with an alcoholic content to it: whether sweet, dry, or somewhere in-between; whether Merlot, Sauvignon, or some other varietal; whether it is Kosher, or was stomped under the feet of a sweaty Franciscan Monk:
    - Actual WINE has universally and historically been the *sign signifying the grace* as the nexus of the sacrament.
    - Truth or error in the practice comes afterward.
- What are the “After” errors?
  - The Papal errors specifically addressed in these sections are:
    - “A change of the substance of bread and wine, into the substance of Christ’s body and blood,” ( i.e., *Transubstantiation*) [Section 6]
    - That this process of transubstantiation is somehow accomplished by the consecration, blessing, hallowing, or sanctification through some sacerdotal invocation of a priest, or some other way.
    - That, as a *consequence* of Rome’s practices,
      - The true nature of the sacrament has been entirely overthrown
      - It has been made into a dim caricature of what Christ intended and made a falsehood.
      - And, due to the superstitious nature of their bastardization, Rome has become the cause of “manifold superstitions, yea, of gross idolatries.”
    - [Hodge]- (regarding Rome’s doctrine of transubstantiation), “*The Council of Trent (1545-1563) teaches (Session 13, Canons 1-4) that the whole substance of the bread is changed into the literal body, and the whole substance of the wine is changed into the literal blood, of Christ; so that only the appearance or sensible properties of the bread and wine remain, and the only substances present are the true body and blood, soul and divinity, of our Lord. And thus he is objectively presented to, and is eaten and drunk by, every recipient, believer and unbeliever indifferently; and this he remains before and after the communion, his very body and blood, Godhead and manhood, shut up in a vessel, carried about, elevated, worshipped, etc.*”
  - Lest we let the Lutherans *completely* off the hook in the *error* department:
    - Lutherans hold that the bread and wine remain bread and wine.
    - But they also believe that the words of consecration materially change the elements such that:
      - The real body and blood of Christ, though invisible, are really present, “in, with, and under the bread and the wine.”
      - This, is the Lutheran doctrine of “*Consubstantiation*.”
    - The *Lutheran Formula of Concord* states, “*Just as in Christ two distinct, unchanged natures are inseparably united, so in the Holy Supper the two substances, the natural bread and the true natural body of Christ, are present together here upon earth in the appointed administration of the Sacrament.*”
  - Romanists and Lutherans alike point to the same (and only) foundation for their errant doctrines on the literal translated statement of our Lord, “This is my body” to justify their beliefs.
    - [Hodge]- “*They (Romans and Lutherans) hold the word ‘is’ is literal: all the Reformed Churches hold it must mean ‘represents,’ ‘symbolizes.’ This is the frequent usage of the word in Scripture.*”
      - Greek word is *ἐστί*- [“*esti*”]- meaning: *is, are belong, call, come, consist.*
      - For example, Revelation 20:2- “*And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,*”
    - Please also observe, that on the night Christ Himself instituted the Sacrament, He gave them bread to eat, and wine to drink, WHILE HE WAS SITTING WITH THEM, in His intact, undivided flesh, and ate and drank of it all HIMSELF.
  - The doctrine of the “real presence” is false then, because:
    - It is not taught in Scripture.
    - It muddles the very notion of “sacrament”
    - It makes the *sign* identical to the thing *signified*

- It contradicts the senses, since we never see, smell, taste, or feel anything but bread and wine; we never see, smell, taste, or feel flesh and blood.
- It contradicts reason, which teaches that qualities cannot exist except as they fundamentally exist in some substance, and that substance can't be known or react apart from those qualities.
- The doctrine of the "real presence" supposes that:
  - The qualities of bread and wine remain without any substance, and that the substance of flesh and blood exists without any qualities, which is absurd and impossible.
  - Christ's glorified body is still material, and therefore finite.
  - Christ's glorified body is somehow still material and therefore finite.
  - Christ is thus not omnipresent in all places on earth, and is specifically absent from the right hand of God in heaven.
- [Hodge]- *"Since the Papists hold that the entire substance of the bread and wine is permanently changed into the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ, they consequently maintain that the principal intention of the ordinance is accomplished when the words of consecration are pronounced and the change effected. Hence they preserve the host carefully shut up in the pyx, elevate and adore and carry it about in their processions. All this stands or falls with the doctrine of transubstantiation."*
- Some interesting consequences resulting from the doctrine of transubstantiation:
  - [Hodge]- *".... There arose the natural fear lest some of the august person of the Lord should be spoiled or lost from the crumbling of the bread or the spilling of the wine. Hence, the bread is prepared in little wafers which cannot crumble, and the cup is denied to the laity and confined to the priests."*
  - To comfort the laity for being denied the cup, Rome began teaching that the blood is IN the flesh, and as the soul is in the body, and as the divinity is in the soul of Christ, the whole person- body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ is equally in every particle of the bread.
  - Since receiving the bread constitutes the entirety of the Eucharist, there became an ancillary doctrine (Council of Trent, Session 21, Canons 1-3) to the effect that one who received the bread received it all. Hey Presto! No more need for the cup!
  - Lutherans and some Romanists have modified this errant sub-doctrine to re-introduce the cup, but to convert the bread/wine administration to a "tincture" or dipping of the bread into the cup by the Priest, who then places the product into the mouth of the participant. But this merely muddles the bread even further, and keeps the cup out of the hand of the laity.

[Hodge]-*"In opposition to the manifold abuses of this ordinance which prevail among the Romanists, our Standards, in common with the general judgment of the Reformed Churches, teach that the Lord's Supper is essentially a communion, in which the fellowship of the believer with Christ and with his fellow-believers is set forth by their eating and drinking of the same bread and same cup. It follows that it should not be sent to persons not present at the administrations, nor administered by the officiating priest to himself alone. In particular cases, however, it may be administered in private houses, for the benefit of Christians long confined by sickness, provided that the officers and sufficient number of the members of the Church be present to preserve the true character of the ordinance as a communion."*

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 29:

### Of The Lord's Supper

**Section 7:** Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament<sup>1</sup>, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are, to their outward senses<sup>2</sup>.

1. 1 Cor 11:28.
2. 1 Cor 10:16.

**Section 8:** Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament, yet they receive not the thing signified thereby; but by their unworthy coming thereunto are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation. Wherefore all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so are they unworthy of the Lord's table, and cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries<sup>1</sup>, or be admitted thereunto<sup>2</sup>.

1. 1 Cor 11:27-29; 2 Cor 6:14-16.
2. Mat 7:6; 1 Cor 5:6-7, 13; 2 Thes 3:6, 14-15.

#### **OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

*“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that the manner in which true believers partake of the benefits of Christ is to be distinguished from the errors of the Lutherans (and Rome), (2) that the unconverted who partake of this sacrament receive the sign but not the thing signified, (3) that they do incur guilt by this action, and (4) that it is therefore necessary for the Church to refuse admittance to all except those who give a credible profession of faith in Christ.”*

#### **FURTHER OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to A.A. Hodge)

*“These sections teach the Reformed doctrine as to the relation which in the Lord's Supper subsists between the sign and the grace signified; that is, as to the nature of the presence of Christ in the sacrament, and the sense in which, consequently, the worthy recipient is said to feed upon the body and blood of the Lord.”*

- The Reformed Doctrine of the Lord's Supper can be summarized this way:
  - The bread and wine always remain mere bread and wine without change.
    - By divine appointment, the flesh and blood of our Redeemer offered as a sacrifice for sin are represented by the bread and wine
    - The relation between the bread and wine and the body and blood of Christ is purely moral or representative.
  - The body and blood are present, but only virtually.
    - The *virtues* and *effects* of the sacrifice of our Redeemer's body on the cross, are:
      1. Made present, and are actually conveyed in the sacrament to the worthy receiver by the power of the Holy Spirit.
      - The Holy Spirit uses the sacrament as His instrument according to His sovereign will.
  - Therefore, when it is said that believers receive and feed upon the body and blood of Christ
    - It is meant that we receive not by the mouth, but through faith,
    - The benefit secured by Christ's sacrificial death, and our feeding upon His body and blood is purely spiritual.
      1. It is accomplished through the free and sovereign agency of the Holy Ghost, and through the exercise of the instrument of faith alone by believers.
      2. In no case is the benefit ever seized by the unbeliever.
  - The unbeliever, therefore, who receives the outward sign with his mouth while failing to receive the inward grace in his soul through faith
    - Only increases his own condemnation
    - Only further hardens his own heart by the exercise.
  - This last, is why the Reformed Churches have always put such emphasis on “fencing” of the Table (more on this momentarily).
    - Those who are known to be unbelievers and whose unbelief is manifest either by their ignorance or their ungodliness, as well as those who (although hoped to be believers)

have been determined through the adjudication of church courts (more on this aspect in Chapter 30) to be non-communicant by Biblical Church Discipline. Should be prevented or enjoined, both for their own sake and for the Church's sake from coming to the Lord's table until they are able to make a sincere and credible profession of their faith in Him who is signified by this sacrament.

- Also, it follows that believers do, and in the same sense, receive and feed upon the body and blood of Christ at other times *without* the use of the sacramental elements, and in the use of other means of grace, like prayer, meditation on the Word, etc.
- All of this raises some interesting consequential questions.
  - [Williamson]-*"Someone has said that Judas ate bread with the Lord, but did not eat the Lord with the bread. This must be true because Jesus said, 'Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.... He who eats this bread will live forever' (John 6:54,56,58). Since there are unquestionably those who receive the elements of the sacrament of whom this is not true, it is evident that 'ignorant and wicked men' may 'receive the outward elements' yet 'receive not the thing signified thereby'."* [Section 8].
  - The Bible clearly evidences that no one can receive even the outward signs and seals without important consequences.
    - 1 Corinthians 11:27-29- *"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself."*
    - The inner heart of a man determines what he **receives** in the sacrament... although (sorry Rome) what **he** is cannot determine what the **sacrament is**.
  - [Williamson]- *"The sacrament is a divinely instituted sign and seal of the covenant. It represents Christ because of divine institution. And it does so even if it be by judgment against rather than reception by the sinner."*
- "FENCING THE TABLE"
  - Basically, this falls into three basic forms (although each have wrinkles): *Open Communion*, *Closed Communion*, and *Restricted Communion*.
  - There are stated reason for each view, and problems associated with each one's administration.
  - At some point in time, someone is going to have to make a determination of the participant's faith condition, and some degree of responsibility is going to rest in the church's leadership to provide discerning oversight.
  - OPEN COMMUNION-
    - This means that the Lord's Table may be approached at will by all who (in their own judgement, and sole risk) are able to do so.
    - This starts with a presumption that Scripture doesn't envision a situation in which only true believers would receive the sacrament, so there is no 'reason' to exercise any restriction on those who can receive the elements on their own accountability.
    - Some churches teach against this view on a couple of premises:
      1. The gospel is preached without distinction, and is an "open" proclamation with an "open" call. But Christ did not administer the sacraments to all (Judas being an interesting thought-exercise for our Upper Room consideration). Many who heard Christ preach the gospel refused the terms upon which baptism was given (Luke 7:30). When Jesus administered the sacrament, he did not administer it in a public place to His disciples only. No one was admitted except those who possessed to be his disciples and appeared to be such. The case about Judas hinges on the presumption that the disciples didn't know until that night that Judas was not the believer he pretended and appeared to be. (cf., Matthew 26:22; Mark 14:19).
      2. In the Apostolic Church, none were admitted who hadn't first been instructed, then baptized, and given evidence of faithfulness (Acts 2:41-42). Whenever a false pretender was discovered, the Apostles directed that the church separate themselves from such a one and keep them from table fellowship- 'excommunication' (1 Cor. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:6). Even Christians were set apart from the ordinances of the Church when they violated their profession, until they changed their ways.
  - CLOSED COMMUNION-
    - This means that the sacrament could only be administered to those who are baptized and professing members of the church or denomination administering the sacrament.

- It presumes a relative purity within the visible Church, where such a practice could be practically overseen and managed with some propriety, and based upon a deeper knowledge of the communicants and their faithfulness
  - It was necessary to each church to receive from other churches within the denomination, every member certified (credentialed?) by their home church to be in good standing, before they could be admitted to the Table.
- RESTRICTED COMMUNION-
  - This (traditionally) simply means that a *particular* church does not indiscriminately admit members of *other* churches to the Lord's Supper. If a person comes from another church body and desires to partake of the Lord's Supper, it is necessary to determine a few things about them: (1) does the person have sufficient understanding of the truth to be a believer, (2) whether or not the person professes faith in Christ and gives evidence of walking in obedience to Christ's commandments. If a person comes from another congregation of the same denomination, he may be admitted. But if a person comes from another denomination, the integrity of the entire other denomination must be accounted for, and unless the denomination is known to be of 'like purity' in doctrine and discipline, any consequent uncertainty could only be resolved by being personally questioned as to his faith and life.
- Under each of these systems, admission to the Lord's Table is made entirely on the basis of a "credible profession of faith."
  - In actuality, the basis is made upon a profession of faith that is considered by some human determination within the church administering the sacrament to be "credible."
  - The Confession says that, *"All ignorant and ungodly persons.... cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto."*
    - But "ignorant and ungodly" are necessarily *idiosyncratic* terms that under this reading of the ordinance must be adjudicated subjectively by other human beings. Who qualifies the judge to be judgmental?
  - The Church would hold, that for it to (passively) abdicate this responsibility would be *equivalent* to actively inviting sinners to harm themselves.
    - But who among us can truly say that we are knowledgeable **enough**, or 'godly' **enough** to partake of these holy mysteries in a worthy manner under the BEST of cases, and without our complete and total dependence upon the Grace of the One signified by the elemental signs present at the Table?
  - The Church would also claim that for it to willfully OR passively allow *ignorant* and *ungodly* persons to access the Sacrament would be to take that damnation upon herself, because she has no standing to claim *ignorance*, or require anything less than *godliness*.
- The reality is that even "proper restriction"...whatever that is determined to be.... If it is even *possible* to do so, will not prevent unbelievers from coming to the Table, and it will only imperfectly warn true believers INTO being adequately knowledgeable of the mysteries displayed there, or guarantee their godliness upon partaking.
- The goal of fencing the table is:
  - Not to restrict true believers from partaking.
  - To warn the secret unbeliever in such a way that he and he alone will bear the guilt if he eats and drinks unworthily (which the Confession takes to mean without really being a professing believer who actually 'walks the walk').
- The practical difficulties in application of each of these systems is:
  - They require some unattainable level of knowledge and godliness to "qualify" to partake
  - They necessarily tend toward accepting that there is some sort of "works-based attainment of righteousness" to commune.
  - They wind up with some human being the judge of heavenly citizenship
    - The individual, who is likely to be insufficiently discerning, and tending toward *secular*
    - The officer of the church who is likely to be overly judgmental and tending toward *sacerdotal*.
- What is our normal practice here?
  - Fencing of the table is a warning against ignorance and ungodliness by ALL in the place.
  - Baptism is treated as the 'admission price' since it points to an objectively sanctified relationship with Christ. The unbaptized are warned not to partake.
  - Those in besetting or scandalous sin in their lives are warned not to partake,
  - Those who are under formal Biblical Church Discipline (adjudicated by church) are warned not to partake.

- All are reminded that the table is a picture of the Covenant of Grace through participation in the body and blood of Christ. As such, it is ALL about him, less about our own righteousness, and not at all about the man or men administering it.

*“And here is also a representation made unto us of that satisfaction the soul of Christ received in the fruit of his travail, having appointed it in a particular manner to be done in remembrance of him. No man will appoint a remembrance of that which he doth not delight in. When Job had no more delight in his life, he desired that the time of his birth might never be remembered. When God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, whereby he exalted his glory, he appointed a passover, and said, “It is a day greatly to be remembered.” Because the people had a great deliverance, and God received great glory and great satisfaction; therefore it was greatly to be remembered.” Because the people had a great deliverance, and God received great glory and great satisfaction; therefore it was greatly to be remembered. We are to celebrate this ordinance in remembrance of Christ; and therefore there is a representation of that satisfaction which Jesus Christ did receive in the travail of his soul: so that he never repented him of one groan, of one sigh, of one tear, of one prayer, of one wrestling with the wrath of God. It is matter of rejoicing, and to be remembered; and do you rejoice in the remembrance of it.”*

John Owen (1616-1683)



# **Chapter 30**

# **OF CHURCH CENSURES**

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 30:

### Of Church Censures

Section 1: The Lord Jesus, as king and head of his Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate<sup>1</sup>.

1. Isa 9:6-7; Mat 28:18-20; Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Cor 12:28; 1 Thes 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:7, 17, 24.

#### OBSERVATIONS - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)

*“This section of the Confession teach us (1) that Christ is king and head of his Church, (2) that he has appointed (under his headship) a government, (3) that this government is in the hand of church officers, (4) that this government is distinct from that of the State.”*

[A.A. Hodge]- *“The principle designated Erastianism, which has been practically embedded in all the State Churches of the Old World, include the following elements: (1) That the Church is an organ of the State to accomplish one of its general functions; and consequently that there is no government of the Church independent of that of the State, but that its officers, its laws, and their administration, are in all things subject to the civil government. (2) That all of the subjects of the State are, ipso facto, members of the Church and entitled to all its ordinances. (3) That the duties and prerogatives of church officers include simply the functions of and administering the ordinances, and do not include discipline, because, according to this view, to exclude a man from church ordinances is to deny him his civil rights as a citizen.”*

{Sidebar Trivia}- It is actually due to the actions of the Erastianism of England, that the so-called (and much ballyhooed) “separation of church and state” came to be associated as a founding principle of our Nation. No longer desiring to live under the soft tyranny of a State Church, our Founding Fathers wrote prohibitions against duplicating the errors of the Old World’s predilection for Erastianism.

- In opposition to Erastianism, the Confession teaches:
  - That the Lord, as mediator is King and has appointed a government for His church.
  - That the Church’s government is entirely distinct (in all respects) from the civil government.
- Christ, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the writings of His Apostles, established a government for his Church.
- By God’s Providence and Spirit, He continues to graciously administer it, and will do so until the end of time.
- [Hodge]- *“Hence, the Church is a Theocratic kingdom. All authority and power descends, and does not ascend. Pastors and Elders teach and rule in the name of God, and not of man. It is the commission of Christ, and not of the Church, that the minister carries with him, and by authority of which he acts. The Church only witnesses to the genuineness of this commission, and sees that it is faithfully discharged by the bearer of it. Hence all the power of church officers, either in their several or collective capacity, is ministerial and declarative. They have only to define what Christ has taught, to carry that teaching to all men, and to execute the laws he has given, and to administer the penalties he has designated, according to his will and in his name.”*
  - The term “Theocratic” merely describes a governmental form where a people exist under God’s direct governance and law. The etymology springs from the Greek, “Theos”: “God” and “kratia”: “Government”. Old Testament Israel was a Theocracy.
  - It should not be confused or conflated with the term “Theonomy” that describes a system of governance among men under God. The etymology of this word also springs from the Greek, “Theos” : “God” and “Nomos” : “Law”. Much mischief has resulted from man’s attempts to create societal Theonomies. These usually start out with a conviction that societies can be built under the governance and law of God, but universally fail because they wind up under the tyranny of men.
  - In a sense, Erastianism was a type of Theonomy, that the Westminster Divines sought to free Christians from.
- The Theocratic government of the Church which Christ established is entirely independent of the civil government.
  - [Hodge]- *“To very many in Europe it appeared impossible that two independent governments should exercise jurisdiction at the same time over the same subjects without constant collision. But the experience of the dissenting bodies and free churches in Great Britain, and*

*of all the churches in America, abundantly proves that there is no danger of interference whatever, when both the Church and the State confine themselves to their respective provinces.”*

- The people subject to the jurisdiction of the government of the Church are also subject to the jurisdiction of the State.
  - But the purposes, laws, methods, and sanctions of the two are very different.
  - One can never interfere with the other, as though they battle for the same sphere sovereignty, or represent warring factions aligned against each other.
- All Christians (with the exception of the Erastians), agree that the principles broadly taught in this section, even though there is great disagreement about the particular human agencies in whom Christ has deposited this power, and who have been useful human instruments for Him.
- There are four “radically different theories on this subject” according to Hodge:
  - The Popish theory, which:
    - Assumes that Christ, the Apostles, and believers constituted the Church while Jesus walked the earth.
    - That the organization was designed to be perpetual,
    - After the ascension of the Lord, Peter became Christ’s vicar, and took his place as the visible head of the Church, who, with his successors continue as bishops at Rome.
    - Apostleship continues perpetually, and is passed by succession to prelates.
    - As in the primitive church no one could be an apostle who was not subject to Christ, so now, no one can be a prelate who is not subject to the Pope.
    - As then no one could be a Christian who was not subject to Christ and the Apostles, so now no one can be a Christian who is not subject to the Pope and the prelates.
    - The Romish theory of the Church then: a vicar of Christ, a perpetual college of Apostles, and the people subject to the infallible control.
  - The Prelatical theory, which:
    - Assumes the perpetuity of Apostleship as the governing power in the Church.
    - The Church consists of those who profess the true religion and are subject to Apostle-bishops.
    - This is the Anglican or High Church form of this theory.
    - In its Low Church form, the prelatical theory teaches an original threefold order within the ministerial offices, but it doesn’t hold it as essential.
  - The Independent or Congregational theory consisting of two principles:
    - First, that the governing and executive power in the Church resides within the brethren;
    - Second, that the Church organization is complete in each assembly, which is independent of every other.
  - The Presbyterian theory, which teaches:
    - The people have a right to a substantive part in the government of the Church.
    - Presbyters who labor in the Word and doctrine, are the highest permanent officers of the Church, and all belong to the same order.
    - The outward and visible Church is (or should be) one in the sense that the smaller parts (congregations) are subject to the larger (presbyteries), and the larger to the whole (denomination).
- [Hodge]-“*Christ has in fact vested all ecclesiastical power in the Church as a whole, none of its members being excluded; yet not in the Church as a mob, but as an organized body consisting of members, their representative ruling elders, and ministers or bishops.*”
  - There has been a belief in some churches that Elders or Bishops were ordained by the Apostles, and have always continued in the Church by “Apostolic Succession.”
  - Whether passed down by some aristocratic-style system, or through some more federal, and representative system of suffrage by assemblies, all hold to the usefulness and continuation of these offices.
  - These offices were designed to be perpetuated as the highest class of officers in the Church (1 Tim 3:1; Eph. 4:11,12).
    - All Church power vests jointly in the lay and clerical members: the ministers and the people.
    - [Hodge]- “*Ruling Elders are properly the REPRESENTATIVES of the people, chose by them for the purpose of exercising government and discipline in conjunction*

*with pastors and ministers. The powers therefore exercised by our ruling elders are powers which belong to the lay members of the Church. They are chosen by them to act in their name in the government of the Church. A representative is one chosen by others to do in their name what they are entitled to do in their own persons; or rather to exercise the powers which radically inhere in those for whom they act.”*

# **Chapter 30**

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    - As then no one could be a Christian who was not subject to Christ and the Apostles, so now no one can be a Christian who is not subject to the Pope and the prelates.
    - The Romish theory of the Church then: a vicar of Christ, a perpetual college of Apostles, and the people subject to the infallible control.
  - The Prelatical theory, which:
    - Assumes the perpetuity of Apostleship as the governing power in the Church.
    - The Church consists of those who profess the true religion and are subject to Apostle-bishops.
    - This is the Anglican or High Church form of this theory.
    - In its Low Church form, the prelatical theory teaches an original threefold order within the ministerial offices, but it doesn’t hold it as essential.
  - The Independent or Congregational theory consisting of two principles:
    - First, that the governing and executive power in the Church resides within the brethren;
    - Second, that the Church organization is complete in each assembly, which is independent of every other.
  - The Presbyterian theory, which teaches:
    - The people have a right to a substantive part in the government of the Church.
    - Presbyters who labor in the Word and doctrine, are the highest permanent officers of the Church, and all belong to the same order.
    - The outward and visible Church is (or should be) one in the sense that the smaller parts (congregations) are subject to the larger (presbyteries), and the larger to the whole (denomination).
- [Hodge]-“*Christ has in fact vested all ecclesiastical power in the Church as a whole, none of its members being excluded; yet not in the Church as a mob, but as an organized body consisting of members, their representative ruling elders, and ministers or bishops.*”
  - There has been a belief in some churches that Elders or Bishops were ordained by the Apostles, and have always continued in the Church by “Apostolic Succession.”
  - Whether passed down by some aristocratic-style system, or through some more federal, and representative system of suffrage by assemblies, all hold to the usefulness and continuation of these offices.
  - These offices were designed to be perpetuated as the highest class of officers in the Church (1 Tim 3:1; Eph. 4:11,12).
    - All Church power vests jointly in the lay and clerical members: the ministers and the people.
    - [Hodge]- “*Ruling Elders are properly the REPRESENTATIVES of the people, chose by them for the purpose of exercising government and discipline in conjunction*

*with pastors and ministers. The powers therefore exercised by our ruling elders are powers which belong to the lay members of the Church. They are chosen by them to act in their name in the government of the Church. A representative is one chosen by others to do in their name what they are entitled to do in their own persons; or rather to exercise the powers which radically inhere in those for whom they act.”*



# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 30:

### Of Church Censures

**Section 2:** To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed, by virtue whereof they have power respectively to retain and remit sins, to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require<sup>1</sup>.

1. Mat 16:19; 18:17-18; John 20:21-23; 2 Cor 2:6-8.

**OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to A.A. Hodge) *“As to the nature and extent of the power conferred upon the Church of admitting and excluding from the fold, and of disciplining its members...as to the ends of this discipline...as to the methods through which it should be administered, All church power must be exercised in an orderly manner through the officers spoken of above, freely chosen for this purpose by the brethren; it relates: (1) To matters of doctrine. She has a right to set forth a public declaration of the truths which she believes, and which are to be acknowledged by all who enter her communion. That is, she has a right to frame creeds or confessions of faith, as her testimony for the truth and her protest against error. And as she has been commissioned to teach all nations, she has the right of selecting teachers, of judging of their fitness, of ordaining and sending them forth into the field, and of recalling and deposing them when unfaithful. (2) The Church has power to set down rules for the ordering of public worship. (3) She has power to make rules for her own government; such as every Church has in its book of discipline, constitution or canons, etc. (4) She has power to receive into fellowship, and to exclude the unworthy from her own communion.”*

**Matthew 16:15-20-** *“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, a ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’”*

**Matthew 18:15-20-** *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*

**John 20:19-23-** *“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.’”*

**2 Corinthians 2:5-11-** *“Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.”*

- The power in Matthew 16:19, commonly called “the power of the keys” is the opening and closing of the doors of the Church, of admitting or excluding persons from sealing ordinances.
- There are two unquestioned, and immutable facts associated with this ‘power’:
  - The power to forgive sin is an incommunicable attribute of God and Christ.

- God has given to no class of men the faculty of absolutely discriminating the good from the bad among our fellows.
- It therefore necessarily follows that the power of the Church of opening and closing, of binding and loosing, is purely ministerial and declarative.
- Church censures declare simply what is, to the best of the knowledge and opinion of the Church officers pronouncing them, what constitutes the mind of Christ in their cases.
- Church censures have direct binding effect only in so far as the relation of the person censured to the visible Church is concerned.
- They can have effect upon the relations of the person censured to God and Christ only in so far as they represent the will of Christ in the case, and only because they do.
- There is no efficacy to a censure improperly or errantly placed upon a person by Church officers acting out of the bounds of Scripture, and not centered in God's will.
- The entire purpose of Church discipline is declared to be:
  - The peace and purity of the Church, and the ultimate glory and esteem of God.
  - The recovery of the erring brother himself.
  - The force and example of the process as a deterrence of others from like sin.
  - The exhibition of righteousness and faithfulness of the church presented to the world.

- [Williamson]-*"It will be noted that the sacraments are not (themselves) keys of the kingdom. They neither open nor shut the kingdom to men. They are signs and seals of that to (or from) which the keys admit or exclude men. We would also call attention to the fact that Christ has joined the two keys of the kingdom together. When men fail to properly exercise or administer these keys, Christ gives them to others. And this happens when either key is not faithfully used. When a church, for example fails to exercise church discipline, it must not be imagined that it will retain power to open and close the kingdom of God to men by preaching. And be a church ever so diligent in maintaining rigid discipline, it will have no such power without the faithful preaching of the gospel. Loss of faithful preaching or discipline is loss of that which is required of heaven."*

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 30:

### Of Church Censures

Section 3: Church censures are necessary for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren; for deterring of others from the like offenses; for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump; for vindicating the honor of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel; and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the Church, if they should suffer his covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders<sup>1</sup>.

1. Mat 7:6; 1 Cor 5 throughout; 11:27-34 with Jude 1:23; 1 Tim 1:20; 5:20.

Section 4: For the better attaining of these ends, the officers of the Church are to proceed by admonition, suspension from the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a season, and by excommunication from the Church, according to the nature of the crime and demerit of the person<sup>1</sup>.

1. a. Mat 18:17; 1 Cor 5:4-5, 13; 1 Thes 5:12; 2 Thes 3:6, 14-15; Titus 3:10.

**OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson) *"These sections of the Confession teach us (1) why church discipline is necessary, and (2) how church discipline is to be carried out. We live in a day in which church discipline is practically non-existent in much of the visible Church. Even churches that endeavor to preserve faithful preaching of the Word of God are often lax in this matter. And this laxity is even defended on the grounds that church discipline is harmful to erring sinners and an unwarranted 'judging' of a brother's soul before God."*

- The Church practices discipline because Jesus commanded it. The outline for it is presented in Matthew 18:12-20.
- Christ is king and head of His Church, and there can be no other law than that which He commands.
- However plausible or attractive arguments made against Church Discipline may seem, they are obliterated by the simple commandment of Christ that discipline must be meted out to the disobedient.
  - **"People will be offended by Church Discipline"**-
    - It is frequently claimed that church discipline will offend and alienate- not only the alienating one who is the subject of the discipline, but others in the congregation.
    - It is usually proposed that, instead of discipline, the Church ought to content itself to pray for the Holy Spirit to trouble the conscience of the offender and restore him to the right path, and fellowship without the direct intercession of church discipline.
      - This is presumed to be a better display of love toward an erring brother.
      - It is presumed to be more humbling (to us) in contrast to having a spirit of harsh and judgmental pride.
      - I SEEMS to be more pious, but is actually the very soul of hypocrisy.
    - How can obedience to the command of Christ be harsh, unloving, or prideful?
      - To lay such a charge against the discipline is to lay the same charge against Christ who instituted it.
      - It is actually sin to pray for the Holy Spirit to invoke means of discipline on an erring brother, when (out of a *pretended piety*) we refuse to invoke the divine ordinance of discipline ourselves.
    - It is an ironic fact that church discipline is really the opposite of what it is commonly said to be: it is the supreme means of reclaiming and regaining an offending brother, who is said to be alienated by it.
    - Scripture proves this.
      - 1 Cor. 5:11-6:4-*"But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you.' When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels?"*

*How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church?"*

- [Williamson]-*"Humanly-invented arguments to the contrary notwithstanding...Church discipline thus proved to be what Jesus said it was: an act of love and concern like unto that of a good shepherd who seeks out a wandering sheep. Church discipline is loving concern in action, the blessed result of which will often be: 'thou hast gained thy brother' (Matt. 18:15). Lack of church discipline is to be seen for what it really is- not a loving concern as is hypocritically claimed, but an indifference to the honor of Christ and the welfare of his flock. Not only is the erring brother himself harmed by the lack of church discipline. Others also are evilly affected. 'Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump.' (1 Cor. 5:6,7)."*
- Error and sin left unchecked only spread. Sinful specimens that are openly tolerated soon become open invitations to others to go and do likewise.
  - 1 Timothy 5:20-21- *"As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality."*
- ***"We shouldn't judge others, lest we ourselves are judged."***
  - This also operates under the appearance of personal piety.
  - It isn't uncommon for church officers to even refuse to administer church discipline on the grounds that they too are sinners and therefore not qualified to judge someone else.
    - This argument can be made to sound very attractive and plausible, but is utterly false.
    - Christ commanded sinners to exercise church discipline.
    - It is no more an attempt to judge another man's soul before God than is admittance to the visible Church.
    - [Williamson]- *"The least that can be said of this sort of argument is that those who are not willing to exercise the keys of the kingdom in excluding men from the kingdom should also renounce the right to exercise these keys to admit men to the kingdom. But Scripture makes it clear that church discipline is to be exercised in some cases even when the offender is not regarded as an unbeliever."*
  - 2 Thess. 3:6-*"Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us."*
- Even if the sin is such that we need not call into question his whole Christian profession, we must still exercise discipline while he walks in a disorderly *manner*.
- "Ordinary" church discipline is of this sort of characterization.
  - "A word to the wise" is usually sufficient to correct error.
  - Informal application of the Matthew 18 process, without the need to involve the leadership or rank-and-file membership is (by far) the most used, and most effective discipline at work in the church.
  - This is the "iron sharpening iron" aspect of Proverbs 27:17, where the counsel of one brother improves the practice of another.
    - This is the process we frequently call, "one-anothering" because it doesn't ONLY speak of happy-clappy, fluffing-up, or positive reinforcement that we *typically* identify with our relationships within the body.
    - "Encouragement" involves *exhortation*, and it may occasionally even involve *admonition*.
    - 1 Thess. 2:10-13- *"You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers."*
  - The entire purpose of church discipline is about the *restoration* of an erring brother, and NOT the mere exercise of an earthly judgement upon his *eternal* soul.

- It is entirely based upon how *behaviors* and *actions* characterize one's presumed condition according to what objective Scriptural standards of faithfulness would necessitate, according to established rules of church order make us expect from the upright.
- Ideally, it is an appeal to God on our brother's behalf; a prayerful offering-up of a petition that God might adjudicate what is actually true, and will mete out appropriate penal consequences for the one(s) involved.
  - But we should acknowledge too, that there is always the danger of an unforgiving or judgmental spirit in the heart of the accuser, that may ultimately be what is judged, condemned, and punished by the Church.
  - There is a risk to all-accused and accuser alike; but we are all without excuse to tolerate the leaven of sin in our midst to pollute and disrupt the peace and purity of the Church.
- Even when excommunication is ultimately necessary, we should see it as the declaration of what a person has undeniably evidenced *himself* to be (a kind of confession), than our successful attempt to know his heart.
  - There should be in us, no pride of accomplishment, no sense of pride in our efforts, and no joy in the outcome.
  - All should watch with fear and introspection, lest we ourselves be found unfaithful and worthy of similar treatment.
- [Williamson]- *"When sinners are admitted to the Church it is because they give evidence of an external sort that men must judge without presuming to judge the heart. And it is the same with the extreme censure of church discipline by which men are excluded from the visible Church. Evidence of an external sort is judged. When a person gives not evidence that he is a true believer, the Church declares that fact by excommunication. But in every case the judgement of the soul is left to God alone {emphasis mine}."*
- **"What is the point of casting people out of the church for every little sin?"**
  - This is where many Christians simply stop their participation in church discipline.
  - It is the Scarlett O'Hara, "I'll think about it tomorrow" copout, for THAT tomorrow never comes.
  - It is a knocking down of the proverbial straw-man.
  - Church discipline is not necessarily a draconian process, with a predetermined outcome.
    - Biblical Church discipline is not a mere matter of casting people out of the church,
    - Neither is it, when it is actually done, for "little" sin.
  - The process of church discipline is intended to remove the sin from the sinner, not the sinners from the church.
  - Excommunication is the last resort and final warrant.... And ALWAYS for extreme sin.
  - Prior to actual excommunication as Christ instructed, repeated, earnest (and tender) efforts are to be employed to bring the errant back to a better mind; to turn from his sin.
  - THAT is a process far more sensitive and involved than simply casting multitudes of people from the assembly for a host of relatively minor offenses.
- BIBLICAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS NECESSARY BECAUSE IT IS THE ORDINANCE OF CHRIST.
 

*Matthew 18:15-18-"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

  - It stands above the *welfare* of any individual (who all deserve God's wrath and curse from the outset).
  - It stands apart from the *feelings* and *attitudes* of any individuals (who are not worthy to stand in judgement before God).
  - It stands in the midst of the gospel *duties* of the Church's leadership:
    - Who are tasked (in *addition* to preaching the gospel) to maintain the honor of Christ and the cause of truth.

- Who are called to be proximate protectors of the peace and purity of Christ's Bride, the Church.
- When church discipline is avoided, a very great price is exacted from her-
  - The *supposed* "evil" avoided and feared is as nothing compared to the actual evil that must necessarily follow.
  - In the letters to the churches recorded in John's Revelation 2 and 3, we see the consequences of churches not holding fast to truth.
    - Many tolerated secret and open sin in their midst.
    - Some suffered in spite of their faithfulness in confronting sin in their midst.
    - But we see clearly that Christ cares nothing for the reputation of churches that are spiritually dead. They have their lampstands extinguished.
- Faithful church discipline MAY result in a smaller church, but it will remain a TRUE church, which *should* be its ultimate goal.
- Every church member has the right and duty to seek recovery of an erring brother, but every individual member going privately to a brother is not seeking his excommunication, but his reformation and reconciliation.
- If at all possible, PUBLIC knowledge of the sin in question is avoided if all possible, and until it cannot be withheld any longer. Any subsequent visitation with witnesses (to the confrontation, by the way, NOT to broker some common offense taken) is still private, and without the intent of ultimate excommunication- it remains with the goal of reformation and reconciliation.
- ALL efforts of bringing the erring to a better mind for the purpose of restoration are exhausted before any final process of excommunication is implemented.
- Excommunication is ONLY the last resort. It follows ever reasonable effort to reclaim the erring brother. IT REQUIRES THAT TWO SPECIFIC CONDITIONS BE MET:
  - There must be undeniable violation of one of the Ten Commandments-
    - Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 24- " 'What is sin?' Answer: 'Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature'."
    - Mere non-conformity to some custom or tradition is NOT punishable by church discipline, especially by excommunication.
  - The sin must be persistent and unrepentant.
    - Some think that excommunication is justified only when a sin is *notorious* or *scandalous*, such as when murder or adultery has been discovered.
    - But excommunication is not related to the notoriety or infamy of the sin. It is connected entirely to the persistence of the sinner IN the sin.
    - [Williamson]-*"Let the sin be slanderous gossip or neglect of divine worship, which are neither uncommon nor 'notorious' and of the sinner hardens his heart and persists in such sins without evidence of repentance, excommunication is warranted. When an erring church member has been faced with his error, when he has been shown from the Word of God what is error is and what his duty is, if he then 'neglects to hear the church' (or in other words, pays no heed, but persists in his error with hardness and obstinacy), the duty of the church is clear: 'let him be.... as an heathen man and a publican.' This is right and good because Jesus said to do it."*

[Williamson]- *"It were better that the honor of Christ be maintained than that a thousand sinners be kept on the rolls of the visible Church to his dishonor. It were better that the truth of Christ be maintained than that men be catered to. It is more important to God that Christ be honored and obeyed than that sinners be pampered. We must choose between the two: we must either maintain the honor of Christ at all costs, or else sacrifice the honor of Christ in order to satisfy the wishes of men. And in the latter, the Church will be 'good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the foot of men' (Matt. 5:13)."*

# **Chapter 31**

## **OF SYNODS AND COUNCILS**

# American Revisions to the Westminster Confession of Faith

## Original Wording (1647)

### Chapter XXXI Of Synods and Councils

I. For the better government, and further edification of the Church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils.

II. As magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers and other fit persons to consult and advise about matters of religion; so, if magistrates be open enemies to the Church, the ministers of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office, or they, with other fit persons, upon delegation from their churches, may meet together in such assemblies.

III. It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially, to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of his Church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same: which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in his Word.

IV. All synods or councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a help in both.

V. Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.

## American Revision (1729)

### Chapter 31 Of Synods and Councils

1. For the better government, and further edification of the church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils: *and it belongeth to the overseers and other rulers of the particular churches, by virtue of their office, and the power which Christ hath given them for edification and not for destruction, to appoint such assemblies; and to convene together in them, as often as they shall judge it expedient for the good of the church.*

[Original paragraph II was omitted; paragraphs III-V were renumbered 2-4.]

2. It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially, to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of his Church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same: which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in his Word.

3. All synods or councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a help in both.

4. Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.



## A.A. HODGE on Chapter 31: Section 1

As we have seen in the last chapter, all Church power is vested by Christ in the Church as a whole — not as a mob, but as an organized body. As organized, the Church consists of presbyters or bishops and the people, and the people as represented by lay or ruling elders. This necessarily gives origin to the session or parochial presbytery, consisting of the bishop or pastor, and the ruling elders or representatives of the people. In this body the entire ecclesiastical power of the whole congregation is vested. It admits candidates to sealing ordinances, exercises pastoral care and discipline over the members, provides for the instruction of the flock, and regulates public worship.

In the Episcopal Church this governing power vests with the rector. In the Congregational Churches it is exercised immediately by the whole body of the brotherhood in person. In the Presbyterian Church it vests with pastor and people — the people, however, acting only through their permanent representatives, the ruling elders.

But the third great principle of Presbyterianism, as stated in the preceding chapter, is, that the whole Church of Christ on earth “is one in such a sense that a smaller part is subject to a larger, and a larger to the whole. It has one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The principles of government laid down in the Scriptures bind the whole Church. The terms of admission and the legitimate grounds of exclusion are everywhere the same. The same qualifications are everywhere to be demanded for admission to the sacred office, and the same grounds for deposition. Every man who is properly received as a member of a particular church becomes a member of the Church universal; every one rightfully excluded from a particular church is excluded from the whole Church: everyone rightfully ordained to the ministry in one church is a minister of the universal Church; and when rightfully deposed in one he ceases to be a minister in any. Hence, while every particular church has a right to manage its own affairs and administer its own discipline, it cannot be independent and irresponsible in the exercise of that right. As its members are the members of the Church universal, and those whom it excommunicates are, according to the Scriptural theory, delivered unto Satan and cut off from the communion of the saints, the acts of a particular church become the acts of the whole Church, and therefore the whole has a right to see that they are performed according to the law of Christ. Hence, on the one hand, the right of appeal; and, on the other, the right of review and control.

The principle contained in the above statement was certainly acted upon in the apostolic age, and it has been practically recognized and acted upon with more or less fidelity in all branches of the Christian Church ever since.

A controversy having arisen in the church at Antioch concerning the Mosaic law, instead of settling it among themselves as an independent body, they referred the case to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem; and there it was authoritatively decided (not by the apostles alone, but ‘by the apostles and elders, with the whole church,’ Acts xv. 22) — not for that church (Antioch) only, but for all others. Paul, therefore, in his next missionary journey, as he passed through the cities, ‘delivered to them,’ it is said, ‘the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.’ Acts xvi. 4.” Hence, in carrying these principles into effect, the constitution of the Presbyterian Church provides for the erection and operation of a regularly graduated series of ecclesiastical councils.

1. Every particular congregation is governed, as we have seen, by a Session or Parochial Presbytery, consisting of its pastor and the ruling elders as the representatives of the people. The whole governmental power of that particular church vests in that session, and all trials for, or discipline of any of its members must originate there. Its decisions are final with respect to the matters subject to its jurisdiction, except when, after having been regularly carried up by appeal, they have been reversed by a superior court.

2. There is the Classical Presbytery, which consists of all the pastors or bishops and the churches in a city or neighbourhood who can conveniently meet together and unite in the exercise of ecclesiastical government. The churches appear in the Presbytery by representatives from the sessions of particular churches, so regulated that the number of lay representatives shall exactly equal the number of pastors; and these representatives of the people in all respects exercise equal power with the pastors. All the powers of these bodies vest in them as bodies, and not in the members severally. Whatever they are competent to decide or to execute can be done only by the members jointly while in session, and not at all by them separately, or even jointly in any other capacity. Ordained ministers are not members of particular churches, but belong in the first instance to the Presbytery. The Presbytery, therefore, in the first instance, examines and decides upon the qualifications of candidates and licenses and ordains them; and in the case of the discipline of a minister the process originates in the Presbytery, to which alone the pastor is directly responsible. A licentiate is in no sense or degree a minister, He is purely a layman — i.e., a private member of a particular church

— taken under care of a Presbytery experimentally, and as a part of his trials or tests temporarily allowed to preach before the people, that they may pass their final judgment upon his qualifications and acceptability as a candidate for the ministry.

3. Synods are only large Presbyteries, consisting of all the Presbyteries in full of a province.

4. The General Assembly of the whole Church, which, like all the other bodies, consists of an equal number of pastors and of the representatives of the people, of necessity is composed of the representatives of the constituent Presbyteries, instead of the Presbyteries themselves in full.

In virtue of the principle of APPEAL, any question originating in a church session, or in any other subordinate court, may be carried up in succession through all the series to the General Assembly, whose decisions when once made are final.

In virtue of the principle of REVIEW AND CONTROL, each church court of every grade above a church session has the right, and is under obligation, to review “the records of the proceedings of the judicatory next below;” and of course to judge of those proceedings, and secure their correction when wrong. And each court, including the church session, is an executive as well as a judicial body; and therefore has an inherent right of supervision and of governmental control over the entire field subject to its jurisdiction. Hence a superior judicatory, in default of the proper action of the inferior judicatory to which the case more immediately belongs, may inaugurate investigation and apply discipline immediately in the case of any person within its legitimate bounds.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 31:

Of Synods and Councils

**Section 1:** For the better government and further edification of the Church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils<sup>1</sup> [1647 ⇌ 1729] ...and it belongeth to the overseers and other rulers of the particular churches, but virtue of their office and the power which Christ hath given them for edification, and not for destruction, to appoint such assemblies<sup>2</sup>, and to convene together in them as often as the shall judge it expedient for the good of the Church<sup>3</sup>.

1. Acts 15:2, 4, 6.

2. Acts 15

**Section 2:** As magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers and other fit persons to consult and advise with about matters of religion<sup>1</sup>; so, if magistrates be open enemies to the Church, the ministers of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office, or they, with other fit persons, upon delegation from their churches, may meet together in such assemblies<sup>2</sup>.

1. Isa 49:23; 2 Chron 19:8-11; 29-30 throughout; Prov 11:14; Mat 2:4-5; 1 Tim 2:1-2. •

2. Acts 15:2, 4, 22-23, 25.

**OBSERVATIONS - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)** “These sections of the Confession of Faith teach us (1) that the civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word, sacraments, or discipline, (2) that he does have authority to see that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, and that error and abuses in worship and discipline be prevented or reformed, (3) that he has power to call synods, and to be present at them to see that what is transacted is according to the mind of God, (4) that there ought to be synods or councils for the government of the Church, and (5) that while a civil magistrate may lawfully call a synod, the ministers of the Church have the power to call such synods themselves if the civil magistrate happens to be an open enemy of the Church.”

[G.I. Williamson’s entire Commentary on 1647 version Sections 1 & 2]

*“We come, in this part of the Confession of Faith, to what can only be called an acute difficulty. On the one hand, we read that ‘the civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven,’ and on the other hand, we read that ‘he hath authority . . . to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed,’ and that in order to do this ‘he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.’ In chapter XXX, 1, we read that Jesus Christ, ‘as king and head of his Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of church-officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.’ But here we read that independent action is envisioned only ‘if magistrates be open enemies to the Church,’ in which event ‘the ministers of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office, or they, with other fit persons upon delegation from their churches, may meet together in such assemblies.’ What is this if it is not a direct contradiction?”*

*This difficulty is not found in the Westminster Confession of Faith alone. For example, in the Belgic Confession, as revised by the Synod of Dordt, these words are found in Article XXXVI (“Of Magistrates”): ‘And their office is, not only to have regard unto, and watch for the welfare of the civil state; but also that they protect the sacred ministry; and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship.’*

*We find that practically every Presbyterian and Reformed church has addressed itself in one way or another to the difficulty presented by this contradiction. Some churches, for example, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, have not changed the original text of the Confession, but have made a special declaration on the subject. The Reformed Presbyterian Declaration and Testimony says: ‘No ecclesiastical authority is lodged in the hands of private Christians or civil Magistrates; Church judicatories are subordinate only to Christ Jesus. They appoint, by an exclusive right, their own times and places of meeting and adjournment . . . ‘ (xxiii, 4).*

*It is difficult to see how this statement can be reconciled with the Confession. We can understand the reluctance that might be felt in changing the text of so venerable a document as the Westminster Confession of Faith. But when it can be shown that the Confession of Faith is incorrect, we believe that it ought to be changed. For, as the Confession itself is careful to teach us, ‘The supreme judge by which all*

*. . . decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men . . . are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture' (I, 10). For our part we believe the only proper solution to the difficulty involved in this portion of the Confession is that which most Presbyterian and Reformed bodies have adopted, namely, a revision of these portions of the Confession of Faith. In such revision as that of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America, for example, all ambiguity and error are removed, and the following principles are clearly stated: (1) that the government of the Church is distinct and separate from that of the State, (2) that civil magistrates may not interfere in the affairs of any church so long as it is not subversive of the civil order, even in controversies of doctrine or discipline, and (3) that church officers alone have the authority to appoint synods or councils, with which the civil government may not interfere."*

Williamson, G.I.; The Westminster Confession of Faith: for Study Classes (pp. 317-319). P&R Publishing.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 31:

Of Synods and Councils

**Section 3 [2]** <sup>\*</sup>: It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially, to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of his Church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same: which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in his Word<sup>1</sup>.

1. Mat 18:17-20; Acts 15:15, 19, 24, 27-31; 16:4.

**Section 4 [3]** <sup>\*</sup>: All synods or councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a help in both<sup>1</sup>.

1. Acts 17:11; 1 Cor 2:5; 2 Cor 1:24; Eph 2:20.

**Section 5 [4]** <sup>\*</sup>: Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate<sup>1</sup>.

1. Luke 12:13-14; John 18:36.

**OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson) *"These sections {Sections 3&4} of the Confession teach us (1) the sphere of authority belonging to synods and councils, (2) the degree or measure of authority belonging to them, and (3) the limitation of their power within the realm of fallible administration. The government of the Church is wholly spiritual and ministerial... This section {Section 5} of the Confession teaches us (1) that synods and councils are to concern themselves with the affairs of the Church, (2) that they are not to intermeddle in the affairs of the State, (3) that they may, however, speak out on civil issues in extraordinary cases involving matters vital to the Church, and (4) that they may also give advice to the civil magistrate when it is requested"*

- The government of the Church is wholly spiritual and ministerial.
  - It has to do with matters of doctrine, worship, and spiritual discipline.
  - Its power is only administrative and declarative.
  - It must do and say everything according to the will of God as it is revealed in Scripture.
- When there is a controversy between two opposing views (both claiming to be according to the truth of God)
  - Then it is proper for a synod or council to convene to determine which view (if either) is according to the Word of God.
- When there are questions as to whether a certain practice is right or wrong, in which there is disagreement in the conviction of men's consciences,
  - Then it is proper for a synod to consider the matter and endeavor to ascertain the proper answer to the question from the Word of God.
- Provided that Scripture is adhered to, a synod has the right to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God and the government of the Church.
- It is limited to the declaration of that which God has said in his Word and the proper order by which the commands of God are to be observed.
  - It would be proper for a synod to make rules concerning the order of worship to be observed in a church where difficulty has arisen over such a question.
  - But it would not be permissible to make new laws additional to the Bible as to the proper elements of divine worship.
- No synod may lawfully legislate the *content* of true worship.
- It can only decree with respect to the *order* of worship.

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\* 1792 (American) version of the Westminster Confession of Faith, used by PCA

[Williamson]- *“To disregard a specific decree which implements a general command of Christ is sinful because Christ has authorized church courts to make such decrees. However, as the Confession reminds us, ‘all synods and councils since the apostles’ times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred,’ so that ‘they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but [only] to be used as an help in both.’ When a church assembly issues a decree or order, or makes a determination of a controversy, which is itself in conflict with the Word of God, it must be disobeyed.”*

- The authority belonging to church councils is limited.
  - It is limited to the declaration and implementation of the doctrines and commandments of Christ contained in Scripture.
  - Synods and councils can never put forward any decree or determination which is inherently, and by virtue of the authority of the synod or council itself, infallible.

[Williamson]- *“It must also be said, however, that even in orthodox Reformed churches there has sometimes been a tendency to gradually elevate the deliverances of synods or assemblies to a place of practical supremacy as the rule of faith and practice. There are orthodox Reformed churches in which the members believe certain things and adhere to certain practices, not because the declarations of Synod or the General Assembly have been presented to them in such a way as to persuade them that such is the teaching of Scripture, but merely because a church rule has been made. We believe this to be dangerous and harmful, even if a particular rule is in accordance with Scripture. There may be a temporary appearance of strict obedience and piety. But it will soon decay and prove powerless to restrain sin. The more difficult way is the right way. When synods and councils put forth the effort to prove their declarations by Scripture, and administer them by persuasion as well as by discipline, the supreme authority of the Bible will be both safeguarded and expressed.”*

- The Reformed concept of “sphere sovereignty” is a scriptural teaching that recognizes that God is supreme in every realm or sphere of life.
  - It teaches that the individual Christian is to glorify God in all that he does.
  - And the law of God is quite as relevant in the political realm as in any other.
  - Moreover, it is the task of the Church to teach the whole counsel of God, even as it pertains to political affairs.
- But there is a world of difference between the teaching of principles of the Word of God to members of the Church and the attempt to directly interfere in the affairs of the State.
  - It is the task of the Church to provide instruction that will guide church members in political matters—civil magistrates included.
  - But it is the task of Christians as *citizens* to affect that which is in accord with the gospel.
- The Church is a mighty force in the affairs of State, but it does so indirectly.
- It is the individual Christian exercising his personal civil rights, rather than the Church, that influences politics with Christian principles.
- There are however instances when the Church may directly concern itself with civil matters.
  - When the State presents a direct threat to the spiritual concerns of the Church, the Church has the right to speak on that matter as an organized body.
    - This happens (for instance) when laws were passed that attempt to silence the Bible.
    - Examples might include:
      - Open acceptance of homosexual sin.
      - Acceptance of open idolatry or heresy.
      - Legalization of murder, theft, divorce, gambling, or a host of other commandment violations.
    - In instances such as these, the Church tells the State that it must denounce what the Bible denounces.
  - There may also be times when the civil authorities actually *request* a statement of opinion on matters involving morals from the Church.
    - Care must be exercised in such cases to avoid confusion between a faithful declaration of clear principles from the Word of God and any attempt to dictate public administrative policy, which is the proper task of the civil magistrates and not (directly) of the Church.

[Hodge] *“In every case in which the decrees of these ecclesiastical courts are consonant to the word of God, they are to be received by all subject to the jurisdiction of said court, not only because of the fact that they do agree with the word of God, but also because of the proper authority of the court itself as a court of Jesus Christ, appointed by him, and therefore ministerially representing him in all of its legitimate actions.”*

*From the Savoy Declaration of 1658 (John Owen)*

**The Institution of Churches, and the Order Appointed in Them by Jesus Christ**

1. By the appointment of the Father all power for the calling, institution, order, or government of the Church, is invested in a supreme and sovereign manner in the Lord Jesus Christ, as King and Head thereof.
2. In the execution of this power wherewith he is so entrusted, the Lord Jesus calleth out of the world unto communion with himself, those that are given unto him by his Father, that they may walk before him in all the ways of obedience, which he prescribeth to them in his Word.
3. Those thus called (through the ministry of the Word by his Spirit) he commandeth to walk together in particular societies or churches, for their mutual edification, and the due performance of that public worship, which he requireth of them in this world.
4. To each of these churches thus gathered, according to his mind declared in his Word, he hath given all that power and authority, which is any way needful for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline, which he hath instituted for them to observe, with commands and rules for the due and right exerting and executing of that power.
5. These particular churches thus appointed by the authority of Christ, and entrusted with power from him for the ends before expressed, are each of them as unto those ends, the seat of that power which he is pleased to communicate to his saints or subjects in this world, so that as such they receive it immediately from himself.
6. Besides these particular churches, there is not instituted by Christ any church more extensive or catholic entrusted with power for the administration of his ordinances, or the execution of any authority in his name.
7. A particular church gathered and completed according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members. The Lord Christ having given to his called ones (united according to his appointment in church-order) liberty and power to choose persons fitted by the Holy Ghost for that purpose, to be over them, and to minister to them in the Lord.
8. The members of these churches are saints by calling, visibly manifesting and evidencing (in and by their profession and walking) their obedience unto that call of Christ; who, being further known to each other by their confession of the faith wrought in them by the power of God, declared by themselves or otherwise manifested, do willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ; giving up themselves to the Lord, and to one another by the will of God in professed subjection to the ordinances of the gospel.
9. The officers appointed by Christ, to be chosen and set apart by the church so called, and gathered for the peculiar administration of ordinances, and execution of power and duty which he entrusts them with, or calls them to, to be continued to the end of the world, are pastors, teachers, elders and deacons.
10. Churches thus gathered and assembling for the worship of God, are thereby visible and public, and their assemblies (in whatever place they are, according as they have liberty or opportunity) are therefore church or public assemblies.

11. The way appointed by Christ for the calling of any person, fitted and gifted by the Holy Ghost, unto the office of pastor, teacher or elder in a church, is, that he be chosen thereunto by the common suffrage of the church itself, and solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer, with imposition of hands of the eldership of that church, if there be any before constituted therein. And of a deacon, that he be chosen by the like suffrage, and set apart by prayer, and the like imposition of hands.
12. The essence of this call of a pastor, teacher or elder unto office, consists in the election of the church, together with his acceptation of it, and separation by fasting and prayer. And those who are so chosen, though not set apart by imposition of hands, are rightly constituted ministers of Jesus Christ, in whose name and authority they exercise the ministry to them so committed. The calling of deacons consisteth in the like election and acceptation with separation by prayer.
13. Although it be incumbent on the pastors and teachers of the churches to be instant in preaching the Word, by way of office; yet the work of preaching the Word is not so peculiarly confined to them, but that others also gifted and fitted by the Holy Ghost for it, and approved (being by lawful ways and means in the providence of God called thereunto) may publicly, ordinarily and constantly perform it; so that they give themselves up thereunto.
14. However, they who are engaged in the work of public preaching, and enjoy the public maintenance upon that account, are not thereby obliged to dispense the seals to any other than such as (being saints by calling, and gathered according to the order of the gospel) they stand related to, as pastors or teachers. Yet ought they not to neglect others living within their parochial bounds, but besides their constant public preaching to them, they ought to enquire after their profiting by the Word, instructing them in, and pressing upon them (whether young or old) the great doctrines of the gospel, even personally and particularly, so far as their strength and time will admit.
15. Ordination alone without the election or precedent consent of the church, by those who formerly have been ordained by virtue of that power they have received by their ordination, doth not constitute any person a church-officer, or communicate office-power to him.
16. A church furnished with officers (according to the mind of Christ) hath full power to administer all his ordinances; and where there is want of any one or more officers required, that officer, or those which are in the church, may administer all the ordinances proper to their particular duty and offices; but where there are no teaching officers, none may administer the seals, nor can the church authorise any so to do.
17. In the carrying on of church-administrations, no person ought to be added to the church, but by the consent of the church itself; that so love (without dissimulation) may be preserved between all the members thereof.
18. Whereas the Lord Jesus Christ hath appointed and instituted as a means of edification, that those who walk not according to the rules and laws appointed by him (in respect of faith and life, so that just offence doth arise to the church thereby) be censured in his name and authority. Every church hath power in itself to exercise and execute all those censures appointed by him in the way and order prescribed in the gospel.



19. The censures so appointed by Christ, are admonition and excommunication. And whereas some offences are or may be known only to some, it is appointed by Christ, that those to whom they are so known, do first admonish the offender in private: in public offences where any sin, before all. Or in case of non-amendment upon private admonition, the offence being related to the church, and the offender not manifesting his repentance, he is to be duly admonished in the name of Christ by the whole church, by the ministry of the elders of the church; and if this censure prevail not for his repentance, then he is to be cast out by excommunication with the consent of the church.
20. As all believers are bound to join themselves to particular churches, when and where they have opportunity so to do, so none are to be admitted unto the privileges of the churches, who do not submit themselves to the rule of Christ in the censures for the government of them.
21. This being the way prescribed by Christ in case of offence, no church-members upon any offences taken by them, having performed their duty required of them in this matter, ought to disturb any church-order, or absent themselves from the public assemblies, or the administration of any ordinances upon that pretence, but to wait upon Christ in the further proceeding of the church.
22. The power of censures being seated by Christ in a particular church, is to be exercised only towards particular members of each church respectively as such; and there is no power given by him unto any synods or ecclesiastical assemblies to excommunicate, or by their public edicts to threaten excommunication, or other church-censures against churches, magistrates, or their people upon any account, no man being obnoxious to that censure, but upon his personal miscarriage, as a member of a particular church.
23. Although the church is a society of men, assembling for the celebration of the ordinances according to the appointment of Christ, yet every society assembling for that end or purpose, upon the account of cohabitation within any civil precincts and bounds, is not thereby constituted a church, seeing there may be wanting among them, what is essentially required thereunto; and therefore a believer living with others in such a precinct, may join himself with any church for his edification.
24. For the avoiding of differences that may otherwise arise, for the greater solemnity in the celebration of the ordinances of Christ, and the opening a way for the larger usefulness of the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost; saints living in one city or town, or within such distances as that they may conveniently assemble for divine worship, ought rather to join in one church for their mutual strengthening and edification, than to set up many distinct societies.
25. As all churches and all the members of them are bound to pray continually for the good or prosperity of all the churches of Christ in all places, and upon all occasions to further it; (every one within the bounds of their places and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces). So the churches themselves (when planted by the providence of God, so as they may have opportunity and advantage for it) ought to hold communion amongst themselves for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.
26. In cases of difficulties or differences, either in point of doctrine or in administrations, wherein either the churches in general are concerned, or any one church in their peace, union, and edification, or any member or members of any church are injured in, or by any proceeding in

censures, not agreeable to truth and order: it is according to the mind of Christ, that many churches holding communion together. do by their messengers meet in a synod or council, to consider and give their advice in, or about that matter in difference, to be reported to all the churches concerned. Howbeit, these synods so assembled are not entrusted with any church-power, properly so called, or with any jurisdiction over the churches themselves, to exercise any censures, either over any churches or persons, or to impose their determinations on the churches or officers.

27. Besides these occasional synods or councils, there are not instituted by Christ any stated synods in a fixed combination of churches, or their officers in lesser or greater assemblies; nor are there any synods appointed by Christ in a way of subordination to one another.
28. Persons that are joined in church-fellowship, ought not lightly or without just cause to withdraw themselves from the communion of the church whereunto they are so joined. Nevertheless, where any person cannot continue in any church without his sin, either for want of the administration of any ordinances instituted by Christ, or by his being deprived of his due privileges, or compelled to anything in practice not warranted by the Word, or in case of persecution, or upon the account of conveniency of habitation; he consulting with the church, or the officer or officers thereof, may peaceably depart from the communion of the church, wherewith he hath so walked, to join himself with some other church, where he may enjoy the ordinances in the purity of the same, for his edification and consolation.
29. Such reforming churches as consist of persons sound in the faith and of conversation becoming the gospel, ought not to refuse the communion of each other, so far as may consist with their own principles respectively, though they walk not in all things according to the same rules of church-order.
30. Churches gathered and walking according to the mind of Christ, judging other churches (though less pure) to be true churches, may receive unto occasional communion with them, such members of those churches as are credibly testified to be godly, and live without offence.

# Chapter 32

## OF THE STATE OF MEN AFTER DEATH, AND OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 32:

Of the State of Men After Death, and Of the Resurrection of the Dead

**Section 1:** The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption<sup>1</sup>; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal subsistence<sup>2</sup>, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies<sup>3</sup>; and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day<sup>4</sup>. Besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.

1. Gen 3:19; Acts 13:36.

2. Eccl 12:7; Luke 23:43.

3. Phil 1:23 with Acts 3:21 and Eph 4:10; 2 Cor 5:1, 6, 8; Heb 12:23.

4. Luke 16:23-24; Acts 2:25; 1 Pet 3:19; Jude 1:6-7.

**OBSERVATIONS** - (with thanks to A.A. Hodge) *“This Section teaches (1) That man consists of two distinct elements, a soul and a body, and that death consists in their temporary separation. (2) That while the body is resolved into its constituent chemical elements, the soul of the believer is (a) immediately made perfect in holiness, (b) during all the intermediate state from death until the resurrection, continues conscious, active and happy, and (c) is in the presence of Christ, who, after his ascension, has sat down at the right hand of God. (3) That the souls of the wicked also continue, during this intermediate state, conscious and active, but in a state of penal torment, reserved to the judgment of the great day. (4) These conditions, though not final, are irreversible—i.e., none of those with Christ will be ever lost, and none of those in torment will be ever saved. (5) The Scriptures afford no ground whatever for the Romish doctrine that there are other places or conditions occupied by deceased men than the two above mentioned.”*

- The duality of human nature, consists of two distinguishable elements: a soul, and a body
  - These have distinct and independent attributes and existence,
    - This is clearly taken for granted and constantly implied in the language of Scripture.
  - God made the human body out of the dust of the earth and breathed life into it, and so man became a living soul. (Gen. 2:7).
- Christ bids us in Matthew 10:28, *“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*
  - See also: Matt. 5:21-30, 10:28, 16:18-19, 23:15,33; Mark 9:43-47; Luke 12:5, 16:19-31; James 3:6; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude:5-7.
- Death is defined in Ecclesiastes 12:7: *“...and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”*
  - [2 Corinthians 5:8]-*“Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”*
  - [Philippians 1:21-24]- *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”*
  - Death then, is a splitting up of the *personal* union of these two elements of flesh and spirit.
    - It is a departing, a being with Christ, a ceasing to abide in the flesh, a being absent *from* the body *by* the conscious *personal* soul.
    - We know that when the soul leaves the body, the body is resolved or committed to its original chemical elements,
    - These physical parts of us are gradually incorporated back into the shifting currents of matter on the surface of the earth.
  - The Scriptures teach us though, that in spite of this change of their *material* constituents, the real *identity* of our bodies is divinely preserved
    - As members of Christ, all that is essential to our *material* bodies is *ultimately* preserved and brought back together into a *glorious* state at our resurrection.
    - [Hodge]- *“As to the condition and location of the souls of men during the interval which elapses between the death of each individual and the general and simultaneous resurrection of the bodies of all, what the Scriptures teach us may be summed up under the following heads: (1.) The souls of both believers and the reprobate continue after death conscious and active, although they remain until the resurrection separate from*

*their bodies. (2.) The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness. (3.) The souls of believers, thus perfected, are immediately introduced into the presence of Christ and continue to enjoy bright revelations of God and the society of the holy angels. (4.) The souls of the reprobate are at once introduced into the place provided for the devil and his angels, and continue in unutterable misery. (5.) This state of both classes admits of no exchange or transfer, but their present condition is the commencement of an inevitable progression in opposite directions."*

- There is a name given by theologians to the condition of persons following their physical death and the their eternal condition assigned at the Resurrection of the Dead: it is called the "INTERMEDIATE STATE."
  - It is *intermediate* in the sense that:
    - The personhood of all men continue in an *incomplete* condition while their souls and bodies are separated by physical death.
    - That neither the *redemption of the saved* nor the *punishment of the lost* has yet reached its final stage.
    - That *possibly*, in the case of the LOST, and *very probably* in the case of the REDEEMED, the physical localities in which they are during the intermediate state are not the same as those in which they are to dwell permanently after the final judgement.
      - [HODGE]-*"As to the location of the place in which the souls of the reprobate suffer, the Scriptures give us no clue. In Jude, verse 7, it is said, 'The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.' In Matt. 25:41, the Judge at the last day says to those 'on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.' The rich man (Luke 16:23) lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torment, while his brethren were still alive on earth. But where these places are situated, and whether the locality of torment now is identical with the locality of torment after the judgment, no man can tell, because God has not revealed it. Of course, the terms 'up' or 'down,' 'under' or 'above,' applied to such a subject, must be simply metaphorical, and cannot indicate absolute direction when addressed promiscuously to the inhabitants of a revolving and rotating sphere."*
      - ([HODGE-again]- *"As to the location of the place where the redeemed are now gathered, absolutely nothing is revealed, except that it is wherever the glorified humanity of Christ is. They are with him, and behold his glory. 2 Cor. 5:1-8. See, also, all the scenes opened in the Apocalypse. And Christ at his ascension, sat down at "the right hand of God," "the right hand of the Majesty on high." Mark 16:19; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3; 10:12, etc. This must be a locality, because, the humanity of Christ being finite, his presence marks a definite place; yet the phrase "right hand of God" evidently marks rather the condition of honour and power to which Christ is raised as mediatorial King."*
  - As for the *location* in which Christ and His Glorified Bride will hold our central home throughout eternity, It is likely that it will be our present earth, first burned with fire and then gloriously replenished.
    - Romans 8:19-23- *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."*
    - 2 Peter 3:4-13- *"They will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.' For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then*

*existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”*

- Revelation 21:1-5—*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’ And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’”*

▪ So, the *intermediate state* of souls is:

- One of *conscious activity*,
  - The REDEEMED being perfectly holy and happy with Christ,
  - The REPROBATE being with the devil and his angels in torment,
- It is PERPETUAL and IRREVERSIBLE:
  - Consider the reappearance of Samuel *in a conscious state, with the full use of all his faculties*, at the call of Saul through the witch of Endor (Cf. 1 Samuel 28:7-20);
  - Consider the appearance of Moses and Elias at the transfiguration of Christ on the mount (Cf. Matthew. 17:3);
  - Consider Christ’s address to the thief on the cross—*“And he [the thief] said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ And he said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”* (Luke 23:42 & 43);
  - Consider the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:23, 24)—Lazarus is conscious and active in Abraham’s bosom; the rich man is in conscious torment in hell (Hades), while his brethren are still living in the flesh.
  - Consider the death of Stephen (Acts 7:55-59) where it is declared that, being full of the Holy Spirit, he saw the heavens opened, and Jesus Christ sitting at the right hand of God, of his crying out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” as he died.
  - Consider 2 Corinthians 5:1-8, where Paul declares that to be at home in the body is to be absent from the Lord, and to be absent from the body is (to the believer) to be present with the Lord;
  - Consider Paul saying (in Philippians 1:21-24), *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”*
  - Consider 1 Thessalonians 5:10, Paul tells us that whether we are alive in Christ or asleep (i.e., in the grave), we live “with Him.”
  - Consider Ephesians 3:15, where the Church is declared to be one whole family, of which part is in heaven at present and part still resided on earth.
  - Consider Hebrews 6:12-20, the Writer declares that after Abraham (and other ancient saints) had patiently endured, “he obtained the promises;”

- which promises we know were spiritual and heavenly in their truest meanings.
    - Consider Acts 1:25, where Judas is said to have gone to his “own place.”
    - Consider Jude 6&7, the lost angels are said to be reserved in everlasting chains, under “gloomy darkness,” unto the judgment of the last day, suffering the punishment of God in eternal fire.
    - In Hebrews 7:23, the spirits of the just are represented as made perfect and happy with the angels in heaven.
    - In Revelation 6:9-11, the souls of the martyrs are represented as under the altar in heaven, praying for the punishment of their former persecutors on earth (which necessarily must be before the Resurrection).
    - In Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 14:1,3, the souls of believers are represented as being now with Christ and the holy angels.
  - Our Confession declares that there is absolutely no foundation in Scripture for the Romish doctrine on the intermediate state of deceased men.
    - Rome holds that Hades (lit. “the place of the dead” or the *underworld*) contains several distinct regions “LIMBO” in which different classes of human souls are destined:
      - (1) The souls of unbaptized infants go to the “*Limbus Infantum*,” where they remain without suffering, and yet without “the beatific vision of God.”
      - (2) Old Testament believers were gathered in the “*Limbus Patrum*,” where, without suffering and yet without the beatific vision of God, they remained as *spirits in prison* until Christ, then during the three days Jesus continued under the power of death, He came and released them. ( Rome cites 1 Peter 3:19 & 20 as their proof text for this).
      - (3) All *unbaptized* adults and those who have subsequently *lost* the grace of baptism, thereby dying unreconciled to the Roman Church, go immediately to the *permanent hell*.
      - (4) All Christians who have attained a state of Christian perfection go immediately to heaven.
      - (5) The great mass of partially-sanctified Christians, dying in communion with the Church but still encumbered with imperfections, go to purgatory.
    - Concerning PURGATORY, the Council of Trent stated:
      - (a) That there is a purifying fire through which imperfect Christians must pass.
      - (b) That souls in purgatory may be benefited by the prayers and masses offered in their behalf on earth.
  - The Confession teaches that these doctrines are false, because-
    - (1) They are nowhere taught in Scripture.
    - (2) They are opposed to all teachings in Scripture pertaining to the *intermediate state*,
    - (3) They rest upon-
      - Anti-Christian principles regarding the efficacy of Christ’s atonement,
      - The need for sin-compensating *human* works
      - The presumed soul-purifying efficacy of temporary sufferings,
      - The perpetual celebration of and sacrifice of the mass,
      - Prayers on behalf of the dead, etc.

[G.I. Williamson]- “When we are made alive by God’s Holy Spirit, we have already passed from death unto life, as far as the soul is concerned. We have already begun to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. And from the moment of regeneration the soul cannot be touched by death. Death, in the full scope of it, as a punishment for sin, incurs the payment of the wages of sin, and this is its sting. This sting is removed at the moment of regeneration, so that at physical death, there is nothing that can touch the soul or spirit, not even any insurmountable fear, and least of all, the sting of the law. Death merely marks an advance in the progress of the believer’s spirit in that eternal life which began with regeneration.”

# Westminster Confession of Faith

## Chapter 32:

Of the State of Men After Death, and Of the Resurrection of the Dead

**Section 2:** At the last day, such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed<sup>1</sup>; and all the dead shall be raised up with the self-same bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls forever<sup>2</sup>.

1. 1 Cor 15:51-52; 1 Thes 4:17.
2. Job 19:26-27; 1 Cor 15:42-44.

**Section 3:** The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonor; the bodies of the just, by his Spirit, unto honor, and be made conformable to his own glorious body<sup>1</sup>.

1. John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor 15:42; Phil 3:21.

**OBSERVATIONS - (with thanks to G.I. Williamson)** *“These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that there will be a general resurrection at the last day, (2) that those who live until that day will be changed without the usual (time-consuming) process of physical decay, (3) that it will be a resurrection of the same body (identical in essence or substance, but different in qualities) that died, (4) that this body will again be united to the soul, so to remain forever, and (5) that this resurrection will be different for the righteous and the wicked.”*

**OBSERVATIONS - (with thanks to A.A. Hodge)** *“These Sections teach— (1st.) That at the last day there will be a simultaneous resurrection of all the dead, both of the just and of the unjust. (2d.) That those who then remain living on the earth shall not die, but be changed. (3d.) That the very same bodies that are buried in the earth shall be raised and reunited to their souls, their identity preserved, although their qualities will be changed. (4th.) That the bodies of believers shall be made like Christ’s glorious body—a spiritual body.’ (5th.) That the bodies of the reprobate shall be raised to dishonour.”*

- At the last day there will be a simultaneous resurrection of all the dead, both of the just and the unjust.
  - Daniel 12:2- *“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”*
  - John 5:28-29- *“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”*
- Both classes will be judged simultaneously, immediately after their resurrection upon the second coming of the Lord.
  - The sheep will stand on Christ’s right side and the goats on His left.
    - Matt. 25:31-34- *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world....*  
*v41- “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*  
*v46- “these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*
    - Rom. 2:6-8- *“He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.”*
    - Rev. 20:11-15- *“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up*



*the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."*

- Those who are alive and remain on earth until the coming of the Lord are not more blessed or better off than the ones who preceded them and who were resting in the grave.
  - 1 Thess. 4:13-18- *"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words."*
  - 1 Cor. 15:50-54- *"I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality."*
- The very same bodies that were buried in the earth will be raised and reunited to their souls; their *identities* will be preserved, although their *qualities* are changed. T
  - Phil. 3:20-21- *"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."*
  - 1 Cor. 15:53, 54- *"For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'"*
- Our bodies are now members of Christ, and they will be raised in a manner comparable to His resurrection,
  - Christ had a body identical to ours, except for sin.
  - His body suffered the wounds of the nails and the spear.
  - His body was declared dead and was placed in a normal human grave.
  - Upon His resurrection, His body was seen and handled for forty days
  - There are many elemental changes our human bodies all go through between birth and death, but none can doubt for a moment that our bodies remain essentially the same throughout our entire lives.
- These changes will doubtless be very great.
  - [Hodge]- *"There are many changes in the material elements and form of the human body between birth and death, and yet no one can for a moment doubt that the body remains one and the same throughout all. There is no difficulty in believing, upon the authority of God's word, that, in spite of the lapse of time and of all the changes, whether of matter or of form, it undergoes, the body of the resurrection will be in the same sense and to the same degree one with the body of death as the body of death is one with the body of birth."*
  - But we have confidence that the bodies of believers will be made like Christ's glorious body.
  - Phil. 3:21- *"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."*
  - [Hodge]- *"The body of the believer is to be made like unto Christ's glorious body. Phil. 3:21. The body of man now is 'an animal body' (1 Cor. 15:44), unhappily translated 'a natural body.' It is suited to the present wants of man, to his present stage of development, intellectual, moral, social and spiritual, and*

*to the physical conditions of the world he inhabits. But 'flesh and blood,' bone, muscle and nerve, 'cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.'"*

- But this shall be "changed."
  - We will NOT receive a new body substituted for the *old*, but the *old* changed into the *new*.
  - [Hodge]- "*As the seed gives birth to a new organism, so the corruptible will give birth to the incorruptible. For 'there is an animal body, and there is a spiritual body.' The spiritual body will be still material and identical with the body which was once animal, but it will be suited to the new wants of the spirits of just men made perfect—to their new stage of development, intellectual and spiritual—to their social relations, and to the physical conditions of the 'new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.'* (2 Pet. 3:12, 13).
- The bodies of the reprobate will be raised to dishonor.
  - John 5:28-29- "*Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*"

# **Chapter 33**

## **OF THE LAST JUDGMENT**

## Chapter 33: Of the Last Judgment

SECTION 1—God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ,<sup>1</sup> to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. 2 In which day not only the apostate angels shall be judged,<sup>3</sup> but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.<sup>4</sup>

SECTION 2—The end of God's appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect, and of his justice in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fulness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord; but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.<sup>5</sup>

THESE Sections teach—

- 1st. That God has appointed a day of general judgment.
- 2d. That he has committed this judgment into the hands of the God-man in his character as Mediator.
- 3d. That the persons to be judged include apostate angels and the whole human race, good and bad.
- 4th. That these persons are to be judged as to all their thoughts, words and deeds.
- 5th. That the great end of God in the appointment of this day is the manifestation of his glorious justice in the condemnation of the reprobate, and of his glorious grace in the glorification of believers.
- 6th. That the righteous are to be awarded admission to the presence of the Lord, which is to be consciously enjoyed by them in a state of unending holiness, happiness and honor.
- 7th. That the reprobate are to be awarded a place with the devil and his angels, to be endured with conscious torment and shame through a ceaseless eternity.

1st. It is a dictate of natural reason and conscience that in some way, formally or informally, severally or collectively, God will call all the subjects of his moral government to an exact account for their character and actions. It is obvious, as the author of the seventy-third Psalm declares, and as many other perplexed souls have thought, that justice is not executed upon men in this world. All this suggests the probability that God will at a future time adjust the disturbed balances and call all men to a strict account. This presumption of reason and conscience is confirmed and declared to be a fact in the word of God; and the additional information is conveyed that this judgment of men and angels shall be general and simultaneous, and shall be conducted on a certain predetermined day in the future. "The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent; because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance to all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." Acts 17:30, 31; Rom. 2:16; Matt. 25:31-46.

2d. The Judge on this great occasion is to be not God absolutely considered, but the God-man in his office as mediatorial King. All judgment is said to be not inherently his, but committed to him by the Father. John 5:22, 27. As Judge he is called the "Son of man" and the "man ordained by God." Matt. 25:31, 32; Acts 17:31. He conducts the judgment as "the King" and as Head of his members who have lived on earth. "For I was an hungered and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, etc.... And the King shall answer and say unto them. Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Matt. 25:35-40. And thus, as mediatorial King, he will consummate his work in the destruction of his enemies, the complete redemption of his friends, and "the restitution of all things." 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 1:7; Acts 3:21.

3d. The subjects of the judgment will embrace the entire human race of every generation, each individual appearing immediately after his resurrection, in the completeness of his reintegrated person, both soul and body. All the generations of the dead are to be raised and the then living "changed." "Before him shall be gathered all nations." "We shall not all sleep, but we must all be changed;... the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God.... And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell (Hades) delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged, every man according to his works." Matt. 25:31-46; 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 20:11-15. All evil angels are also to be arraigned in this judgment. "The angels which kept not their first estate... he hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day." Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4. Good angels will be concerned in it as attendants and ministers. Matt. 13:41, 42; 2 Thess. 1:7, 8.

4th. The judgment will not rest upon appearances, nor testimony, nor any partial knowledge of the facts, nor upon technical grounds of law, nor specific actions dissociated from the state of the heart and the motives which prompted them. The heathen who has sinned without the law "shall be judged without the law"—that is, without the law supernaturally revealed, but by the law written upon the heart, which made him a law unto himself. Luke 12:47, 48; Rom. 2:12-15. The Jew who "sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." Rom. 2:12. Every man who has lived under the dispensation of the gospel shall be judged by the gospel. Heb. 2:2, 3; 10:28, 29. We are told not to judge according to the appearance (John 7:24), and therefore to "judge nothing

before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.” 1 Cor. 4:5; Eccles. 12:14. “There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known. Therefore, whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light, and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.” Luke 8:17; 12:2, 3; Mark 4:22. This shall be done to manifest the righteousness of God in the condemnation of his enemies, and his glorious grace in the sanctification of his people. The saints will not be acquitted in the day of judgment on the ground of their own good deeds, but because their names are found written in “the book of life,” or the book of God’s electing love, and on the ground of their participation in the righteousness of Christ. Their good deeds will be publicly cited as the evidences of their union with Christ. Their union with Christ is the ground of their justification. Their faith is the instrument of their union with Christ; and their faith, as the Apostle James says, is shown by their works. Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 20:12, 15.

5th. The great end of God in this public unveiling of secrets and manifestation of character in connection with his final disposition of his creatures is of course the manifestation of his own glorious excellences as moral Governor and Redeemer. The redeemed are for ever “vessels of his mercy” prepared beforehand, in order that in them might be “made known the riches of his glory.” And the reprobate in like manner are exhibited as the “vessels of wrath,” to show his righteous wrath and make his power known. Rom. 9:22, 23. It has already been proved, under Chapter 4, § 1, that the chief end of God in the original creation was the manifestation of his own glorious perfections. If this was his end in the original creation, it of course must be so in every subsequent step consequent upon it.

6th. Immediately upon the close of the judgment, the righteous, being honourably acquitted, are to be awarded admission to the presence of the Lord, with whom they are ever to continue in a state of conscious and exalted happiness, excellence and honour for an absolutely unending eternity. Of the blessed estate of the saints, the Scriptures teach—(1.) Their blessedness flows from their perfect freedom from sin, and from their being with God and Christ, and their sharing the glory of Christ as joint heirs with him. John 17:24; Rom. 8:17; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 21:3. (2.) It shall be perfectly free from all evil of every kind (Rev. 21:4), and it shall involve every form of blessedness in an inconceivably great degree (1 Cor. 2:9) and exalted in kind (Col. 1:12). (3.) It is to endure for an absolutely unending eternity. It is called “eternal life” and “everlasting life,” an “eternal weight of glory,” “eternal salvation,” an “everlasting kingdom,” an “eternal inheritance.” Matt. 19:16, 29; 25:46; Rom. 2:7; 2 Cor. 4:17; Heb. 5:9; 2 Pet. 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:4; Heb. 9:15. From such passages as Rom. 8:19-23; 2 Pet. 3:5-13, and Rev. 21:1, it appears not improbable that after the great conflagration of the earth and all that inhabits its surface, which the Scriptures reveal shall accompany the judgment, this world will be reconstituted, and as the “new heaven” and the “new earth” be gloriously adapted to be the permanent residence of Christ and his Church.

7th. The reprobate will be immediately conveyed to the place prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41), and are there to continue in the conscious endurance of torment and shame for an absolutely unending eternity. The strongest terms which the Greek language affords are employed in the New Testament to express the unending duration of the penal torments of the lost. The same words (αἰών, αἰώνιος and αἰδίοος) are used to express the eternal existence of God (1 Tim. 1:17; Rom. 1:20; 16:26), of Christ (Rev. 1:18), of the Holy Ghost (Heb. 9:14), and the endless duration of the happiness of the saints (John 6:58; Matt. 19:29; Matt. 25:46, etc., etc.), and the endless duration of the sufferings of the lost. Matt. 25:46; Jude 6. Besides, their condition is constantly set forth by such terms as, the “fire that shall not be quenched,” “fire unquenchable,” “the worm that never dies,” “bottomless pit,” the necessity of paying “the uttermost farthing,” “the smoke of their torment ascending up for ever and ever.” Luke 3:17; Mark 9:45, 46; Rev. 14:10, 11. Of the unpardonable sin, Christ says that it shall never be pardoned, “neither in this world nor in that which is to come.” Matt. 12:32. The entire Christian Church, Greek and Roman, Lutheran and Reformed, have agreed in holding this truth that the penal sufferings of the lost are to last for ever. Certain individuals and heretical societies, however, have denied it, and substituted in its place one or other of the following hypotheses: (1.) That the “second death” spoken of in Rev. 20:14, to which the wicked shall be subjected after their condemnation in the judgment, involves the total and absolute destruction of their being—i. e., annihilation. But the Scriptures always consistently speak of the future of the lost as a state of conscious suffering enduring forever. The “worm dieth not,” “everlasting fire,” “unquenchable fire” “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” “the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night.” (2.) The other hypothesis supposes that, sooner or later, God will secure the repentance and consequent reformation and restoration of all sinners, even of the devil himself. This is to result either through the atoning and purifying efficacy of protracted though temporary suffering, or through other moral influences which God will bring to bear upon them in another world. But remember—(a.) That suffering per se, while it may expiate guilt, has no tendency to purify the soul from pollution or to enkindle spiritual life. (b.) The atonement of Christ and the sanctifying power of his Spirit are the only appointed means of bringing men to repentance, and indeed the highest possible means to that end. In the case of the reprobate these have been finally rejected, and hence “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.” Heb. 6:26, 27. (c.) There is not the slightest trace in Scripture of such an ultimate restoration, either in the design of it, or the means of it, or the results of it. On the contrary, as we have seen, the Scriptures positively affirm the precise reverse to be true.

SECTION 3- As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity;<sup>6</sup> so will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.<sup>7</sup>

1st. That God has made the fact absolutely certain that there will be a future judgment, in order that this knowledge may act upon all men as a wholesome motive deterring them from sin, and, at the same time, that it may console the godly in the midst of their adversity. With reference to the first object, Paul says, “We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.” 2 Cor. 5:10, 11. And Peter says, “Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God?” 2 Pet. 3:12. With reference to the second object, Paul says, “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you that are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.” 2 Thess. 1:7.

2d. That on the other hand, God has left us in absolute uncertainty with respect to the time at which this great event shall occur, in order to prevent carnal security and to keep his people ever on the alert and constantly prepared. That the time is intentionally left unknown is expressly affirmed again and again in Scripture: “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:36. “Be ye, therefore, ready also; for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.” Luke 12:40. “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has put in his own power.” Acts 1:7. “The day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night.” 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10. “Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments.” Rev. 16:15.

The designed effect of the attitude of uncertainty with regard to the time of the second advent and general judgment in which the saints are placed is, that they should regard it as always immediately impending; that they should look forward to it with solemn awe, and yet with joyful confidence; and hence in view of it, be incited to the performance of duty and the attainment of holiness, and comforted in sorrow. Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:4, 5; James 5:7. It is their duty also to love, watch, wait for and hasten unto the coming of our Lord. Luke 12:35-37; 1 Cor. 1:7, 8; 1 Thess. 5:9, 10; 2 Tim. 4:8; 2 Pet. 3:12; Rev. 22:20.

## Chapter 33. Of the Last Judgment

Section 1. God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.

Section 2. The end of God's appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect, and of his justice in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord; but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

Section 3. As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity; so will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.

These sections of the Confession teach us (1) that God has appointed a day of general judgment, (2) that Christ will be the judge, (3) that all angels and men will appear before him, (4) that they will be judged for every thought, word, and deed, (5) that God's purpose in appointing this day is the manifestation of his glorious justice and grace, (6) that the righteous and wicked will then enter upon their eternal reward, and (7) that the great day cannot be predicted or known before it comes.

As the Larger Catechism says, "We are to believe, that at the last day there shall be a general resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" and that "immediately after the resurrection shall follow the general and final judgment of angels and men" (Q/A 87–88). The teaching of the Westminster standards is that there will be a general resurrection of all men, and then, without delay, a general judgment. "For the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will . . . come forth" ( John 5:28–29). John describes the scene: "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works" (Rev. 20:12–13). Observe: two kinds of books were opened, and there were present those who were judged on the basis of each kind, and every man was included. We are thus shut up to the fact that "He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained" (Acts 17:31).

This teaching of Scripture is so plain that it might seem unnecessary to dwell upon it. But there is today widespread acceptance of a form of doctrine at variance with the teaching of Scripture concerning both the general resurrection and the general judgment. It is the doctrine called premillennialism. In order to understand this doctrine, and also to present the other two classic views, we will introduce at this point a brief discussion of the millennial positions.

### Millennial Views

The word "millennium" comes from the Latin words meaning "thousand years." It has come to have a special meaning in the realm of doctrine. There are some who associate with the return of Christ the idea of an extended period (hence, millennium) of unparalleled prosperity and blessedness on earth during which Christianity will virtually reign supreme. (1) Some hold that Christ will return before this period begins. They are called premillennialists. (2) Others believe that a period of unparalleled prosperity and blessedness (i.e., the millennium) will come first, and that the return of Christ will come after this. They are called postmillennialists. (3) And there are those who do not believe that the Bible warrants expectation of any extended period of triumph of Christianity prior to the end of the age. It has become traditional to call these amillennialists, because they believe there will be no millennium. (These persons do believe that there is a proper interpretation to be given to Revelation 20:1–10, and so it is not correct to associate the term "amillennialist" with disbelief of Scripture.) We shall now endeavor to give a brief description of certain characteristic examples of these three basic views.

### Premillennialism

Classical Premillennialism. This view was held in early church history by Irenaeus and others. The main outline is as follows: (1) world history is expected to extend six thousand years, a thousand years for each of the days of creation (cf. 2 Peter 3:8); (2) toward the end of this period (the sixth day, which began with Christ's first coming) suffering and persecution of believers will increase until climax in the rise of Antichrist (cf. 2 Thess. 2:3–10; 1 John 2:18); (3) at the height of Antichrist's power Christ will appear in heavenly glory to triumph over all his enemies, resurrecting the saints and establishing his kingdom, which will last a thousand years (the seventh day, Sabbath, or Millennium). (During this period Jerusalem will be rebuilt, the earth will prosper, and there will be universal peace); (4) at the end of this period the wicked will be raised for the final judgment; (5) finally, the new creation will appear (cf. 2 Peter 3; Rev. 21–22).

This basic scheme has had advocates throughout church history, although this must be called a distinctly "minority" view. In the nineteenth century this view became much more popular, and was held (with some variation) by such able scholars as Bengel, Godet, Van Oosterzee, Moorehead, and others. Then toward the end of the century and throughout the twentieth century to an even greater degree, there came a new and radically different type of premillennial doctrine. To this we now turn.

Modern Dispensational Premillennialism. This view can only be called a recent innovation. It is rather a product of the dispensational system, of which it is a part, than of the ancient teaching of the Christian Church. The dispensational premillennial scheme is as follows: (1) There are seven dispensations: Innocency (creation to the fall), Conscience (the fall to the flood), Human Government (the flood to the tower of Babel), Promise (from the patriarchs to Moses), Law (Moses to Christ), Grace (Christ to the Millennium), and Kingdom (the millennial period). (2) The nation (or kingdom) of Israel occupies a special place in the divine economy. It was the provisional form of the kingdom of God. Because of apostasy it was overthrown, but the prophets predicted its reestablishment. The Messiah came and offered to establish this kingdom. The Jews refused. Christ was therefore forced to delay the establishment of the kingdom. He temporarily withdrew (going into a far country, Matt. 21:33) but will return to do what he was then kept from doing. (3) The Church is regarded as a mere parenthesis in the history of the kingdom. It has no connection with the kingdom and was unknown to the prophets. It is a sort of unexpected "break" which resulted in the "windfall" of the gospel of grace for the nations. Most dispensationalists do not look for very profound results in the preaching of the gospel. The real hope is only in Christ's return. The work of surpassing greatness will then follow in the millennial period. (4) Christ's return is imminent. He may come at any time. There are no predicted events which must first be fulfilled. (5) Christ's second coming will consist of two separate events (comings) with seven intervening years between. The first will be his coming for his saints (see Matt. 24:40–41; 1 Thess. 4:17). The second will follow the seven-year period in which the gospel of the kingdom will again be preached (by believing Jews), widespread conversion effected (though not universal), Israel reconstituted (some, however, put this event later), and in the latter part of this period Antichrist revealed and God's wrath poured out upon the human race (2 Thess. 2; Rev. 16; Matt. 24:14–22). After this period Christ will come with his saints. The living nations will then be judged, the saints that died during the great tribulation raised up, Antichrist destroyed, and Satan bound (Rev. 20:1–2). (6) The millennial kingdom will then be established. It will be an earthly, visible kingdom in which only the Jews will be natural citizens; the Gentiles will be merely adopted citizens. Christ will sit on a throne in Jerusalem. The temple will be rebuilt, and sacrifices made once more (Ezek. 40–48). Universal peace and prosperity will prevail (Isa. 11:8). During this period the world will be converted, some say by the gospel, but most say by might and by power. (7) At the end of the millennium Satan will be loosed for a little season. Gog and Magog will rise against the holy city (Rev. 20:7–8). But God will intervene with fire from heaven. Satan will be cast into the pit, and the dead that have not yet been raised (i.e., the wicked) will be raised to appear before the judgment seat of God. (8) Then will follow the eternal kingdom of heaven.

### **Postmillennialism**

Postmillennialism has presented a stable view throughout the history of the Church. However, in recent times modernism has adapted a semblance of the view to its own naturalistic reconstruction of Christianity. Unfortunately, many who know of postmillennialism assume that postmillennialism is invariably associated with modernist views. It is actually not even accurate to speak of modernists as postmillennialists at all, because the former do not believe that Christ will return in a visible way at any time. Therefore, in our discussion we will not even consider the modernist position. We are here presenting only the views of those who can be called Christians.

Most postmillenarians believe (1) that the Holy Spirit will gradually bring about a period of virtual triumph of true Christianity before Christ returns. (2) Some believe that a great apostasy will precede the "golden age," others (perhaps most) believe that it will follow it. (Some believe that the papacy at its height was the great apostasy, and that the Reformation began the course of events that will bring about the golden age.) (3) Christ will return after the



world is evangelized, the Jews converted (en masse), and the Church established in great purity and unity. (4) The resurrection will be general (all men at the same time). (5) The general judgment will follow. (6) Then the eternal kingdom will begin. Postmillennialists believe that the kingdom of God is a present reality, that it is spiritual in character, and that the Church is the divine institution which effects this coming of Christ in his kingdom power (John 18:36; Luke 17:20; Matt. 16:19; Col. 1:13; Dan. 2:44). They point to various passages to prove that Christ's kingdom is in existence, and that it is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (Acts 15:14–18; Heb. 12:22–23). (Cf. Acts 2:34–36; Ps. 110:1; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1.)

### **Amillennialism**

Amillennialists do not believe that the Scripture predicts a golden age in world history prior to Christ's return, nor do they believe that it predicts such an age in history after Christ's return before the final judgment. They believe (1) that there will be a progressive maturation of the forces of good and evil (Matt. 13:24–30, 37–43, 47–50). (2) Some believe there will be tribulation and much (or great) apostasy throughout this era, while others believe that the apostasy will come as an event concentrated in time immediately prior to Christ's return. Still others believe there will be (a) the great (concentrated in time) apostasy, (b) conversion of the Jews (en masse), and (c) a state of affairs in which it can be said that all nations of the earth have been blessed in the seed of Abraham (Christ). (3) Christ will return and resurrect all men at one time. (4) The general judgment will follow. (5) The new heavens and the new earth will appear in their full beauty and glory to abide forever.

It is important to note that postmillennialism and amillennialism agree in the conviction that Revelation 20:2–3 describes a present reality, and that Jesus will not return until the period here described comes to an end. In other words, strictly speaking, both of these positions are postmillennial in the sense that they see Christ's return as taking place after the millennial period of which John wrote. So the difference is essentially a matter of the degree of optimism with which they view the unfolding of present-and-yet-future church history. The writer of this study does not mind being called an optimistic amillennialist. Neither does he mind being called a non-utopian postmillennialist.

The various millennial views (without attention to particular variations) are illustrated in figure 5. One thing should be obvious: it is no easy task to chart the future! But two questions may profitably concern us: (1) how shall we look upon those who hold these differing views, and (2) how shall we determine which (if any) should be given preference?



As to the second question we offer the following suggestions, believing that if we hold firmly to these truths we will avoid serious error. First, Scripture warns us that no one knows the times or the seasons (Acts 1:7; Matt. 24:36–44; 1 Thess. 5:1). No man knows, or can know, the chronology of the future (this is the meaning of the Greek word *chronos*) nor the precise events (or timing of events, *kairos*) which will mark the unfolding of God’s plan. Therefore, any scheme (such as that of the dispensationalists) which claims such knowledge cannot be accepted by those who believe and know the truth.

Second, Scripture clearly teaches that Christ’s kingdom is (a) already existent (Matt. 4:17; 5:3; 16:19; Mark 9:1), (b) spiritual and invisible, not worldly and material (Luke 17:20; John 3:3–8; 18:36; 1 Thess. 2:12; Col. 1:13), (c) not millennial only (Dan. 2:44; 2 Peter 1:11), (d) not the possession of national Israel, from which it was taken and given to all nations (Luke 12:32; Rev. 11:15), (e) to end, as to the present mediatorial administration, only when “He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. . . . Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him” (1 Cor. 15:24–28). Then will the kingdom appear in its final form (2 Tim. 4:1; Matt. 26:29), but even then it will be a continuance of the kingdom that now is.

Third, the Bible states that Christ’s return will be (a) without warning (that is, without signs) (Matt. 24:36–39, 42–44). It is compared with the days of Noah when life went on “as usual” until, without warning signs, the flood suddenly came. Noah’s preaching was the only warning, but this was not different from the preaching of today, which is the only warning of Christ’s coming. Christ also used as an illustration of this truth the thief that comes without warning signs, and the lightning that shines without warning from east to west. (b) When he does come, he will summon all men to rise from their graves (John 6:28–29; Acts 24:15). (c) In that day the heavens and the earth as we now know them will “pass away” because “the elements will melt with fervent heat” (2 Peter 3:10–11).

Fourth, the Bible says that this is the final period of human history (Heb. 1:2; John 6:39; 11:24; 12:48; Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Peter 3:3; 1 John 2:18). As the apostle Paul said, we are those “upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11). This can mean only that we live in the final age marking the history of salvation.

Fifth, the great apostasy cannot be something in the distant future from the perspective of the apostle, because he said that “the mystery of lawlessness” which causes this apostasy was already at work in his day (2 Thess. 2:7–9; and see 1 John 2:18, 22, and 4:3).

Sixth, no view can be correct which envisions a period of “good-without-evil” or the separation of the righteous from the wicked prior to the end of this age, because Jesus said, “At the end of this age . . . the Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and those who practice lawlessness (Matt. 13:40–41, 49).

Finally, no view can be correct which envisions Christ’s present reign as terminating before “He has put all enemies under His feet.” “For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet” (1 Cor. 15:25) and “the last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (v. 26). It follows that entire victory will coincide with the defeat of death by the general resurrection. There can be no complete triumph of the kingdom of Christ until world history comes to an end.

We do not maintain that only postmillennialists or optimistic amillennialists are entitled to the name Christian. But we do believe that a premillennial view is difficult to harmonize with the clear teaching of Scripture and the Confession.