

Making A Good Profession

A Course in Basic Christian Faith and Practice
in Preparation for Making Public Profession of Faith

1 Timothy 6:12

“Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life,
to which you were also called
and about which you made the good confession
in the presence of many witnesses.”



by

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Making A Good Profession

Introduction

This little book is intended to serve the needs of the local session in fulfilling its task of training people to make “a good profession” of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ before his church. The material is based on Scripture and our secondary standards *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms* and assumes the use of the “Questions for Public Profession of Faith in Christ” found in “The Directory for the Public Worship of God,” Chapter IV.B.2, in *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (cf. Appendix B).

The Purpose of the Course

This course is designed for those who wish to consider membership in this local church, by acquainting them with the teaching and practice of this particular church; and designed to prepare those who wish to make a good profession of Jesus Christ in his church. You will no doubt find that there are many areas that will require more study in the future. This course is only meant to lay the foundation and equip believers with the basic resources for a lifetime of Christian study and growth. Participants should look at this study as a beginning not an end.

The course will cover the full range of what it means to be a Christian in faith and life. This involves what Presbyterians believe and how we are to live as a consequence of those beliefs. Such teaching was known in the ancient church as *catechizing*. Whether or not such instruction should take place before or after one makes a “public profession of faith” before the church may be debatable. Biblical precedent points in the direction or prior instruction, especially for the “unchurched,” who have little or no knowledge of the Christian faith. The book of Acts gives several examples of those who were connected with the synagogue and yet received instruction prior to baptism. Philip explained the passage that the Ethiopian Eunuch was reading in Isaiah and went on to preach Jesus from the rest of Scripture to him (Acts 8:35). Peter instructed the godly Cornelius prior to baptism (Acts 10:34ff). If those connected with the visible church of the old covenant needed instruction, how much more essential is it in our day, which is largely characterized by ignorance of the Bible. Whether instruction takes place before or after membership vows are taken, one thing is clear at Pentecost: the centrality of apostolic teaching in the life of the early church (Acts 2:41–42).

There is no more important course of instruction offered in the Christian church than the one which prepares people to make a good profession of Jesus Christ. The lack of such training today, along with the general absence of biblical literacy in our culture adds to the urgency of the task. The Reformation heritage of conservative Presbyterian churches has put us on the cutting edge of education for several centuries. The progress of God’s kingdom in the present day depends upon knowing what and who we believe, and how we are to live. Teaching the “whole counsel of God” lies at the heart of fulfilling our Lord’s Great Commission to “disciple the nations.” We cannot properly worship and serve a Lord and Savior about whom we know little. That is the heart and soul of biblical doctrine.

In 1 Timothy 6:12 Paul enjoins Timothy to “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the

presence of many witnesses.” *Profess* means to confess or declare plainly. A Christian profession is an earnest confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; and that eternal life is obtained by faith in him alone, as the Son of the Triune God. Timothy had made such a profession in the presence of the church, not only at the beginning of his Christian life but continually as a disciple who lived according to what he said he believed. The English word *believe* is derived from two words in late old English, *be* and *lēfan*, “to live in accordance with, or loyal to a person.” This word accurately captures the meaning of the Greek word for *faith* (*pistis*). To profess a good profession is to take vows before the living God in the presence of his people, the church, that commit the professor to being a life-long disciple of the crucified and risen Christ. One becomes a soldier in God’s spiritual army the church. In order to fight the good fight with Timothy one must be well equipped with a good knowledge of the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). This is the burden of this course. Along with the effort that goes into study each student has the promise of our Lord: “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, him I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven . . .” (Matt. 10:32).

Participation in the Course

Participation in this course does not necessarily represent a commitment to becoming a member of this church.

In order to gain the most benefit from this course the following guidelines are recommended:

1. Study the assigned material prayerfully with an open Bible.
2. Read the “Questions for Public Profession” (Appendix A) carefully each week before class.
3. Bring questions to class. I will stop for questions at appropriate points during the lectures. Please stop me at any time to ask questions of information and/or clarification.
4. Memorize *The Apostles’ Creed*, *The Lord’s Prayer* and *The Ten Commandments*, if you are able (see Appendices B, C, and D). Begin memorizing *The Shorter Catechism*.

Reading for the Course

Required Reading:

Gregory E. Reynolds, *Making A Good Profession*

This booklet is the main textbook and gives the basic outline of the course.

The Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

This is the primary text of our doctrinal standard. The Banner of Truth edition, *The Shorter Catechism with Scripture Proofs*, is pocket size and thus perfectly suited for memorization.

“The Five Points of Calvinism” (Appendix E)

This covers the Reformed doctrine of salvation by sovereign grace presented in a systematic way.

Robert K. Churchill, *Lest We Forget*

This covers the early history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

John Blanchard, *Ultimate Questions*

This is an evangelistic tract that gives the content of evangelism.

Supplementary Reading:

G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*

This is a thorough exposition of the confession.

Richard Pratt, *Every Thought Captive*

William Metzger, *Tell the Truth*

William Edgar, *The Face of Truth*

Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready*

These help to understand how to better present and defend the faith.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Cross, The Vindication of God*

Sinclair Ferguson, *Healthy Christian Growth*

Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*; and *The Practice of Godliness*

Ferguson, *Read Any Good Books?*

Richard Dewitt, *What Is the Reformed Faith?*

This booklet demonstrates that the Reformed faith is not limited to the “Five Points.”

Michael Horton, *The God of Promise*; and John V. Fesko, *Last Things First*

These are excellent introductions to biblical theology and the biblical covenants.

David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms* explores the relationship between Christianity and culture.

Thomas, *Reading the Bible*

This will help you grow in your Bible reading.

Darryl Hart and John Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: Three Hundred Years of American Presbyterianism*

Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict*

Darryl Hart and John Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*

Darryl Hart, *Between the Times*

The Proper Tools for Bible Study

The Shorter Catechism

Q. #89 How is the word made effectual to salvation? A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

Q.#90 How is the word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation? A.

That the word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.

The Word of God is the primary means of grace. Notice that it is “especially the preaching of the word” that God uses to save sinners and sanctify the saints. This does not exclude private reading of God’s Word. But it does correct the individualistic idea that all one needs is the private reading of Word. The Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church has ordained that preaching in the church should be the context in which private reading of the Word grows. In Troas Paul preached on the evening of the Lord’s Day. “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7).

The church is central to Bible study. A student at a local college once told the group leader that she had a difficult time understanding the Bible. The leader wisely answered that she needed to learn the Scriptures under the regular pastoral exposition of God’s word by a Minister of the Word in the local church. Every Christian should be reading the “whole counsel of God” on a regular daily basis in the context of the church. Symbiotic relationship: reading helps hearing and hearing helps reading.

The heads of households should have regular family devotions (Deut. 6:4–6; Eph. 6:4). This is an essential means of family nurture.

Here are the tools every Christian needs to assist in the study of God’s Word:

1. Bible – *The Authorized (AV) or King James Version (KJV)* is the classic English translation. Published in 1611 it has dominated all theological and devotional literature in English speaking Christendom for four centuries. The *New King James Version (NKJV)* is a modern translation that omits archaic words while retaining the familiar language of the KJV. Finally, the excellent new translation used by our congregation is the *English Standard Version (ESV)*. It reads very well aloud in the tradition of the KJV.

2. Concordance – This gives each word in the Bible in alphabetical order, with each verse in which the word appears in the order of the books of the Bible. Don’t forget the marginal notes and references in your Bible. They will usually give you the best texts to be found in a concordance. Most Bibles have short concordances at the end. Study Bibles have larger ones. Strong’s *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* is best for the KJV. Strong’s is keyed to the original languages. Nelson publishes *The Complete Concordance to the Bible* for the NKJV. *The Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance* and *The Englishman’s Greek Concordance* are very helpful for those with a basic knowledge of the original languages. *The Crossway Comprehensive Concordance of the Holy Bible, English Standard Version* is the concordance for the ESV. Bible software provides excellent access in a way similar to a concordance. Also useful are: A **Topical Bible** (*Zondervan’s Topical Bible*) organizes Scripture by various topics. A **Harmony of the Gospels** (Robertson’s *A Harmony of the Gospels*) arranges the text of the gospels in historical order.

3. Commentaries – comments of experienced pastors and theologians whose work has stood the test of time. They interpret the Scripture verse by verse. Start with a complete commentary. *Matthew Henry* is excellent (usually 6 vols.). Do not get an abridgment. *Matthew Poole’s Commentary* (3 vols.). *Calvin’s Commentaries* are unsurpassed. *The New Bible Commentary* or *Eerdmans Bible Commentary* are a reliable modern one volume works.

Each book has individual commentaries of different kinds and qualities. It is wise to collect individual commentaries like Hendricksen's New Testament commentaries (20th century); *NIV Application Commentaries* are good in many books. Ask your pastor for advice on particular Bible books.

4. Bible Dictionary – contains articles on different biblical people, places and doctrines. *Eerdmans New Bible Dictionary* and *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* are sound one volume works. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)* is a fine 5 volume work. A good English dictionary can be very useful. The 19th century *Noah Webster Dictionary* is excellent. *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* is decent. *The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* is the ultimate authority.

5. Bible Survey – gives summaries of Bible books, along with outlines. This is a helpful way to get the big picture. Hendricksen's *Bible Survey* is very dependable. Tenney's *New Testament Survey* and Wood's *A Survey of Israel's History* are helpful. Edersheim's *Bible History: Old Testament* and *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* are classics. **Bible Handbooks** like Unger's and Eerdmans are useful short works. **Introductions** to each Testament are helpful in understanding the content and structure of each Bible book. Machen's *The New Testament: An Introduction to Its History and Literature*, and Young's *An Introduction to the Old Testament* are indispensable.

6. Geography – *Broadman's Atlas of Bible Lands* will help you locate Biblical places. *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* is a more detailed one volume atlas.

7. Theology – the systematic or doctrinal approach to the Bible. It seeks to articulate the teaching of the Bible on different subjects arranged in a logical order around the classic topics (*loci*): God (Theology), Man (Anthropology), Christ (Christology), Salvation (Soteriology), the Church (Ecclesiology), Last Things (Eschatology). It answers the question: "What does the Bible say about _____"? A good **Dictionary of Theology** like *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* is helpful [cf. *New Dictionary of Theology*; *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*]. These provide theological topics alphabetically with short articles.

Systematic Theology – Systematic theology gives the doctrines of the Bible **by topic**. Louis Berkhof's *Summary of Christian Doctrine* is good for beginners. This is a simplified version of his classic *Systematic Theology*. Also popular is Packer, *Knowing God*. A. A. Hodge's *Outlines of Theology* is a more popular treatment of theology. Calvin's Reformation classic *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* is long but superb. There are also many works on a single systematic subject, such as the atonement or church. Ask your pastor.

Biblical Theology – to understand the historical setting of revealed truth in History of Redemption. Vos's *Biblical Theology* is the classic work. Also De Graaf's 4 volume *Promise and Deliverance* is very helpful (it was originally written to help Sunday School teachers). Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, are among many excellent books available. John V. Fesko's *Last Things First* is an excellent introduction to biblical theology. Michael Horton's *The God of Promise* is an excellent introduction to the doctrine of the biblical covenants.

8. Confessions – summaries of the biblical system of truth affirmed by the church. They help set boundaries for our thinking and living. They keep us from error and aid us in understanding

the whole counsel of God. They function as a concensus, a doctrinal basis for unity of the church. *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms* is an essential guide to the essential biblical system of doctrine. Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom* gives all the creeds and confessions of church history. Collect good commentaries on the confessions such as *Williamson's The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* and *The Shorter Catechism for Study Classes*. Above all memorize *The Shorter Catechism*. There is no more concise and accurate road map. *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* is a must for every church member.

9. Church History – church history helps us learn from the church's past, both what to imitate and what to avoid. An excellent short history is S. M. Houghton's *Sketches of Church History*. A more in-depth reference is B. K. Kuiper's *The Church in History*. These belong in every Christian's library. Schaff's *History of the Christian Church* is an extensive multi-volume work. **Christian biography** is an interesting and entertaining way to learn from the example of others.

10. Daily Devotional – A very helpful way to get warmed up for Bible reading and prayer is to read C. H. Spurgeon's classic devotional *Morning and Evening* or his *Faith's Checkbook*. The daily devotional available on the website of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is highly recommended, <http://opc.org/devotional.html>.

Note: Many of the books recommended above are available in digital format.

Schedule of Classes

Weeks #1 & 2 - Scripture: The Foundation of Our Profession

Reynolds, *Making A Good Profession* - Chapter 1
The Westminster Confession of Faith - Chapter 1

Optional:

Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* - Chapter 1
The Shorter Catechism: Q.#1–3

Weeks #3 & 4 - Salvation Accomplished: The God of Our Profession

Reynolds, *Making A Good Profession* - Chapter 2
The Westminster Confession of Faith - Chapters 2–8
Shishko, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Appendix E)

Optional:

Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* - Chapters 2–8
The Shorter Catechism: Q.#4–28
Dewitt, *What Is the Reformed Faith?*
Lloyd-Jones, *The Cross, The Vindication of God*

Weeks #5 & 6 - Salvation Applied: The Realization of Our Profession

Reynolds, *Making A Good Profession* - Chapter 3
The Westminster Confession of Faith - Chapters 9–18

Optional:

Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* - Chapters 9–17
The Shorter Catechism: Q.#29–36, 84–87

Weeks #7 & 8 - Salvation Applied: Living Our Profession

Reynolds, *Making A Good Profession* - Chapter 4
The Westminster Confession of Faith - Chapters 19–22, 24

Optional:

Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* - Chapters 18–22
The Shorter Catechism: Q.#39–83
Ferguson, *Healthy Christian Growth*
Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*; and *The Practice of Godliness*
VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*

Weeks #9–11 - The Church: The Context of Our Profession

Reynolds, *Making A Good Profession* - Chapter 5
The Westminster Confession of Faith - Chapters 23, 25–31

Optional:

Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* - Chapters 23–30 (pp.187–251)
The Shorter Catechism: Q.#88–107
Thomas, *Reading the Bible*
Ferguson, *Read Any Good Books?*

Week #12 - Mission: The Propagation of Our Profession

Reynolds, *Making A Good Profession* - Chapter 6
Cummings, *Confessing Christ* - Chapter 7
Blanchard, *Ultimate Questions*
Churchill, *Lest We Forget*

Optional:

Richard Pratt, *Every Thought Captive*
William Metzger, *Tell the Truth*
William Edgar, *The Face of Truth*
Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready*
Darryl Hart and John Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*

Weeks #13 & 14 - Last Things: The Fulfillment of Our Profession

Reynolds, *Making A Good Profession* - Chapter 7
The Westminster Confession of Faith - Chapters 32–33

Optional:

Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* - Chapters 31–32
The Shorter Catechism: Q.#37–38
Michael Horton, *The God of Promise*
John V. Fesko, *Last Things First*



Chapter 1

Scripture: The Foundation of Our Profession

1. Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?

The Bible is the only source of the knowledge of God and ourselves necessary for salvation from sin and death through the Lord Jesus Christ. It must be the starting point and foundation for Christian faith. The knowledge of its author and message is a matter of eternal life and death. Scripture is the essential bedrock and foundation of our profession.

The Authority of Scripture

We must first ask the question of ultimate authority. Whose word will we trust, man's word or God's word? Romans 1:25; Isaiah 8:20

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#2 What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him? A. The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

Q.#3 What do the scriptures principally teach? A. The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

Seven Views of the Bible's Authority

You will encounter at least seven different views of the Bible's authority in the world today.

1. **Humanist** – *Man's word* is the ultimate authority. The Bible is merely a human document. This view is usually assumed in college courses such as “The Bible as Literature” or “Comparative Religions.” Advocates will even refer to the Bible as “inspired literature.” This, however, refers to *human* inspiration on the order of Shakespeare.

2. **Liberal Protestant** – *Christ's ethical teachings in the Bible* are the ultimate authority. Christ was a great moral teacher. Perhaps *the* greatest moral teacher. The miraculous is the naive worldview of a pre-scientific age. This view is really humanism in Christian garb.

3. **Neo-orthodox Protestantism** – *God's word as we experience it in the Bible* is the ultimate authority. This is a reaction against Liberalism whereby theologians like Karl Barth (1886–1968) sought to reassert the doctrines of the Reformation, especially God's radical transcendence. However, it is radically a subjective view. The *written* word, the Bible, is not God's word. Portions of it may become God's word as we read them in faith. God is too

transcendent to reveal his mind in human words. The Bible, therefore, is not God’s word, but simply the place we most often encounter him. This is a mixture of humanism and Christianity or Neo-liberalism.

4. Neo-Gnostic Protestantism – *God’s word is in the texts of all religions.* The New Age movement has revived ancient Gnosticism within mainline liberal Protestantism. This Monism (all is one, Pantheism) views all reality as essentially one. It seeks to connect with the “spiritual” world in order to realize the god (“divine spark”) within everyone. Man’s religious consciousness is the final authority. This emerging view is well suited to the soil of modern relativism, multi-culturalism and inclusivism. This is the Postmodern spirit.

5. Roman Catholicism – *The Bible is an ultimate authority alongside apostolic oral tradition, the Apocrypha and ex cathedra statements of the Pope.* Furthermore, the Bible is authoritatively interpreted by the church. This resembles the late Judaic use of the Old Testament. Cults also add their own revelations. The Mormons add the *Book of Mormon*, the Jehovah’s Witnesses add the Watchtower publications.

6. Fundamentalism – *God’s word is identical with the Bible.* However, many Fundamentalists ignore parts of Scripture, such as the teaching on God’s sovereignty in salvation. In other areas, such as total abstinence from alcoholic beverages, they add rules as if they were God’s requirements. The humanistic element of Arminianism, which emphasizes the power and freedom of man’s will as an independent power, is what weakens this view.

7. Reformed Protestantism – *The entire Bible (Tota Scriptura) and nothing but the Bible (Sola Scriptura) is God’s word.* It is the infallible guide for the whole person in the whole of life. “All which [the 66 books] are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life” (WCF 1.2).

Two Types of Revelation: Special and General

General Revelation is God’s revelation of himself in his created works, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1). It is also the revelation by which all people know that God exists, “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” (Rom. 1:20). People know right and from wrong, or what theologians call “natural law.” “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” (Rom. 2:14). Civil rulers are able to regulate society through civil government (Rom. 13:1–7). And they are able to continue developing culture in areas like literature, the arts, science, and mathematics.

Special Revelation, the Bible, is God’s teaching about our relationship to God, “what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man” (WSC #3). The Scriptures are the corrective lenses (Calvin “spectacles”) through which we may view reality clearly. All other religious teachings and writings of men represent men inventing gods to their own

liking. God’s Word, on the other hand, represents God revealing Himself to men the way he truly is.

The Bible Is Authoritative. When we say that the Bible is authoritative we mean that it is God’s very word. While it is written through by men, its primary author is the Holy Spirit—the writers are his instruments. The Bible resounds from beginning to end with “Thus says the Lord.” It is “holy” because it is unique. “Holy” means “set apart.” There is no other book that *is* God’s word. Thus, both its origin and content are utterly unique (*sui generis*).

The means by which the writings which make up the Bible received their authority is by their being “inspired” by God Himself. The word “inspired” does not mean that they are the work of genius, such as the works of Shakespeare. “All Scripture is breathed out by God,” (2 Tim. 3:16). The word “inspiration” (Gr. *theopneustos*) means “God-breathed.” “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). “Carried along” as, for example, in a boat.

In this process, however, the secondary authors are not automatons, which the old “dictation theory” (a paper tiger of Liberalism and Neo-orthodoxy) maintains. Though certain things, like the Ten Commandments, were given verbatim, the vast majority of the text of the Bible was written taking into full account the personality, background, education, and intelligence of the secondary authors. The Bible is God’s message *through* men *to* men. God in his sovereignty prepared each author in every respect to produce his Word for a particular purpose at a particular point in history. Incidentally, not everything written by an author of the Bible is necessarily inspired. So Scripture is characterized by divinity and humanity together. For example, Paul wrote several letters to the Corinthians which have not been passed down to us. If they were found they would not become part of the Bible, because God also caused the church to recognize and preserve all and only inspired writings (WCF 1.8).

It is important that the Bible is *written* because it is a covenant document. In this respect it is similar to other covenant documents. Real estate ownership requires a written deed. Mortgages are written agreements. So are marriage licenses. *Important* documents are written to prevent the corruption of agreements and contracts. Neo-orthodoxy underestimates the value of the written word. The more important an established relationship is the more critical is its being written. What John wrote at the end of *Revelation* applies to all inspired writings: “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” (Rev. 22:18–19; cf. Deut. 4:2; WCF 1.1). Scripture is verbally inspired so that the very words of Scripture are God’s words.

The product of this divine activity of inspiration is a book that is *infallible* and *inerrant* in all of its parts. Theologians often refer to this as “plenary” inspiration. All of Scripture is precisely what God wants to say to fallen man in order to reveal himself, his salvation and his will for our lives. Jesus said, “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” (Matt. 5:17–18). The “iota” is the smallest Hebrew letter “yod” “י” and the “dot” or tittle is the small nib on the upper right hand corner of the “daleth” “ד”. Paul says, “we impart this (the things freely given to us by God) in words not taught by human wisdom

but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual” (1 Cor. 2:13). Here the “things” are the words which house the ideas of God Himself.

Because we do not have the original documents penned by the authors of Scripture, called the *autographa*, we have to engage in textual criticism to determine, through studying the thousands of ancient copies in our possession, what the originals said. These are constantly being discovered. No ancient text has more documentary corroboration than the Bible. We may have great confidence that what we hold in our hands is God’s word. This is why the text in the original languages must be faithfully translated into the languages of the people (WCF 1.8).

Modern man likes to make a distinction between history and religion, and science and religion as if there are two separate kinds of truth. In fact, while the Bible is not a book of science or history in the modern sense, it is historically accurate. The Bible is the story of God’s covenant with his people and is set in history and in the world which science explores. The parting of the Red Sea, the swallowing of Jonah and the resurrection of Jesus Christ took place in space and time. The God of the Bible is the Creator and the sovereign Lord of history and thus able to intervene as he wishes for his redemptive purposes.

Furthermore we must be careful not to impose our standards of truth and literature on the Bible. It was written in predominantly oral cultures, where owning manuscripts, which were all hand written, was expensive and therefore rare. The Bible was composed under the supervision of the Holy Spirit in various types of literature, such as poetry and narrative. Poetry is often used to describe great historical events, and narrative is often written in unique structures to aid the listener in remembering.

The Three-fold Testimony that the Bible Is God’s Word

How do we know that the Bible is God’s Word?

1. The Bible asserts itself to be God’s Word (Isa. 8:20; John 10:35; Matt. 4:3-10; Matt. 26:54; Heb. 1:5ff; 2 Tim. 3:15,16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). It is self-authenticating and self-attesting. By its nature there can be no higher authority or else it is not God’s word. Any standard or *canon* outside or above God’s word by which it might be judged becomes the final authority. The Bible is the “*canon*” (lit. measuring reed) by which all else is judged. “And as for all who walk by this rule (*kanoni*), peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). Even the church does not *determine* (as Roman Catholics believe) what God’s word is, it only *recognizes* that the Bible is what it claims to be, the very Word of God. The church by spiritual discernment knows the difference between “fools” gold and the genuine article. God’s people respond to the inherent authority of God’s Word, and submit to it as his Word. Peter equated the letter of Paul with Holy Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15,16). “The authority of the holy scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God, (who is truth itself) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received because it is the word of God” (WCF 1.4, cf. 1 Jn. 5:9). “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” (1 Thess. 2:13).

2. The attributes of Scripture reflect the divine quality of its ultimate author. *The Westminster Confession* gives a compelling summary of these “excellencies”: “the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, (which is to give all glory to God) the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, and many other incomparable excellencies...” (WCF 1.5). Add to this the multitude of fulfilled prophecies (e.g. Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:6); and the detailed confirmations of archeology and history, and we have a compelling testimony that “it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God” (WCF 1.5).

3. The testimony of the Holy Spirit, however, is necessary for these excellencies to be recognized and submitted to as the Word of God. Without the Spirit’s work the divine origin of Scripture is denied. “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” (1 Cor. 2:14). Only the author of the Bible can convince men that it is his Word. This is called *illumination*. The Spirit of God enlightens the minds of blind and foolish sinners. The sheep hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. As *The Westminster Confession* says: “our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof [Scripture], is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts” (WCF 1.5).

The Westminster Confession lists the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments (WCF 1.2), because the *Apocrypha* is not inspired and has therefore not been recognized by the church historically as Scripture (WCF 1.3). Furthermore, the canon of Scripture has been closed since the end of the first century, because Jesus Christ is God’s final revelation of Himself to mankind. “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . . (Heb. 1:1–2). The Lord promised that his Spirit would come after his resurrection and ascension to remind his apostles of his teaching and lead them into all truth (John 14:26). The writings of the New Testament were completed in the Apostolic era under Apostolic supervision (Eph. 2:20). After John wrote his work in the final years of the first century the writing of Scripture ceased. The sixty-six books of the Bible is the standard, or measuring rod (canon) by which all truth is judged.

This means that any claims to continuing revelation are bogus. As *The Westminster Confession* so tersely states: “those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased” (WCF 1.1). Nothing may or needs to be added to this revelation either by “new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men” (WCF 1.6). This position is known as the “cessationist” position. The apostolic epoch of revelation based on the historic incarnation of the Son is our final source of guidance in every area of life. When we ask God for guidance it is not for direct fresh revelation, but rather for the wisdom that God’s Spirit gives in applying God’s Word to our situation. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (Jas. 1:4–5).

The Sufficiency of Scripture

Is there any other source of wisdom we need to live the Christian life?

Scripture itself declares its own sufficiency to give us all we need to know in matters of faith and practice during our pilgrimage. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). “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” (WCF 1.6). Notice that the Scripture is not, because it was not meant to be, sufficient for knowledge of everything. It does not teach us about mathematics, science, foreign policy, or medicine. These are revealed through general revelation as people explore the riches and potential of the creation.

The Clarity (perspicuity) of Scripture

How do we explain the difficulty of understanding certain parts of Scripture?

There are many parts of Scripture which are not as clear as the rest. Also God’s people have varying abilities to understand these passages. Some passages are clear to some and yet not so to others (WCF 1.7). If Scripture was completely easy for all to understand it would foster pride as well as doubt that such a book could be the Word of an all wise God (Deut. 30:11–14). God is majestic and mysterious, so we should expect his Word to be profound. “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes . . .” (Ps. 19:7–8).

However, because of his condescending compassion God has made those things that are necessary for our salvation clear. This is the *perspicuity* of Scripture. “All things are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them” (WCF 1.7). While the Bible is not an easy book, its central message is absolutely clear. It is God addressing fallen mankind through his grace in the gospel.

The clear passages are to interpret the unclear. Because the essential message of the Bible is clear we need to keep a very important principle in mind when we study the Bible, especially difficult passages. We always begin with what we know for sure. Comparing Scripture with Scripture is known as “the analogy of faith.” The Scripture is self interpreting (WCF 7.9). Therefore, it never contradicts itself. Difficult passages interpreted out of the context of the whole Bible may become a source of dangerous error, and this explains why so many weird and unhealthy things have been done with the Bible. This also points up the need for qualified teachers of the Bible, called and equipped by God, as Paul so clearly teaches in the so-called “Pastoral Epistles” (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus).

Furthermore, each passage has a single meaning according to the intention of the original author the Holy Spirit. The meaning of any passage “is not manifold but one” (WCF

7.9). Its implications may be profound and with many nuances, connections, and implications, but the meaning is one. This is especially important in light of the “Deconstructionist” movement in modern literary circles, which attributes the primary meaning of a text to the reader rather than the author. The reader brings meaning to the text, much like Neo-orthodoxy and Neo-gnosticism. Imagine if we read wills and deeds this way. The Bible is God’s objective communication to man. The meaning is his alone. Otherwise we are adrift in a sea of hopeless subjectivity.

Following the two principles of interpreting the Bible, known as hermeneutics (interpreting of texts), above will avoid much error in understanding the meaning of the Bible.

The Necessity of Scripture

Is the Bible absolutely essential? After all Adam and Abraham didn’t have a Bible.

While Adam did not have a written Word of God, even before he fell God’s Word was essential to his life as God’s servant in the Garden of Eden under the Covenant of Works. Genesis 2:16 indicates that Adam communed regularly with God. God clearly communicated the terms of his covenant to his people in their paradise state. Because man is made in God’s image, in fact he *is* God’s image, he needs God’s Word as God’s creature.

In his fallen state man especially needs God’s Word. Without the word of the Covenant of Grace he is hopelessly lost in sin. “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). Paul reminded Timothy that from his youth he had “known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). Because man is a sinner he needs God’s Word.

Since the message was relatively short in the Adamic and Patriarchal ages, and because memory is keen and accurate in an oral culture the *written* Word of God was not a necessity until the Mosaic covenant was given. The sheer volume of communication that came from Mount Sinai demanded a written document. “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29).

Thus the Bible is absolutely necessary for the believer.

The Unity of Scripture

Is the Bible one book or two? How are we to understand the difference between the Old and New Testaments?

The Bible is an authoritative unit. It is one book in two parts, Old and New Testaments. It is one Covenant of Grace in two administrations (Like 24:25ff; 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:1–2). “There are not therefore two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations” (WCF 7.6).

The revelation of the Bible should be understood progressively or historically. Each epoch or covenantal era reveals more of God and his salvation, culminating in the supreme and final revelation of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. he is *concealed* in the old covenant and

revealed in the new covenant. Like a tulip the Old Testament shows the growth of the plant through various stages of development up to the appearance of the bud in the latter prophets (major and minor); the New Testament is that plant in full bloom.

In asserting the unity of the Bible we must not minimize the dramatic difference between the Mosaic Covenant and the new covenant. “This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant” (Heb. 7:22). “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. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second” (Heb. 8:6–7). “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13).

It is helpful to remember that the Bible is God’s story of redemption. There is one fundamental theme developed over time.

The Confession and Scripture

Do written statements of faith and doctrine like The Westminster Confession and Catechisms threaten the authority of the Bible?

No, creeds, confessions, and catechisms summarize the essential teachings of the Bible in a topical way. They are just like road maps are to roads. They give us the big picture so we can find our way around more easily without getting lost. Confessions are manmade and therefore fallible and open to correction and improvement. However, just like maps they are perfected over time so that they are reliable guides. No one would confuse a map with the actual roads. Traveling the roads verifies the accuracy of the map. God’s Word is always primary. But unless you want to start out drawing your own map it is wise to have great respect for maps that have stood the test of time. Anyone foolish enough to make their own map instead will soon find themselves lost.

“No creed but Christ. No book but the Bible” is a half truth. Everyone has a system of doctrine which answers the basic question: “What does the Bible teach about such and such?” The real question is: “Is your system what the Bible teaches?” and “Is one person wise enough to discern the teachings of the entire Bible?” American individualism reinforces the pride of private interpretation. In defending the value of Bible commentaries Spurgeon said that it is amazing that those who think so much of what the Holy Spirit has taught them can think so little of what he has taught others.

The church has a history of interpreting the Bible that we need to study and appreciate as we grow in the knowledge of God’s Word. Not only will this help us better understand Scripture, but it will keep us from error, as we learn from the church’s past mistakes.

The Roman Catholic Church puts its confessions as well as oral tradition and the ex cathedra statements of the Papal See on a plane with Scripture. We see our Confession as based on Scripture. In fact, The Westminster Confession begins with Scripture for just that reason. All manmade doctrinal statements are to be judged by Scripture, “the supreme Judge” (WCF 7.10). Again, remember that sound teaching done by those called and equipped by God in his church for that purpose is essential to understanding God’s Word.

The first confession in the New Testament was given infallibly through the Apostle Peter when asked by our Lord: “Who do people say that the Son of man is? . . . You are the Christ,

the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). What we confess is a matter of eternal life and death. “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). If the incarnate Word depended on Scripture to resist the three-fold temptation of the Devil (Matt. 4:1–11), we who are but sinful mortals must certainly depend on God’s infallible Word alone in all matters of faith and life.



Chapter 2

Salvation Accomplished: The God of Our Profession

2. Do you believe in one living and true God, in whom eternally there are three distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—who are the same in being and equal in power and glory, and that Jesus Christ is God the Son come in the flesh?

The God of the Bible is the only God who can save us from sin, death, and the devil. It is imperative that we know who he is as he has revealed himself to us in his infallible Word and how he has accomplished our redemption in Christ. he is the one we profess.

The God of the Bible

Who is God? What has he revealed about himself in his Word, the Bible?

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#4 What is God? A. God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

Q.#5 Are there more Gods than one? A. There is but One only, the living and true God.

The world in sin makes God after its own sinful image. The Bible calls this idolatry. Calvin called the fallen human soul an “idol factory.” After describing the “idols of the nations” as “the work of human hands” the Psalmist shows that they are not living, but impotent. “Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them” (Ps. 135:13–18). By contrast “the LORD is great, and . . . our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the LORD pleases he does . . .” (vs. 5–6). he judges the nations and has compassion on his servants. he is sovereign over history and creation.

The world wants to control God for its own sinful purposes. It wants to see him as dependent on creation in some way. It purposely confuses the Creator with his creation as Paul says in Romans 1:25 “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!” Monism and Pantheism make God identical with everything. Deism makes him a distant, but uninvolved, originator of the universe. But in his infallible Word the true and living God reveals himself as the sovereign creator who controls history for his glorious and wise purposes.

The Attributes of God

What are God’s attributes?

The attributes of God (essential personal characteristics) listed in *The Shorter Catechism* can be divided into two categories: *communicable* and *incommunicable*.

God’s communicable attributes are those attributes that he gives in a limited (finite) way to humans, who are made in God’s image: spirit, being, wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and truth. Adam and Eve perfectly reflected these attributes as he was originally created. They were made to be completely dependent on God. These are also known as God’s “moral attributes.”

God’s incommunicable attributes are those attributes that are utterly unique to God: infinite, eternal and unchangeable. These are also known as his “natural attributes.” These attributes teach us that God is separate from his creation. he is totally independent of what he has made. he created freely. The word **infinite** literally means “without boundaries” (Ps. 145:3). God is limitless. **Eternal** means that God is unbounded by time (Ps. 90:2).

Unchangeable means that he is immutable, unbounded by space-time history. he is the “I AM THAT I AM” (Exod. 3:14) who never changes (Mal. 3:6).

God is incomprehensible. While he may be truly known, in as much as he chooses to reveal himself to us, our knowledge of God is not exhaustive, nor can it ever be since we are creatures and will remain so in glory (Isa. 55:8–9). We can never wrap our minds around him because he is “infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.”

The Trinity

Is God personal?

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#6 How many persons are there in the Godhead? A. There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

A good profession is always a Trinitarian profession. The world views God either as impersonal or as a limited being. In both cases man seeks to control God by imagining him to be manageable. he is, in fact, neither limited or impersonal. he is triune or tri-personal. he is perfect diversity in unity. The three persons communicate among themselves eternally in glorious divine perfection, harmony and love.

The profundity of this truth requires us to submit our minds to God’s revelation, the Bible. he is, after all, God. he would hardly command our respect, worship and awe if he were anything less. As we have said he is incomprehensible. “ ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts’ ” (Isa. 55:8–9).

The doctrine of the Trinity is hidden in the Old Testament. Before God created man he declared “Let us make man in our image . . . ” (Gen. 1:26). God refers to himself with the “plural of majesty” hinting at a plurality of persons. The triple blessing of Aaron in Numbers 6:24–26 suggests the Trinitarian nature of God. The angelic doxology in the heavenly throne room vision of Isaiah 6:3 is a similar revelation: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” The Messianic Psalms refer to the Messiah as God. Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1 to confound the rebellious Pharisees with proof of his deity. “ ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?’ They said to him, ‘The son of David.’ he said to them, ‘How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying: The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under my feet?’ If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how is he his son?’ ” No one dared respond (Matt. 22:41–46).

The Trinity is fully revealed in the consummate redemptive revelation of Jesus Christ and his Spirit in the new covenant epoch. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are explicitly present at the baptism of Jesus into his Messianic office (Matt. 3:16–17). It is into the triune name of God that the nations are to be baptized in fulfilling the Christ’s Great Commission to make disciple of all nations (Matt. 28:19). Paul uses the Trinitarian blessing in 2 Corinthians 13:14 “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Scripture texts that indicate a subordination of the Son to the Father and the Spirit to the Father and the Son are to be understood in terms of their roles in relation to their work of creation and redemption, not their relationship as eternal God. The Son incarnate, who is the Suffering Servant, says: “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (Jn. 5:30). And yet he also says: “I and the Father are one” (Jn. 10:30). Eternally the three persons are “equal in power and glory.”

The following chart shows the relationships of each of the three persons in eternity (*opera ad intra* – working within the Trinity) and in time (*opera ad extra* – working in history).

Person	Eternal (ontological – being in eternity) <i>opera ad intra</i>	Temporal (economical – function in time) <i>opera ad extra</i>	Deity (fully God)
Father	Source: begets Son, spirates Spirit John 17:5	Plans 1 Pet. 1:2	Eph. 4:6
Son	Eternally begotten of the Father John 1:14, 18; John 3:16	Accomplishes 1 Pet. 1:2	Jn. 1:1–5, 14, 18; 5:17–18; 8:58 Heb. 1:2–3
Holy Spirit	Eternally spirated proceeds from Father & Son John 15:26	Applies 1 Pet. 1:2	Acts 5:2–4

The Son and the Spirit are given the same names and attributes as the Father in Holy Scripture. They also perform the same works and are accorded the same worship as the Father. The Son and the Spirit are the “Jehovah” (Yahweh or LORD) of the Old Testament.

Beware of human illustrations of the Trinity, such as water = liquid, ice and steam. These each illustrate heresies in the history of the church. The creator transcends all created examples. This doctrine is not meant to be the subject of speculation beyond what is revealed in God’s Word. It is meant to make us bow before such a glorious and awesome God in worship and service.

So God is not only personal but tri-personal. The universe is therefore ultimately personal. What a contrast with the impersonal universe of Atheism or Pantheism.

The Sovereignty of God

Does God control all things?

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#7 What are the decrees of God? A. The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass.

God has a plan which he sovereignly and freely established in the counsels of eternity. his purposes are in the “Lamb slain from the foundations of the world” (Rev. 13:8 NKJV). Paul told the Ephesian church that God “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 through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, . . . 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, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.” (Eph. 1:4–5, 11–12).

The focus of God’s plan is on his incarnate Son and the people who are united to him as the new humanity. But this focus can only be realized by one who is in control of all things. God is in absolute control (cf. Ps. 33:11; 115:3; Prov. 16:33; Dan. 4:17; Rom. 8:28–30). Even the wickedest act ever perpetrated in history, the crucifixion of the Lord of glory, was ordained by God. “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). Here we see that God is sovereign and man is responsible. This is a great mystery, but it is clearly revealed by God in his infallible Word.

This great truth is revealed to humble sinful men who wish to claim sovereignty over their own lives and destinies. We are not in control—God is. This is a great issue of discipleship. We must let God be what he is—God. But God’s sovereignty is also meant to comfort God’s people. The victory of Jesus Christ is only sure in the hands of a sovereign God. If he is not in control of history then none of his promises is sure.

Some have claimed that God cannot be both good and sovereign. he must be *both* to be God and his Word confirms this from beginning to end. This very challenge is faced squarely by the Apostle Paul. “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?’ ” (Rom. 9:18–20).

On the other hand no one can say God is not merciful. In Jesus Christ he extends his mercy to all. “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (Jn. 6:37). Some say if God is sovereign then his calling only some is unfair. But the sovereign God is also the suffering God. The cross, not speculation is where we should seek security and solace. As with the doctrine of the Trinity this truth is meant to lead us to humbly put our trust in God. This is the great issue of human existence. Autonomy or theonomy. Man rules or God rules. “Let God be God.” he is whether or not anyone acknowledges it. Only those who do will spend eternity in his glorious presence. For the Christian this is not debatable it is imperative.

This is not Fatalism (what will be will be), nor is God responsible for evil. God is living and so are we. God is sovereign and man is responsible. The alternative is life without a plan

and therefore without meaning; a world in moral chaos and without hope; history without a purpose and ending in emptiness. Thank God that the wise, powerful and merciful God of the Bible is in control of all things. Knowing this leads Paul to break forth in appropriate praise, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Rom.11:33).

How did God put his sovereign plan into effect?

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#8 How doth God execute his decrees? A. God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence.

As an architectural designer I drew many plans that were never executed. But God’s plan is not so. his plans are always wisely made, powerfully, perfectly and completely executed. The following sections explain how God puts his plan into effect in creation and providence.

The Creator

Did God create all things?

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#9 What is the work of creation? A. The work of creation is, God’s making all things of nothing, in the space of six days, and all very good.

Q.#10 How did God create man? A. God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.

The Triune God of the Bible created all things out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). Note that *each* person of the Trinity participated in creation (cf. Gen. 1:2; John 1:3, 10; Heb. 1:2–3; Col. 1:16). Furthermore it is the *God of the Bible* and no other god who created all things. The Bible begins with a challenge to all would-be gods: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). In Genesis 2:4 we are told that “the LORD God made the earth and the heavens...” *LORD* is God’s covenant name, often called the Tetragrammaton. It is the name God has revealed to his redeemed people. All other explanations of origins are bogus. All other ancient accounts are distorted imitations of the original.

The fact that he created all things *out of nothing* (*ex nihilo*, Heb. 11:3) accents the distinction between the Creator and the creature; they are separate, and that the creation is entirely dependent upon the Creator for its origin and maintenance. Eastern religions see creation as an emanation of God. God is identical with creation. Thus, created reality is not *created* to them. The Creator and the creation are confused as Paul says in Romans 1:25, they “worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator . . .” This is really a rebellious evasion of God’s Lordship. This is why the Bible begins, with an assertion of God’s Lordship over creation.

Evolution only evades the question of origins by positing enormous time periods for the development of present reality, while reducing that reality to the material. This also evades the explanation of the astonishing order and complexity of the world and its interdependent systems. It is no wonder that the Darwinian dominance of academia is being challenged by the “spirituality” of the New Age movement as well as scientists, who, since the emergence of Big Bang Theory have been uncovering an increasing array of evidence for design. The idea of a

random universe is both intellectually and spiritually unsatisfying. The Christian is not surprised by this because it is not the truth.

The creation took place in “the space of six days” (WCF 4.1). While some take this to be six twenty-four hour days, it is difficult to explain the various elements in the order given. For example, the sun, by which we measure hours, was not created until the fourth day. Furthermore, the word for *day* (*yom*) in Hebrew is often used of various time periods other than twenty four hours. These days were definite periods of time. Finally, the seventh day on which God rested, from his works of creation, has no end, signifying an endless day in the heavenly realm into which his people are invited through Jesus Christ. What is clear is that creation is an utterly unique event performed entirely by the powerful commands of God, who called all things into being. his explanation of that event is revealed in terms that we can understand, and which form the basis for the patterns of creational and redemptive life. In an oral culture literature was written to be heard and remembered. Thus the creation account is structured in a pattern. The realm of light created on the third day is ruled by the heavenly luminaries of the fourth day; the heavenly realm of sky and sea on the second day is ruled by the creatures of sky and sea created on the fifth day; and the earth with its vegetation of day three is ruled by man, who is created on day six. However, five different views of the creation account have been determined by the OPC to be within the bounds of orthodoxy. The study paper is available on the OPC website.

Some Christians argue that by calculating the years indicated by the genealogies of Genesis we can determine the age of the earth to be very young. The problem is that the genealogies are written with a purpose that requires excluding many ancestors. By comparing genealogies within the Bible itself this can be shown to be the case. Again we need to be careful not to claim the Bible says something when it doesn't.

Man was created in God's image (Gen. 1:26; 2:7). Actually Scripture says he *is* God's image, body and soul. he was miraculously and specially created by God. God “sculpted” him out of the dust of the earth and breathed into him the “breath” (spirit) of life. Rather than being the highest form of animal he is unique because he was created to commune with God and reflect his glory. Theistic Evolution posits God giving his image to a higher primate at a certain point after the initial creation. This theory is a contradiction in terms, because Evolution posits a godless random universe developed by chance. There is no evidence in the Bible for this compromise theory. Man is the special creation of God.

Christian must be careful, however, to avoid two dangers. The first is to commit to a scientific theory, like “creationism,” and act as if the details of the theory are the Bible's clear teachings. Then if the particulars are demonstrated not to be true, like the Ptolemaic theory that the earth is the astronomical center of the solar system, it appears that the Bible is not true, when in fact the problem is with the scientific theory. The second danger is to treat Genesis like a scientific textbook, as if this is the only way to take the book seriously as actual history. While Genesis teaches historical truth it does so in terms of the ancient world and not in scientific language. It is covenant document teaching that God is the Creator of all things and the Redeemer of his people.

Creating man in his image (*imago dei*), God gave him the ability to imitate his own creative nature by *recreating*, planning and building culture—to develop the potentialities of creation. This is often called the “Cultural Mandate,” given in Genesis 1:28, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Since man's fall into

sin cultural development continues, but is no longer holy as it was in the Garden of Eden before the fall.

God also created man male and female. The clear distinction between the sexes by creation forms the basis for a heterosexual understanding of human sexuality. It also demonstrates that the difference of roles is not essentially a result of cultural development, but is rather a creation ordinance, something inherent in the nature of human beings. Woman was formed out of man, not to assert her inferiority, but to reveal her dignity and uniqueness as a “a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:20). “Fit” does not imply slavery or inferiority, but rather that she is a companion image-bearer suited to complement her husband in the task of having dominion over the earth for God’s glory under the man’s loving and wise headship.

The Providence of God

Does God control his creation and history?

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#11 What are God’s works of providence? A. God’s works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

God not only created all things, but because he did so with a purpose, he controls his creation and its history in order to achieve that purpose.

The God of the Bible is not the deity of Deism who started things in motion and left the outcome to the vicissitudes of history like a clock maker. Nor is he the deity of Fate like Allah who controls people like puppets, whose actions play no vital part in his providence.

The God of the Bible preserves and governs all things so as to preserve the integrity of man’s choices and actions and yet insure that the outcome is according to his plan. Note carefully that the God who is in control is *holy*. he preserves and governs in a way completely consistent with his divine perfections. he is also infinitely *wise* and not capricious. he controls the means as well as the ends. he has a perspective on reality which is complete. he is *omniscient* (all knowing), knowing the beginning from the end. he is also *powerful*, able to control every element in realizing his plan. he is *omnipresent* (present everywhere) and *omnipotent* (all powerful). he is able to meet the needs of every creature, but especially his people, working all things for their good (Rom. 8:28; cf. Deut. 8:3; Ps. 145:9; Acts 14:17; 17:28; Heb. 1:3).

This wonderful truth is meant to humble the proud and comfort God’s people. A world out of God’s control is not only a frightening prospect but an impossible concept.

The Sin of Man

3. Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, that you repent of your sin, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?

The Bible is very frank about the central problem of human history—the sinfulness of human beings, what the Puritans referred to as the “sinfulness of sin.” Thanks God that is not all the Bible tells us; it tells us about sin in order for us to see our need of Jesus Christ as Savior.

The Fall

Is man a sinner, and was he always a sinner?

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#1 What is the chief end of man? A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Q.#10 How did God create man? A. God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.

Q.#12 What special act of providence did God exercise toward man in the estate wherein he was created? A. When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.

Q.#13 Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created? A. Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by their sinning against God.

Crucial to our self-understanding is the fact that man is not what he ought to be; in his present fallen state he is not the way he was created to be. Adam and Eve were created positively righteous in order “to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” They had uninterrupted communion with their Creator. God entered into a **Covenant of Life** or **Works** with them. A *covenant* is a sovereignly established relationship between God and his people. After they were created God pronounced his entire creation “very good” (Gen. 1:31). They were created in “knowledge, righteousness and holiness.” Every thought, word, and deed pleased God. Their dominion over creation, their cultivation of the garden of Eden, brought glory to God, because they did everything as servants of their Maker with thanksgiving.

Modern environmental problems are a not the result of man’s *using* God’s creation. We were created to be masters of it. The problem is that sinful man tends to use his creation for his own purposes, thus distorting and abusing creation, rather than being a steward of creation , seeking to fulfill God’s grand purposes.

The first question of *The Shorter Catechism* beautifully states the purpose of human life: “to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” To *glorify God* means to reveal the excellencies of who he is; to demonstrate in thought, word, and deed how truly wonderful God is. Because God created man for this purpose he is miserable pursuing any other purpose in life. To glorify him is to *enjoy* him. God’s glory alone is man’s happiness. Any other enjoyment is temporary and futile because it is not connected with God.

Man’s perfection came to an end when he fell into sin and rebellion by disobeying God. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was placed by God in the garden as a test of Adam’s loyalty as a *covenant of works*. All other trees were his to enjoy (Gen. 2:16). But this tree and its fruit were forbidden as a test of his obedience (Gen. 2:17). It was a probation to see if man would live by God’s Word or seek his own wisdom independently of God.

The Evil One, Satan, came in the guise of a beautiful snake, the “serpent,” and deceitfully suggested that God was keeping something good from Adam and Eve. In other words God’s Word is not sufficient to live by, not trustworthy. God does not know what is best for mankind (Gen. 3:1-6). The result of giving into this awful temptation was spiritual and physical death,

just as God had graciously warned them (Gen. 2:17; 3:7ff). *Death* in the Bible is *separation* from God. Ultimately this leads to separation from our bodies and human history and one day after judgment, separation from God in hell. Immediately after their first sin Adam and Eve tried to cover up their sense of shame and hid because of the true guilt of their disobedience (Gen. 3:7,8). In this life we are by nature “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). As the representative head of the human race Adam had failed the probation. As a result all of his descendents have been born in this sinful condition.

Total Depravity

What does it mean that he is a sinner? Just how sinful is he?

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#14 What is sin? A. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.

Q.#15 What was the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created?

A. The sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created, was their eating the forbidden fruit.

Q.#16 Did all mankind fall in Adam’s first transgression? A. The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.

Q.#17 Into what estate did the fall bring mankind? A. The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.

Q.#18 Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell? A. The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam’s first sin, the want of original righteousness, the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.

Because of Adam’s fall everyone is totally depraved. Anyone who doubts that the Bible teaches that man is totally depraved needs only read Romans 3:9–20 or Jeremiah 17:9 “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can understand it?” Anyone who doubts that man actually is totally depraved needs only to read the daily newspaper and look honestly at his own heart.

Sin is the breaking of God’s law, which is best summarized in the Ten Commandments. “Sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). Sin is failing to do what God has commanded and doing what he has forbidden. When the Bible says that man is a sinner it means that he is not only breaking God’s law as a matter of course; but also that he has a natural disposition to do so. This is referred to as **Total Depravity** (TULIP, see Appendix E). In what sense is mankind totally depraved or sinful?

First, **every person is a sinner**. This is so because of the covenant that God made with Adam in the beginning. As the representative of all mankind, he brought all into sin by his fall (Rom. 5:12–21). “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19). Thus everyone born of Adam’s race inherits a sinful nature. No one is exempt from Original Sin. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Second, **every aspect of each person is sinful**. The intellect, the will and the emotions as well as the body are corrupted by sin. “Then 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” (Gen. 6:5).

Third, **every thought, word, and deed is corrupted by sin**. “Actual transgressions” proceed from our sinful selves. “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matt. 15:19).

How does this square with our experience of the pleasant non-Christian next door neighbor or the heroic act of bravery by a person who is not a Christian?

First, sin is defined by God and is judged ultimately only from his perspective. Proverbs 21:4 says that even the “plowing of the wicked” is sin. How so? The “civil righteousness” (plowing is in itself a good activity) of the sinner fails to meet God’s threefold standard of “good”. For a thought, word, or deed to be good according to God’s Word it must come from **the right motive: the love of God and one’s neighbor**; be based on the **right standard: God’s written Word**; and must have **the right goal: God’s glory**. Thus what we call “good works” are only outwardly good from God’s viewpoint. These works are done by the unbeliever out of self-preservation or self-interest (WCF 16.7).

Second, God encourages such “civic righteousness” in a fallen world, because without it the world would be an unbearable place to live, indeed an impossible place to live. These “good” works are a reflection, as the remnant of the image of God, of his goodness or what is often called his **Common Grace**. God uses this gracious gift to preserve history for his redemptive purposes. In the life of Abraham Abimelech was more virtuous than Abraham in the matter of Sarah’s identity (Gen. 20). God’s grace is the ultimate explanation for Abimelech’s virtue. “Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her” (Gen. 20:6). This natural law shows the work of God’s law written on every human heart (Rom. 2:15). All of the gifts and virtues of unbelievers are God’s kind gift to an undeserving and ungrateful world (Matt. 5:45). One day they will be called to account for how they have used such grace (Rom. 2:4–5).

What are the consequences of man’s being a sinner?

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#19 What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell? A. All mankind by their fall lost communion with God are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.

Ever since the fall of Adam all mankind has been born in sin with sinful hearts that can do nothing but live in rebellion against God. This is known as **original sin**. Luther referred to this as the bondage of the will. As a consequence all mankind is under God’s wrath and curse. This explains the turmoil, tragedy and brokenness of human history.

The curse of Adam and his heirs is connected with sin, which by its nature works misery into the human situation. Sin is lovelessness, selfishness. Our alienation from God spills over into every relationship including our relationship with ourselves. Witness the psychological problems of mankind. Our alienation also includes creation. Witness pollution, disease and disaster. All misery and every disaster in the world is a stark reminder that God is justly angry with our rebellious ways. Death is the ultimate wake up call. No amount of wishful thinking or Eastern mystical babble will suffice in the hour of death. And after this judgment and hell (Heb. 9:27, more on this in Chapter 7).

However, the fact that man is now not the way he was created to be is really a source of hope when looked at from a Biblical perspective. If there is nothing essentially wrong with

mankind then the way things are is the way they will always be, and, indeed, ought to be. Ecclesiastes describes how everything is out of whack due to the fall. Injustices and inequities are everywhere in human experience. The word often translated “vanity” means that things are not the way they ought to be. Believing that things *are* the way they ought to be does not explain the longing of mankind for a better existence. The problem is that all of those longings apart from the solution that God has provided are *utopian*, literally *no place*. But God has provided a marvelous alternative to this desperate situation in which we find ourselves.

Christ the Redeemer

Is there any hope for mankind in such a desperate situation?

The Promise of a Redeemer

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#20 Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery? A. God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.

The plan of salvation, conceived by God in the counsels of eternity, known as the **Covenant of Redemption** or **Peace**, made between the Father and the Son (John 6:38–40, 17:4–12), was first put into effect through a wonderful promise.

Immediately after the fall of Adam God graciously promised to redeem Adam from his sin and its consequences. he entered into a new relationship with a portion of mankind, his “elect” (to be discussed in the next chapter). This relationship was in the form of another covenant called **The Covenant of Grace**. he did this through a promise called the *protevangelium* or the “First Gospel (Good News).” God told the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). This was the first promise of a Redeemer who would be a man born of the woman’s lineage. Though Satan would make him suffer by wounding him (bruising his heel), the Redeemer would have the ultimate victory by crushing Satan’s head (a symbol of authority). The entire history of redemption from this point on is the story of the battle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. At stake is God’s Lordship over his creation, especially humanity. God promises to crush the Great Usurper and all of his disciples. he also promises to save the Seed and all of his disciples.

The Covenant of Grace is the relationship sovereignly established by God through the undeserved favor given in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Through the person and work of the Mediator-Seed God establishes union and communion with himself, restoring the broken relationship between God and man and confirming it permanently in union with a new, second and final head of a new humanity, thus raising God’s image-bearer to its consummation in Jesus Christ, the Second and last Adam (1 Cor. 15:42–49).

This redemptive reality was prefigured in the Old Testament in the gradually unfolding revelation of Jesus Christ. The promise of redemption, first given to Adam and Eve in the garden, was renewed and expanded to the Patriarchs. The world-wide blessings of an everlasting covenant were given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 17:1–8; 49:8–12). “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’

referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). Under Moses the Tabernacle and Temple depicted the covenant relationship: “I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev. 26:11–12). Then Lord renewed the Covenant of Grace with King David (1 Sam. 7:12–17), who was a type of Christ and depicted Christ’s suffering and glory in his Psalms. The prophets foretold the coming of God incarnate who would be born of a virgin and suffer for his people’s sins and be raised from the dead to rule in glory forever in a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; 66:22).

The entire Old Testament is a rich revelation of Jesus Christ. As he opened the Old Testament Scriptures to the disciples on the Emmaus Road “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. . . . Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled’ ” (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39).

The Person of the Redeemer

Who, then, is this redeemer?

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#21 Who is the Redeemer of God’s elect? A. The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.

Q.#22 How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man? A. Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.

The plan and promise of salvation were accomplished in the incarnation of God’s Son. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). “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. . . . No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (John 1:14, 18).

The unique and miraculous event of the incarnation, in which God the Son became man, required his conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah had prophesied: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (lit. “God with us” Isa. 7:14). The angel Gabriel came to Mary and said: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). After reciting the Davidic royal lineage of Jesus on his covenant father’s side Matthew records: “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18).

It should not surprise us that this magnificent miracle is unthinkable to the naturalist who presupposes that the sovereign God of the Bible does not exist. Without the Virgin Birth there can be no Christianity. Only so can God the Son take to himself a complete human nature to become the Christ who takes away the sins of the world.

If he was not fully God he could not satisfy God’s justice through his substitutionary death to pay the enormous infinite penalty for our sins. The value of his death had to be infinite. If he was not God he could not have overshadowed the sinful nature of Adam that was inherited by Mary. If he was not fully man, with a true body and soul, he could not obey in our place as a representative man, the second and last Adam (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:42–49). Only One who was fully man, yet without sin, could be the Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). The teacher of morality envisioned by the Liberals is not a sufficient Savior. Neither is the angelic being of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who is neither fully God nor fully man. On the other hand the mere *appearance* of a man who was fully God, as held by the ancient Docetists does not meet the biblical requirements either. Thus, the Mediator revealed by God in the Bible and in history must be “both God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person forever.”

God himself has completely identified with us. he was tempted at every point just like we are, and yet without sin. Truly he came to save sinners like us from our sins.

The Work of the Redeemer

How is it that this redeemer can save us from our sins?

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#23 What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer? A. Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

Q.#24 How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet? A. Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.

Q.#25 How doth Christ execute the office of a priest? A. Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us.

Q.#26 How doth Christ execute the office of a king? A. Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.

Q.#27 Wherein did Christ’s humiliation consist? A. Christ’s humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.

Q.#28 Wherein consisteth Christ’s exaltation? A. Christ’s exaltation consisteth in his rising again from the dead on the third day, in ascending up into heaven, in sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day.

“Christ” (lit. “the Anointed One” or Messiah) is not a proper name but a title of office, the biblical office of **Mediator**. When Jesus was baptized he was anointed to fulfill his messianic office. This one office is threefold: prophet, priest and king. Each of these is prefigured by various individuals in the Old Testament. Each is necessary to “save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Moses was a prophet who looked for a greater prophet (Deut. 18:15–22); Aaron was a priest who looked for the ultimate priest (cf. the Book of Hebrews); David was a king who looked for a greater king (2 Samuel 7:12–16). All of these are perfectly embodied in Jesus the Christ (Heb. 1:1–3).

As Prophet Jesus speaks and *is* the final revelation of God to man. he is the Word made flesh. he is the Author of the whole Bible (1 Pet. 1:11), bringing the Scriptures to their

completion with the apostolic revelation of the New Testament (John 14:26). he speaks today as that Word is preached and taught to the nations (Matt. 28:18–20).

As King he has spoiled Satan the usurper’s dominion along with all principalities and powers, crushing the head of the Serpent through the work of the cross (Col. 2:15; Eph. 4:7–10). he subdues his people through conquering their hearts (Eph. 2:6). he rules and defends us. All authority in heaven and on earth is his (Matt. 28:18). he is “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15).

As Priest he represents us before God. The New Testament vocabulary used to describe the nature of his priestly work in our behalf is rich. he is our **Advocate** (1 John 2:1). he died as a substitute for his people to satisfy God’s justice. he is the **Propitiation** for our sins. This means that his finished work appeased the just anger of God caused by our sins (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2). his sinless life was lived in our place (active obedience, Heb. 4:15). his sinless suffering throughout his life on earth, and especially on the cross, paid the penalty as he gave his life for our sins (passive obedience, 2 Cor. 5:21). he gave his life as a **Substitute**, taking our place before God’s judgment (Rom. 5:6). he is our **Ransom** (Mark 10:45), paying the price of **Redemption** (Eph. 1:7) for our sins and **Reconciling** us to God (Rom. 5:10). he is presently our **Intercessor** at God’s right hand (Heb. 7:25).

There is one very important question concerning the nature of Christ’s accomplishment which needs to be answered. For whom did Christ Die? The answer to this question is known as the *Third Point of Calvinism*, **Limited Atonement** (TULIP, see Appendix E). Christ died for his elect, *all* of them and *only* for them. If in fact, as some (Arminians) maintain, he died in the place of every single person in the whole world, then according to justice *everyone* must be saved. If the penalty is paid then God will not exact that penalty again. To say otherwise is to impugn God’s absolute justice. Of course, the Bible clearly teaches that many will not be saved (2 Thess. 1:6-10; Matt. 25:46). Thus, the Arminian makes the effect of Christ’s work on the cross depend on man’s choice. Such an atonement then provides only a *potential* salvation. No actual payment is made. This is not the teaching of Scripture because this is not the nature of the finished work of Christ on the cross.

The Bible teaches that Christ died for his elect people. his work on the cross had a definite object: to procure the salvation of his elect. The very nature of Christ’s work as a Substitute involves his *actually* taking our place under God’s judgment for our sin. Redemption requires that the price of the penalty *actually* be paid. God’s design in sending Christ was to “save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Anything less than this undermines the effectiveness, power, and purpose of Christ’s death. Furthermore, the nature of God’s love in Christ is such that he rescues people who are dead in sin and unable and unwilling to come to him. If the effectiveness of Christ’s death depended on human choice nobody would be saved. “We love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19 NKJV).

As to the *definiteness* of the atonement the nature of love itself teaches us that love must have a definite object. No woman would be impressed with a lover who claimed to love all woman in general. She is only impressed when he makes her the special object of his love. True love always has a definite object. Such is the love of Christ, the husband, for his bride the church (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:4; 5:25). The word “foreknew” in Romans 8:29 does not mean that God foresaw who would choose him. It means that God in eternity set his love upon us. “Know” in Hebrew referred to a relation of intimacy and delight: “Adam knew Eve his wife” (Gen. 4:1). “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2; cf. Gen. 18:19; Jer. 1:5; John 10:14; 2 Tim. 2:19). Christ’s giving of himself for his church was to make her

holy, nothing less. If his death only potentially saves everyone then it is a failure. No Christian would wish to impugn his work in this way. The problem is that few think through the logic of their beliefs. Paul says Christ “loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

C. H. Spurgeon used an excellent illustration to distinguish this biblical truth from the error of an unlimited or indefinite atonement. The Arminian bridge of salvation is wide enough for all of humanity, but only goes half way to the other side, thus giving hope to all but actual salvation to none. The biblical or Calvinistic bridge is narrower, only designed for God’s elect, but though it is limited it goes all the way to the other side, actually saving all for whom it was designed. It should also be remembered, however, that his elect are, according to the Book of Revelation, a “great multitude” (Rev. 7:9; 19:1, 6).

The infallible historical record establishes the genuineness of Jesus person and work. His miracles attest his deity. After reading from Joel on the Day of Pentecost Peter asserted: “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst . . .” (Acts 2:22). This man was crucified and raised from the dead. His resurrection was the consummate miracle proving his Sonship and the pleasure of God in his accomplishment on the cross (2:23–36). Mark records the remarkable story of the paralytic whom Christ forgives of his sins (Mark 2:5). The scribes accuse Jesus of blasphemy because only God can forgive sins. Christ responds by asking whether it is easier to forgive sins or heal. Of course, both are the work of God. Christ’s healing of the paralytic authenticates his authority as God. Notice that when the apostles heal they do not forgive sins but proclaim the divinely given message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The message that the crucified and risen Christ forgives sins is authenticated by the miracles of the apostles.

It is impossible to separate the supernatural claims of the Bible from the teachings of Jesus. his teachings are inextricably connected with his deity. The entire Bible testifies that the Jesus of history is God incarnate. This is written for us that we may with Thomas bow before the Christ of Scripture and confess “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). He was either a lunatic, a liar or the Son of God. The most important question ever asked is “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matt. 16:14). The only answer that will save you from sin, death and hell is the answer of the confessing apostle Peter: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). This is what it means to make a good profession of Jesus Christ.



Chapter 3

Salvation Applied: The Realization of Our Profession

Now we come to the application of the finished work of Christ to his elect people by the power of his Holy Spirit. This is the answer to the question, How is it that we actually become Christians? Both the Son and the Holy Spirit who he sends execute the covenant plan of the Father agreed upon by the Holy Trinity in eternity (John 16:13–15; 17:4). Now we see from Scripture how that plan effects the lives of God’s elect in time.

The Holy Spirit

How do we become believers?

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#29 How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ? A. We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit.

In the upper room prior to our Lord’s death and resurrection he promised to send his Spirit “to convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:7–11). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Risen Lord who replaces the stony hearts of his elect with hearts of flesh that love God and his law (Eze. 36:26; John 14:18; 2 Cor. 3:17).

God’s choice of who he will call to himself is *not* based on anything in them. It is due entirely to his sovereign election. This is the *Second Point of Calvinism*, **Unconditional Election** (TULIP, see Appendix E). God’s eternal plan (his decrees) includes his election of a portion of mankind to be saved (Rom. 8:28–29; Eph. 1:4–6). This portion, as we have noted, makes up a vast number of people according Revelation 7:9, “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes . . .” (cf. Gen. 15:5). This aspect of God’s sovereignty over all things is known as **Predestination**, which is his specific sovereignty in the salvation of his people (for more on God’s sovereignty see Chapter 2, pp. 11–12).

The point here is to emphasize that God’s choice of us is *unconditional*. That is it is not based on any qualities in the sinner. No one is any more “redeemable” than anyone else. This truth is meant to humble us and give all the glory to the author of our salvation. God told Moses: “I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Exod. 33:19). Jacob and Esau were chosen before they were born, before they had done any good or evil “in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call—” (Rom. 9:11). “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (Rom. 9:16). In fact, God often chooses the least likely candidates in order to display the wonders of his grace. “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the

source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’ ” (1 Cor. 1:26–31).

Thus, the Holy Spirit applies the finished work of Christ to lost sinners who have been chosen by God for his own glorious purposes from before the foundation of the world.

The Order of Application

The order of the Spirit’s work in applying Christ’s work to us is logical not necessarily temporal. In other words many of the following aspects of the Spirit’s work in our lives are given to us all at once, while some involve a process, and others are future. Enumerating the **order of salvation** (*ordo salutis*) is meant to help us appreciate and remember the whole of God’s work in our lives. The work of the Spirit represents one united multidimensional work of God’s amazing grace.

Calling

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#30 How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ? A. The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

Q.#31 What is effectual calling? A. Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

Effectual calling is one of several kinds of *calling* in Scripture. For example, the daily work or occupation of every person is a calling. “Each one should remain in the condition (calling) in which he was called.” (1 Cor. 7:20). Paul is encouraging Christians to keep doing the daily work they were doing when they became Christians. Becoming a Christian is not a call to abandon life in this world (more on this later). The second use Paul makes of the word *call* (“called”) in this verse is the subject that we are now concerned with: *effectual calling*.

There are three types of call that involve the gospel. The first is the **Universal Call**. This is God’s call to everyone to acknowledge him as God and worship him accordingly. All of God’s creation, including man, his consciousness, and conscience are a general revelation of God. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 2:14–15). This revelation leaves everyone without excuse (Rom. 1:20). “God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance” (Rom. 2:4). Because of the hardness of people’s hearts this call by itself never leads to anyone’s salvation. Fallen people are blind to it.

The second type of call is the **Gospel Call**. This is the message of the gospel which calls everyone who hears it to repent of sin, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. God’s salvation is freely offered to all who hear. “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). By itself, however, this call, too, will not save anyone. In Athens after Paul called his hearers to repent and believe we are told “some mocked” (Acts 17:30–32). They were called by the preaching, but not *effectually*, so they did not respond. They are deaf to the call.

The third type of call is the **Effectual Call**. This call occurs when God’s Spirit causes the Gospel Call to take effect (an effective call) as it did in Lydia’s heart when she heard the gospel

message: “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul” (Acts 16:14). When Paul writes to various churches he often refers to them as “the called of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:6; Eph. 4:1). This refers to those who are *effectually called*. Jesus tells us that his sheep hear his voice (John 10:3, 16). “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:18, 24).

This is the *Fourth Point of Calvinism*, **Irresistible Grace** (TULIP, see Appendix E). Some object to this as if God works against the will of the sinner. In a world that values a menu of choices this is especially offensive. But, in fact, God’s Spirit changes the will of the sinner by giving him a new heart. When someone is effectually called he desires what he once opposed or *resisted*. When God sets his love and affection on someone from eternity he wins them by changing them. Thus, his grace is *irresistible*. If our wills initiated our salvation then several impossible and undesirable ideas would result. First, God would not be in control of history. History would be under the control of sinful people. Second, we would attribute salvation to our wise choice and steal part of the glory due to God alone. The logic of Scripture, as you can see, begins with man as a helpless, spiritually dead, sinner. Once this clear biblical truth is affirmed the rest of what we call Calvinism follows necessarily. Only sovereign, irresistible grace can save such a sinner.

Union with Christ

Union with Christ is one of the most fundamental concepts in the New Testament regarding the work of God’s Spirit. Whenever Paul refers to Christians being “*in Christ*” he is referring to our union with Christ. All of the elements of the *ordo salutis* are rooted in this wonderful reality. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places *in Christ*” (Eph. 1:3: cf. 1 Cor. 1:2). This union is vital, spiritual, covenantal, and mystical. When the Spirit effectually calls us, he calls us *into union with Christ*. This is the ground of the application of all of the other benefits of salvation.

Regeneration

Regeneration is the new birth caused by the Spirit’s entrance into our inner lives. Jesus refers to this during his encounter with Nicodemus in John 3 as being “born of the Spirit” (v. 8). No one can enter the kingdom of God without this new birth (v. 5). As a result of the new birth we are indwelt by God’s Spirit and vitally united with Christ, who as the True Vine gives spiritual life to each of the branches (John 15:1ff).

This is the Spirit’s provision of new life through the new heart that he gives. The prophets had predicted this blessing of the Spirit centuries before Christ. “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Eze. 36:26; cf. Jer. 31:33). Jesus chided Nicodemus for not knowing about the new birth: “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” (John 3:10). “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 . . .” (Titus 3:4–5).

The new birth overcomes our deadness in sin (Eph. 2:1, 5), and enables us to repent and believe the gospel. Both faith and repentance are the sovereignly bestowed gifts of God's Spirit in regeneration (John 3:6, 8). "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). Regeneration is entirely the sovereign, mighty, and creative work of God's Spirit. As a result of his work we become a "new creation". "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The new birth is absolutely necessary in order to see or enter the kingdom of God. "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . You must be born again." (John 3:3, 7). The so-called "born again" movement of the 1970s unfortunately tended to identify the new birth with individual experience, especially exciting experience. It is important to keep in mind that the Spirit's work in changing a sinner's heart may express itself in a great variety of experiences depending on the personality, background, and situation of the person.

Conversion: Repentance and Faith

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#85 What doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin? A. To escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption.

Q.#86 What is faith in Jesus Christ? A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest on him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.

Q.#87 What is repentance unto life? A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

One of the reasons that many think that their repentance and faith are the cause of their salvation is that repentance and faith are the first conscious acts of the person with a new heart. Thus people mistakenly think that repentance and faith cause them to be born again. In fact, as we have seen above, repentance and faith are impossible without a new heart. It is the Spirit's work of regeneration that causes repentance and faith.

Repentance and faith are both occur simultaneously. Together they are known as **Conversion**. Repentance is the negative aspect of conversion, while faith is the positive aspect. Conversion is a sinner's *turning from sin* (repentance) and *trusting in the Savior*. Although both repentance and faith are God's gifts they must be exercised by us. While regeneration is *entirely* God's work, repentance and faith are God's gifts given in the new birth for us to exercise. God does not repent for us. He *enables* us to repent and believe. He enables us to obey the basic gospel command "Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Repentance and faith are the instruments by which we receive all the benefits of our union with Jesus Christ.

Repentance has three essential dimensions or elements: Admission of sin, true Sorrow for sin, and Turning from sin to Christ (**AST**).

Admission of Sin. This is accepting God’s assessment of our spiritual condition. As we learn the perfect standard of holiness from God’s law and from the life of our Lord we recognize and admit that we fall far short of God’s glory. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). “so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. . . . through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:19–20). With David we confess “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.” (Ps. 51:3). Instead of excusing ourselves and justifying our sins we cry out with the tax collector “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13; cf. Luke 15:21; Hos. 5:15).

Sorrow for Sin. True sorrow is to be distinguished from what Paul calls “worldly sorrow” (2 Cor. 7:10). Worldly sorrow is rooted in self-pity, fearing the immediate consequences of sin. The drunk who experiences the pain of the hangover may be sorry because he doesn’t want to experience that pain again. He may be sorry that his behavior threatens his marriage or job. This self concern leads in the same direction as every other decision of the sinner: to death. Godly sorrow comes with a deep sense that our sin is chiefly an offense against God Himself. “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” (Ps. 51:4). The sorrow that produces repentance is God-centered not self-centered.

Turning from Sin. This turning is a 180 degree about face. As the sinner sees what sin is, he hates it, turns from it, and walks in an entirely new direction: the way of righteousness. Repentance involves a clean break with sin as a way of life. This includes a heartfelt commitment to live a life pleasing to God (Acts 22:10; Eph. 2:1–5, 4:22–24; 1 John 2:1).

Repentance drives sinners helpless into the hands of a merciful God. But remember repentance is always exercised with faith. Repentance and faith are really two sides of the same act of the new heart.

Faith has three essential dimensions or elements: **Knowledge** of the truth, **Assent** to its truthfulness, and **Trust** in the One revealed by the truth (**KAT**).

Knowledge of the Truth. Faith must have a real object. I say *real* because the modern conception of faith minimizes the importance of the object, looking at faith itself as psychologically beneficial regardless of its object. Furthermore, modern people often believe that there is no objective or real object of faith. It is a product of our own aspirations. This might actually be an accurate description of idolatry, the imaginations of the “idol factory” of the sinful mind; but the biblical idea is quite different. God, who exists independent of his creation from all eternity, is the object of true faith; and not just any God but the God who reveals himself in the Bible, especially in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. Even Evangelicals often hold the mistaken idea that we trust a person not a doctrine. We cannot know a person without a revelation of who that person is. Faith must know the truth about God and Jesus Christ or it is not biblical faith.

Paul reminded the Corinthians of the *content* of the truth by which they had been saved,

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (1 Cor. 15:1–5)

One may not know much but one must know who Jesus Christ is and what he did for sinners in order to be saved.

Assent to its Truthfulness. Of course, a person may actually have a very detailed knowledge of what Scripture teaches, without believing that it is true. Assent means that the sinner embraces the truth of the gospel. Jesus said to the man with the paralytic son, “If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:23–24). His faith was weak but he assented to the truth and his son was healed. Thomas confronted with the truth of Jesus’ resurrection was called on by our Lord to believe it as the truth. Thomas confessed “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:27–28).

Trust in the One Revealed by the Truth. Believing that the gospel is true requires that the sinner trusts in the Lord himself. It is possible to assent to the truth of the Christian faith and yet refuse to bow before the Lord (James 2:19). The Puritans referred to this as “historical faith”. True saving faith means that we entrust our whole lives into the Lord’s hands, believing that Christ’s death is sufficient to pay for our sins and committing ourselves to be his followers. “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (Ps. 2:12). When a child knows his father is trustworthy he must still put his hand in his father’s when crossing the street. Anything less would not be genuine trust.

Repentance and faith are not exercised only once as one becomes a Christian. They must be a constant part of our daily lives as disciples of Christ (1 John 1 & 2, especially 1:9, 2:1). Have you repented and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ? Is he *your* Lord and Savior?

Justification

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#32 What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life? A. They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them.

Q.#33 What is justification? A. 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 righteous of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

When we first put our faith in Christ and are united to him we partake immediately of several blessed benefits. The first of these is justification.

Romans 3:21–31 describes the glorious and liberating truth of justification. The first thing to note is that this is **an objective act of God**. It is a *forensic* (legal) *declaration* by the ultimate Judge regarding our guilt as sinners. It is a declaration of complete and eternal pardon. “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven. Whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity . . .” (Ps. 32:1–2). Unlike a presidential pardon this pardon is granted because someone else has paid the price for us. God has imputed or credited to our account the impeccable righteousness of Christ. Thus, justification by faith is not a “legal fiction” as Roman Catholics contend. It involves an actual transfer of the infinitely perfect and acceptable currency of Christ’s righteousness to our account, thereby truly removing the debt.

Note also that this righteousness is an *alien* righteousness. That is it has nothing to do with our works. “For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (Rom. 3:28). Roman Catholics believe that God forgives us based on *infused* righteousness, that is the righteousness worked in us by grace. But because this righteousness is imperfect, due to

remaining sin, it cannot be acceptable to God. Only the righteousness of Christ pleases God. “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). No other righteousness will do (Rom. 5:17–21; 2 Cor. 5:19–21).

When we say that Christ’s righteousness is imputed (credited to the account of another) to us we should remember that there are three imputations in the Bible. First, the disobedience of Adam was imputed to all of his posterity, because God appointed him to be the representative head of humanity (cf. p. 15; Rom. 5:12–21). The reason that Paul discusses that covenant connection is because in the same way God appointed a second representative, the second Adam (1 Cor. 15:45–49), Jesus Christ, to represent his elect people. Thus, our sin was imputed to Christ (2 Cor. 5:18–21); and Christ’s obedience is imputed to us (Rom. 5:12–21). Without this triple imputation there would be no salvation.

This is the reason that this righteousness is imputed **by faith**. Faith is the only instrument of justification because it is uniquely suited to receive the free gift of Christ’s righteousness. Faith looks away from the self to Jesus alone. “That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace” (Rom. 4:16). Faith trusts another for what it cannot do for itself. The sinner’s righteousness is as “filthy rags” in God’s sight. The sinner must, therefore, trust the righteousness of Christ and nothing else. If we add anything of our own we undermine the sufficiency and the very nature of God’s grace, “we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Gal. 2:16).

Adoption

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#34 What is adoption? A. Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.

Adoption, too, is **an objective act of God**. Both justification and adoption are given once for all at the point of regeneration. Like justification adoption is forensic (legal) but with a personal, relational dimension. The judge is also our new Father and we become part of the family of God, his church, “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Gal. 3:26; cf. John 1:12). “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” (Rom. 8:16–17).

This new relationship as justified sons of God forms the basis of the Christian life. It is to be our constant source of strength and encouragement as we live by faith and progress toward the coming heavenly fulfillment of our adoption. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3:1). Through faith in Jesus our mediator we have access to the very throne room of heaven and the presence of God himself. “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ ” (Rom. 8:15). Through his Word, prayer, and the sacraments we enjoy all of the privileges of the children of God regularly communicated to us in his church. The fellowship we have with his body is communion with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Along with the privileges of the sons of God we also have responsibilities as we shall see in what follows. Perhaps the writers of The Shorter Catechism mention only privileges because as servants even our responsibilities are viewed as privileges.

Sanctification

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#35 What is sanctification? A. Sanctification is a work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

Sanctification is a work of God's free grace. It is a *process* that continues throughout our sojourn in this world. It is still completely dependent upon God's free grace, but is now viewed in terms of our gradual growth in the knowledge of God and the practice of righteousness. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6).

The New Testament does speak of sanctification as an accomplished reality. This has been called "definitive sanctification". So, for example Paul writes, "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2). The saints in Corinth had been definitively "set apart" by God in his grace to be his people. But, the way sanctification is used in most places and in our confession and catechisms has to do with a progressive work of God in the believer.

This is the place where it is proper to speak of God *infusing* or *imparting* Christ's righteousness. Roman Catholics believe that by distinguishing clearly between sanctification and justification Protestants undermined the practice of holiness. However, God's Word is clear both in distinguishing between the two and in uniting them. In Scripture there is no possibility of being justified without also being sanctified. This is Calvin's double grace (*duplex gratia*). Some Christians claim that accepting Christ as Lord is a second step in the Christian life that comes after one has accepted Christ as Savior. Biblically being forgiven of our sins is the beginning of *discipleship*, and discipleship involves obedience. At Pentecost Peter called his audience to repent and believe in Jesus as both *Lord* and Christ (Acts 2:36). "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6:1–2; cf. vs. 11–12). The goal of the incarnation was "that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

Now that we have new hearts we cooperate with God in this process of putting off the old ways and putting on Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:17–24). It is all of grace, but is God's *grace working in us* "both to work and to do for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Some Christians say "Let go and let God." This very dangerous slogan undermines our responsibility as God's children. As sons we are no longer powerless. We are connected to the very power of heaven itself. "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you what is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20–21).

Sanctification is literally "setting apart". God is in the process of setting us apart by renewing us in the inner person. As our Father he is nurturing us from being spiritual babes to being mature Christ-like adults. We are called to imitate God in Christ (Eph. 5:1) through communion with him, obeying his holy law (Rom. 8:7), which is the law of love (Rom. 13:8ff), and waging spiritual warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil (Eph. 6:10ff). Because of

indwelling or *remaining* sin (Rom. 7:17, 20) we must mortify sin or put it to death (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5), by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Some Christians have claimed that perfection is attainable in this life. **Perfectionism** is a dangerous doctrine because it ignores the Biblical reality of *remaining sin*. The New Testament continually addresses its readers as those who are tempted by sin, assuming that remaining sin is a reality that must be dealt with through continual repentance and faith, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions” (Rom. 6:12). Such exhortations make no sense unless indwelling sin is a problem. Perfectionism, in order to deal with this, usually claims some second blessing or experience of grace that enables them to attain perfection. It also tends to lead to antinomianism, or a disregard for the demands of the moral law, in order to deal with everyday experience. Along with this is a tendency toward legalism which equates perfection with a set of external standards, which are more easily performed to create the illusion of perfect holiness. The desire we have for holiness of life may easily tempt us to be attracted to such “Victorious Life” teachings. But in the end we will be forced to face the reality of the struggle or live in spiritual unreality and denial.

In fact, the more sanctified we become the more we will see our sin and depend on God’s daily mercy and grace. Humility is one of the chief marks of Christian maturity and perhaps one of the reasons that God doesn’t perfect us immediately.

Perseverance

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#36 What are the benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification? A. The benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.

Perseverance is the *Fifth Point of Calvinism* (TULIP, see Appendix E). This has been a source of much confusion in the church. As with God’s sovereignty in salvation in general, if we let all of Scripture be our guide we will be on sure footing and get a full account of the matter. We may sum it up this way: God’s elect *will* persevere and God’s elect *must* persevere. We must not try to reconcile God’s sovereignty with man’s responsibility but accept them because they are both clearly revealed in God’s Word for our benefit. Furthermore this is the nature of our covenant relationship with God. he has *sovereignly* called us into a *living* relationship with Himself.

Some Christians err on this doctrine because they only accept one side of the Scripture’s teaching. Arminians take the threats and warnings of Scripture seriously, but wrongly conclude that we can lose our salvation. Others who hold to the doctrine of “Eternal Security” take the promises of Scripture seriously but wrongly believe that once you are saved you are always saved no matter how you live.

The Biblical doctrine teaches that we are guaranteed by God’s grace that we will continue in the way of salvation to the end. Stated this way we take into account both the security of God’s gracious promises and importance of our continuing in faith and faithfulness to the end.

God’s elect *will* continue in faith and faithfulness to the end, by God’s grace, and based on **his promises of preservation**. “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” (Phil. 1:6). “who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the

fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:8–9; cf. Rom. 8:28–30). The nature of God’s sovereign grace dictates that he will finish what he has begun. To say with the Arminian that we can be saved one day and lost the next impugns the perfection and power of Christ’s work. Furthermore God does not want us to live insecurely, not knowing from one day to the next if he loves us. As our heavenly Parent he never stops loving us. This is the foundation of his nurture and our growth in grace.

On the other hand, God’s elect *must* persevere to the end, based on **his commands to persevere**. Along with God’s promises of preservation Scripture gives us commands to persevere, along with warnings of the consequences of not persevering. These function as the goads of the Good Shepherd which keep us on the right path and direct us back when we stray (Ps. 23). Jesus said, “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt. 10:22). Paul exhorts the Philippians to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). The book of Hebrews is filled with exhortations to persevere. “Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope” (Heb. 3:6). After speaking of the degree to which one may participate in the life and blessings of the church and yet turn one’s back on the gospel under the pressure of persecution, the writer of Hebrews says, “Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. . . . And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end . . .” (Heb. 6:9, 11). “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:23).

On the surface such warnings look as if we can lose our salvation. However, John tells us that certain professing Christians left the church and turned their backs on salvation because they were never truly Christians: “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” (1 John 2:19). We make our calling and election sure by continuing in God’s grace (2 Pet. 1:10). To say, as those who teach “Eternal Security” do, that “we are saved no matter what we do” is to foster a dangerous “easy believism” that undermines the purpose of God’s grace and gives “false assurance” to those who have never truly repented and believed the gospel.

The Biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is both a comfort and a command designed to lead us to heaven.

Glorification

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#37 What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death? A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

Q.#38 What benefits do believers receive from Christ at resurrection? A. At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity.

Glorification is the glorious finished product of God’s sovereign grace. This is the goal of the *ordo salutis*. Note that glorification has two stages, covered by the two *Shorter Catechism* questions.

At death the believer goes immediately to be with the Lord. We enter what is called the “intermediate state.” Paul was torn between his desire to serve God in this life and his desire to

go immediately into the presence of his Savior. “I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil. 1:23). The reason it is an *intermediate* state is that our glorification is incomplete until we receive our resurrected bodies. “For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling . . .” (2 Cor. 5:2). In Romans 8:23 Paul makes clear that this groaning is for the final glory of the “redemption of our bodies.” But while we have our corrupt mortal bodies in this life, we do not have the Lord in the fullness we will experience in the intermediate state. “While we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:6). Thus, the intermediate state is something to be desired even though our final “clothing” must await the resurrection. Our perfection in holiness, and the glory of Christ’s presence is a mighty comfort to believers in the hour of death. “Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8).

While our spirits go immediately to be with the Lord at death, our bodies rest in the grave until resurrection day. “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep” (1 Thess. 4:14). Scripture often refers to the death of the body of a believer as “falling asleep” (1 Cor. 15:18). In Matthew 9:24 Jesus referred to Jairus’s dead daughter as “sleeping”. Those who were mourning her death “laughed at him”. The point of the analogy is that the believer whose *body dies* is not dead. Even then the dead body is still united to Christ by his Spirit. “He who has prepared us for this very thing [the resurrection] is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Cor. 5:5). The fact that our bodies rest in the grave temporarily does not mitigate the promise of resurrection. While the resurrection is the ultimate goal the intermediate state is no less a positive blessing for the believer. As Jesus told the thief on the cross: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). The error known as “soul sleep” is therefore not a Scriptural idea. Clearly the thief on the cross was being promised a conscious blessing. Nor do the claims of unbelievers who say they experienced light and peace “on the other side” of death have any Biblical basis. The Bible is clear that without the Lord Jesus Christ no one will experience light and peace after death. Jesus, more than anyone else in Scripture speaks of “outer darkness” as the destiny of unbelievers.

At the resurrection believers will be reunited with their bodies, only these will be *glorious* bodies. Note carefully from 1 Corinthians 15:35–49 that the *glorious* body is different in quality not only from our present mortal bodies, but also different from the body of Adam before the fall. The “natural body” is followed in the history of redemption by the “spiritual body” (v. 46). Paul uses the analogy of a seed (vs. 37ff) to illustrate the difference. The seed is not fulfilled until it dies in the ground and brings forth the ultimate potential, for which it was designed, in the plant and flower. So our ultimate goal is found in imaging the “man of heaven”, the Lord Jesus Christ (vs. 44–49). “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 3:2).

On that great Day of Resurrection “we shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted” says the *Shorter Catechism* (Q#38). Our justification, adoption, sanctification, and perseverance will come to their final consummation for all the world to see. “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 Thess. 4:16–18).

The doctrine of the resurrection, first Christ's and then ours, is central to the message of the New Testament. It is the source and foundation of our hope. "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor. 15:13–14). It was no more believable in the first century than it is in modern times (1 Cor. 15:12). We must face the materialist challenge squarely with this truth. The witness and the witnesses of the New Testament documents are incontrovertible. That we can not explain the physics of the resurrection is no more of an argument against its reality than is our inability to explain the physics of our own bodies a proof that they do not exist. The burden of proof is on those who deny both the reality of the resurrection and the existence of the God of the Bible. The evidence which they now so adeptly suppress (Rom. 1:18 ff.) leaves them without excuse. One day they will come face to face with the Author of that evidence, and they will be speechless.

Let us comfort, counsel, and encourage one another with this blessed hope, and let us spread this glorious message to a hopeless world.



Chapter 4

Salvation Applied: Living Our Profession

4. Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord and do you promise, in reliance on the grace of God, you will serve him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?

This chapter will amplify the doctrine of sanctification, which we have already discussed in Chapter 3 (pp. 31–32). We will explore the importance of sanctification and the standard of sanctification, which is the law of God, in order to help us better live the Christian life. What does it mean to live as a Christian in a fallen world? How do I know what attitudes, speech and behavior please God? We will also look at the means and motivation for sanctification, because without this the law is simply a condemning standard. Christ and the power of his Spirit are central to the doctrine of sanctification.

The Mandate of Sanctification

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#39 What is the duty which God requireth of man? A. The duty which God requireth of man, is obedience to his revealed will.

As we have seen in the *ordo salutis* sanctification is inseparable from all the rest of God's work of salvation for and in us. It is especially connected with justification and the forgiveness of our sins. In the Bible there is no justification without the subsequent fruit of sanctification. "Cheap grace" and "easy believism" have no place in a true profession of faith. The doctrine of the so-called "carnal Christian" has done untold damage to the witness of the church in our day. As we have seen above some Christians teach that you can accept Christ as Savior without bowing before him as Lord. This is based on a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 3. There Paul was chiding and exhorting the church for their carnality, not setting up a distinction to excuse faulty methods of evangelism. Evangelists tend to preach forgiveness without preaching the need for repentance and a changed life. While we certainly do not want to preach forgiveness *through* or *because of* a changed life, we must preach that no one is justified who has no interest in obeying and following their Savior. "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" (Rom. 8:7). The justified sinner has been forgiven of sin in order to walk according to the Spirit in obedience to God's law (Rom. 8:3–4).

"Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Rom. 3:31). "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). At the *heart* of the Old Testament promises of the new covenant is a people who with new hearts will obey God's law. The law will be *in* their hearts. They will take God's holiness *to heart* (Jer. 31:33; Eze. 36:25–27). "How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6:1). This is the thrust of the epistle of James. Good works

are the necessary fruit of a changed heart and a justified person: “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:17–18). “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Holiness glorifies God and enables us to enjoy him forever. We must not view the law like legislation in a law book, however. As a revelation of the very character of God true holiness will only come from communion with the God whom we are commanded to imitate (Eph. 5:1). Our obedience should be a joyful response of thanksgiving out of gratitude for the finished work of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 1:6; Phil. 1:21, 3:7). The love of Christ compels us to be a living praise to his glory.

Our temporal and eternal happiness is rooted in holiness (Pss. 1:1-3; 16:11; 19:7–11; 128:1–2). Nineteenth century preacher Philips Brooks once said, “Happiness is the flower of duty.” Happiness is not a proper goal in itself as the “power of positive thinking” and the “self-esteem” gospel teach. Happiness comes from imitating our Creator by being like his Son in whom he is well pleased. Obedience is first a matter of the heart. From a heart changed by grace, which loves God and its neighbor, come the good works which please our Father in heaven, and therefore bring him glory (Matt. 5:16). This is what distinguishes our righteousness from the righteousness of the Pharisees, which consisted merely of strictness with externals (Matt. 5:20). Some think we are to exceed them in strictness. No, we are to exceed them in heartfelt earnestness which obeys God out of thanksgiving and true love. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be disciplined by him as our gracious Master.

The Measure of Sanctification: God’s Law

The Third Use of the Law

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#40 What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience? A. The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience, was the moral law.

Theologians have categorized **three uses of the law** in Scripture. This is not to be confused with the distinction among the **three types of law** found in the Old Testament theocracy: moral, civil, and ceremonial. The civil and the ceremonial laws are done away with in Christ. They were like the scaffolding of the Covenant of Grace, which are now taken away with the coming of the substance which is Jesus Christ, his person and work. “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. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col. 2:16–17). We must be careful not to confuse, as some Christians do (Theonomists), the secular civil government with the Old Testament theocracy. This is to reintroduce the civil law and the state of Israel. We must also be careful not to reintroduce the ceremonial law, by holding Passover (Messianic Christians), or hoping for a rebuilding of the temple and its worship in Jerusalem as Dispensationalists do.

The three uses of the law are three ways in which the **moral law** is used in Scripture. **First: The Civil use** (*usus politicus, civilis*) serves the purposes of Common Grace in restraining sin and promoting civil righteousness (Rom. 2:14; 13:1–7). **Second: The Convicting use** (*usus elenchticus, pedagogicus*) serves to convince men of their sin in order

to drive them to Christ and his perfect righteousness (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:24). **Third: The Guiding use** (*usus didacticus, normativus*) serves to guide the believer in God's revealed will for his life (Ps. 1:1–3; 37:31; 119:105; Rom. 13:8–10; James 2:10–11). The moral law has always been the rule of godly living: a "Rule of Life". It was so in Eden before the fall and for Abraham before the Ten Commandments were given by Moses at Mount Sinai (Gen. 26:5). It is this third use of the moral law which concerns us here.

Many Christians today deny this use of the law by referring to what Paul says to the Corinthians about the letter and the Spirit. Paul says, "You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:2–3). Combining this with several other New Testament statements about not being under the law but under grace, one might wrongly conclude not only that the commandments are no longer relevant to the Christian, but also that the written word is not important either. Paul's point, however, is that the Corinthians themselves are the best letter of recommendation of the work of the Apostles. Paul was under attack by arrogant critics who used the Corinthians to promote themselves. The fruit of Paul's ministry was lives changed by God's sovereign grace. Far from diminishing the Ten Commandments, which were written on tablets by the finger of God on Mount Sinai, Paul is highlighting the fulfillment of Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's prophecies that God would give his new covenant people new hearts to love and obey his holy law. Remember that the Holy Spirit is the author of every *written* word of Scripture. While we are no longer under the Mosaic Law or covenant, the Ten Commandments are not only repeated in the new covenant, but they are expanded and deepened through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Summary of the Law

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#41 Where is the moral law summarily comprehended? A. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments.

Q.#42 What is the sum of the ten commandments? A. The sum of the ten commandments is, To love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbour as ourselves.

The Ten Commandments are found in two places in the Old Testament: Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21. While they are, strictly speaking, a summary of the Mosaic Covenant, they are useful in organizing new covenant ethics. They are a perfect summary of God's moral standard of love in the lives of his people (Ps. 119:96). *The Westminster Confession* takes the two tablets mentioned in Exodus to be two parts of the Ten Commandments: "the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six our duty to man" (WCF 19.2). More likely they were a double witness to all ten commandments, the second being a kind of carbon copy. In any case the commandments in the "first table," while they primarily refer to God, also have reference to man. For example, the fourth commandment enjoins corporate worship, and works of mercy. The commandments of the "second table," while they primarily refer to man, also have reference to God. When David committed adultery (seventh commandment) and murder (sixth commandment) he confessed that he sinned primarily against God (Ps. 51:4).

The Lord gave us the orderly and logical form of the commandments so that we would have a memorable, logical and comprehensive guide to Biblical ethics. They are **Memorable**, giving a structure to help organize our ethical thinking and remember it. They are **Logical**, because they move from a focus on God to focus on the human heart kept by and for him. Finally, they are **Comprehensive**, since they house all of Christian ethics and duty. Calvin's commentary on Exodus 20 organizes all of the legal material in the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) under each of the Ten Commandments.

In all of our thinking about what please God we must always remember Jesus's sum of the summary, "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" (Matt. 22:37–38). This gives the essence or gist of the commandments. This helps prevent a Pharisaic imbalance which neglects the weightier matters of the law and strains at gnats, while swallowing camels (Matt. 23:23–24). The Law of God is the law of LOVE, expressing his character, which is revealed in his incarnate Son. Sin is lovelessness!

The Preface to the Ten Commandments

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#43 What is the preface to the ten commandments? A. The preface to the ten commandments is in these words, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Q.#44 What does the preface to the ten commandments teach us? A. The preface to the ten commandments teacheth us, That because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments.

The preface gives us the Redemptive-Historical context of the commandments. This, too, will help us avoid legalism. The Exodus is the great salvation event of the old covenant. It prefigured the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It reminds us that the Ten Commandments are not an isolated set of rules for good living, but the guidance of our Redeemer, who saves us by his grace. he purchased his people out of Egypt so that they would become his distinctively holy people (Lev. 22:31–33). The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ calls us to a similar obedience as the people of the Second Exodus (1 Peter 1). Peter cites Leviticus 11:44 as an appropriate command for Christians, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16).

#1 The First Commandment: The Object of Our Worship

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#45 Which is the first commandment? A. The first commandment is, Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Q.#46 What is required in the first commandment? A. The first commandment requireth us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify him accordingly.

Q.#47 What is forbidden in the first commandment? A. The first commandment forbiddeth the denying, or not worshipping and glorifying the true God as God, and our God; and the giving of that worship and glory to any other, which is due to him alone.

Q.#48 What are we specially taught by these words [before me] in the first commandment? A. These words [before me] in the first commandment teach us, That God, who seeth all things, taketh notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other god.

The first commandment teaches us that we are to put God first in our lives, as Jesus indicates in Matthew 6:33 “Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Deut. 32:17–18; 1 Cor. 10:20). The Lord is to be the love of our lives, the primary object of our loyalty and affections.

False gods, or idols, are anything that we value more than God Himself (Pss. 115:1–8; 135:13–18). There is only one living and true God (Isa. 43:11, 45:21). In sin mankind manufactures counterfeit substitutes to rationalize sin. “Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them” (Ps. 115:8). They “worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25). This is done to perpetuate the original lie that God is not who he says he is, “with minds set on earthly things” (Phil. 3:19). They are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4). This is why John concludes his first letter with the command, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

Instead we are called, as those who are united to the resurrected Christ to “seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth” (Col. 3:1–2). The exalted Lord Jesus Christ is “the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent” (Col. 1:18). This first commandment is at the heart of all the rest. We are to live “before” him (*en coram Deo*) in every area of life.

#2 The Second Commandment: The Manner of Our Worship *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.*

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#49 Which is the second commandment? A. The second commandment is, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Q.#50 What is required in the second commandment? A. The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his word.

Q.#51 What is forbidden in the second commandment? A. The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word.

Q.#52 What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment? A. The reasons annexed to the second commandment are, God’s sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal he hath to his own worship.

This commandment teaches us the proper way in which to worship our God. Because we are so prone, as idolaters by nature, to fashion God after our own image, he has clearly prescribed the manner of worship in his Word. God’s prescriptions for worship are designed to reveal Himself to us as he truly is. In connection with the use of pictures and statues to help us worship *The Heidelberg Catechism* warns us: “we must not be wiser than God, who will not have his people taught by dumb images, but by the living preaching of his Word” (Lord’s Day

35, Q. #98). The media of worship are chosen by God in order to prevent us from distorting who he is.

This concept is known as “**The Regulative Principle.**” The way of worship is regulated by God’s Word. This is similar to the concept of “enumerated power” in the U.S. Constitution. The Federal government may only do what the Constitution explicitly says it may do. We are to worship God only in ways positively warranted by his express command and example in Scripture. Jesus chided the Pharisees for their twisting of God’s commandments. He quoted Isaiah 29:13: “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” (Matt. 15:8–9).

One of the most poignant examples of God’s displeasure with manmade forms of worship is found in the case of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron (Lev. 10:1–2). They made an offering of fire and incense offering “unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.” The incident involving Aaron and the “golden calf” is another example of worshipping through a means that was not appointed by God (Exodus 32). Note that it is not the use of means *per se* that is the problem. The problem is in using means that are invented by man, which are not the means appointed by God. It was precisely these God-given means that were being revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai while the people were choosing their own means of worship at the foot of the mountain. The golden calf was a means for the sinful people to seek to control God. Idolatry is essentially a matter of control. The undistorted revelation of God which comes to us through the means God has appointed leads us to bow before his Lordship and be controlled by him through his grace.

All of the symbolic revelation in the Mosaic covenant, found in the architecture, sacrifices, rites and furnishings of the Tabernacle/Temple, did not reveal God’s essence, but rather his redeeming work in Christ the promised Mediator. This reminds us that even the God appointed means teach us that God reveals himself through a Mediator. Now that Christ, the Mediator, has come we have a more spiritual form of worship. He is the substance of the shadows of the Old Testament system (Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1). Thus, the Father seeks true worshippers who “will worship the Father in spirit and truth . . . God is a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24). Hence, the symbols in our worship are few and they focus on the accomplishment of Christ at the cross, resurrection, and ascension. Water, bread, and wine and their administration point us to the finished work of Christ. Our worship is mediated through the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:5–6).

Clearly, then, pictures of Jesus, images of the saints, crucifixes, etc. are not to be used in biblical worship. Protestants demonstrate that they have forgotten their Reformation heritage when they use pictures of Jesus in the church as means to aid worship. We do not know what Jesus looked like. The only descriptions we have in the Bible describe Jesus as One who has “no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Isa. 53:2). Paul said, “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer” (2 Cor. 5:16).

For this reason the preaching of the Word is even more central in new covenant worship than it was in the old. As the Heidelberg Catechism, quoted above, says, we are to be taught “by the living preaching of his Word.” It should not be forgotten that along with their service

in their ceremonial functions of the Tabernacle/Temple the Levitical priests were instructors of the Word (Cf. Ezra). But now that the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us, and he has given us the final word of salvation, we focus entirely upon his Word, the Bible. Thus the Word is to be read, expounded, and sung. Prayer, in all its biblical richness, is to be offered. The sacraments are to be administered. Confession is to be made, and assurance of pardon in Christ declared. Offerings are to be received as an act of worship, acknowledging Christ's Lordship in our lives. These are the essential **elements** of worship. These are prescribed in the New Testament.

The Westminster Confession also wisely mentions **circumstances** of worship (1.6). These are incidental and occasional, thus not prescribed in the Word, because they are not of the substance of worship. The place, time, musical accompaniment, exact order of worship, etc., are, therefore, to be decided according to "the light of nature and Christian prudence."

Four Views of the "The Regulative Principle."

1. **Pagan** – True worship is performed according to human wisdom. There is no such thing as false worship.
2. **Roman Catholic** – True worship is according to what is commanded along with tradition and anything not expressly forbidden in God's Word. False worship is only what is expressly forbidden.
3. **Lutheran/Anglican** – True worship is according to what is commanded along with anything not expressly forbidden in God's Word. False worship is only what is expressly forbidden.
4. **Reformed** – True worship is *only* according to what is commanded in God's Word. False worship is anything not expressly commanded. As *The Westminster Confession* says: "the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited to his own revealed will" (21.1).

#3 The Third Commandment: The Attitude of Worship

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#53 Which is the third commandment? A. The third commandment is, Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Q.#54 What is required in the third commandment? A. The third commandment requireth the holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works.

Q.#55 What is forbidden in the third commandment? A. The third commandment forbiddeth all profaning or abusing of any thing whereby God maketh himself known.

Q.#56 What is the reason annexed to the third commandment? A. The reason annexed to the third commandment is, That however the breakers of this commandment may escape punishment from men, yet the Lord our God will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment.

To use God's name in *vain* is not to be superficially limited to "swearing". To use God's name in *vain* is to *empty* it of its true significance (lit. "lift up to emptiness"). Furthermore, God's name is not merely the word "God" or any other name for God, but his name implies all the means whereby he reveals Himself to us. Thus his "names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works" are included. A name in the Bible is much more than a mere label. "Isaac,"

for example, means “laughter”, marking an important event in his life in relation to his God” (Gen. 21:5–6). It tells us something about Isaac’s history and character. So a name reveals the nature and attributes of a person, place or thing. David says “we trust in his holy name” (Ps. 33:21). God’s name identifies who he is, especially in relationship to his creation and his people.

Using God’s name in vain is any frivolous or empty use of his name. Such talk misrepresents who God is, and lacks the reverence which his name deserves. Swearing is an obvious irreverence. It is actually the opposite of prayer. Cursing seeks to control God and his creation for our own evil purposes. We damn something or someone when they do not do what we want. All foolish and unclean talk, flattery, lying and perjury are suing the Lord’s name in vain. “Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving” (Eph. 5:4).

But the use of God’s name in a merely formal way is also vain or empty. Jesus chides the religious establishment of his day for “empty phrases” in worship (Matt. 6:7) and misuse of oaths (Matt. 5:33 ff.). Isaiah told rebellious Israel that their fasting was odious in God’s eyes because they used their religious exercises as a cover for their oppression of the poor and their violence (Isa. 58:1–5). Even God-ordained forms of worship are empty when not used in sincerity. Without true love for God and neighbor all worship is vain.

God gave us our tongues to bring him glory and to be a blessing to our fellowman. “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name” (Ps. 29:2). “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them” (Rom. 12:14). Adam brought glory to God by naming the animals appropriately (Gen. 2:19). Human language should reveal the glory of who God is in every area of life. “Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!” (Ps. 34:3).

#4 The Fourth Commandment: The Day of Worship

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#57 Which is the fourth commandment? A. The fourth commandment is, Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath-day, and hallowed it.

Q.#58 What is required in the fourth commandment? A. The fourth commandment requireth the keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word; expressly one whole day in seven, to be a holy Sabbath to himself.

Q.#59 Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly Sabbath? A. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly Sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian Sabbath.

Q.#60 How is the Sabbath to be sanctified? A. The Sabbath is to be sanctified by 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 publick and private exercises of God’s worship, except so much is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.

Q.#61 What is forbidden in the fourth commandment? A. The fourth commandment forbiddeth the omission or careless performance of the duties required, and the profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments and recreations.

Q.#62 What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment? A. The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment are, God's allowing us six days of the week for our own employments, his challenging a special propriety in the seventh, his own example, and his blessing the Sabbath-day.

The Sabbath is not, as many Christians today believe, a uniquely Mosaic commandment that is done away with in Christ. It is a **creation ordinance**. God instituted it when he had finished creating the world (Gen. 2:1–3). Moses tells us that one major reason for keeping the Sabbath is that God is our Creator (Exod. 20:8–11). Because he rested the seventh day we should imitate him by resting and acknowledging his Lordship over creation. Clearly Israel kept the Sabbath before the Ten Commandments were given at Mount Sinai. Double the amount of manna was to be collected on Friday so that the people of Israel would not have to labor on the Sabbath (Exod. 16:26). There were aspects of the fourth commandment in the Mosaic legislation that were unique to the theocracy, such as the death penalty for Sabbath-breaking labor (Numb. 15:33–36). But the essence of the commandment has been in force since Eden. The seventh day in the creation narrative has no end. God enters Sabbath rest, i.e. the enjoyment of his completed work. Adam through the covenant of works was supposed to pass the probation test in order to gain access to the Tree of Life and enjoy glory in the Sabbath rest of God. Having failed this the Sabbath also signals God's saving grace in redemption.

Already by the time Moses wrote Deuteronomy just prior to Israel's entrance into the land the focus of the fourth commandment had changed to point forward to new covenant redemption. In Deuteronomy 5:12–15 the reason given for keeping the Sabbath is the exodus from Egypt. This is the central redemptive act of God in the old covenant era. It pointed forward to the second exodus initiating death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thus in the new covenant economy the Sabbath teaching of the Old Testament comes to its fulfillment. Jesus Christ is raised from the dead on the first day of the week. The early disciples established the worship pattern centered around the Lord's post resurrection appearances on the first day (Matt. 28:1; Jn. 20:1, 19, 26; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). The Spirit of the victorious Lord comes fifty days after the resurrection at Pentecost in fulfillment of the Jubilee pattern of the Old Testament law. So the day is changed to celebrate the ultimate redemptive act of God in history. Seventh Day Adventists and Jews are living under the economy of types and shadows. The ceremonial elements of the Sabbath and Jubilee are fulfilled in Christ and therefore done away with (Col. 2:16–17). As Isaiah looked forward to the glorious reality of the new covenant he saw believers delighting in the Sabbath (Isa. 56:2, 4; 58:13–14).

And yet despite the accomplishment of Christ, his redemption of the nations and his enthronement as King of kings “we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (Heb. 2:8). Even on this side of the resurrection we anticipate the consummation of our salvation in the coming eternal Sabbath. But until then there yet remains the need of a Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:9–11). We keep the Lord's Day each week to remember the resurrection and look forward to our coming resurrection. It is no accident that John was given the vision of the final unfolding of history in the book of Revelation on the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10).

Part of the liberty of the new covenant is that we have only one holy day and that is the weekly Lord's Day. Though we may choose to have other events, even special days of thanksgiving or fasting for specific purposes, the only holy day that God's people are bound to keep is the Lord's Day.

All ordinary labor and activities are to cease on the Lord's Day (Neh. 13:15–22). In thinking of what we cease to do we need to remember that “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mk. 2:27). God wants us to be refreshed by his grace on this appointed day. The rest from ordinary toil is meant to be a blessing. Of course, the Sabbath command assumes six days of productive activity (2 Thess. 3:10). The Sabbath is also necessary to wean us from placing our hope in the temporary and cursed reality of this present evil age. The whole day should be devoted to rest and worship, setting our affections on the things above. Instead of asking for a list of “dos and don'ts” we should ask: “What pleases my crucified and risen Lord?”

Public worship is central to keeping the Lord's Day. We are not to forsake the assembly of God's pilgrim people (Heb. 10:25). Attending morning and evening worship is an excellent way to define the character of the whole day. Besides private prayer and reading, fellowship with family and church is a delightful and important way to spend the day. It is clear from Matthew 12 that works of necessity, like eating, and works of mercy, like helping our neighbor are quite acceptable on the Lord's Day. In our hurried world we should cherish the Sabbath. Without spiritual strength and maturity will not be ours. If we delight ourselves in the Lord on his appointed day he promises: “I make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father” (Isa. 58:14).

#5 The Fifth Commandment: The Sanctity of God's Authority Structure *Honour thy father and thy mother.*

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#63 Which is the fifth commandment? A. The fifth commandment is, Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Q.#64 What is required in the fifth commandment? A. The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honour, and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.

Q.#65 What is forbidden in the fifth commandment? A. The fifth commandment forbiddeth the neglecting of, or doing any thing against, the honour and duty which belongeth to every one in their several places and relations.

Q.#66 What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment? A. The reason annexed to the fifth commandment is, a promise of long life and prosperity (as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good) to all such as keep this commandment.

All authority in church, school, workplace and state is modeled after the family authority structure. The breakdown of authority in every other sphere is rooted in the breakdown of the family. The family nurtures every other institution. Where mother and father are honored from the heart and in practice loved and respected there will be happiness and health. And this will be so in every other relationship in this world. The Bible uses the parental names to refer to those in authority in every other basic institution. Deborah the judge is called “a mother in Israel” (Judges 5:7). Elisha referred to the prophet Elijah as “my father” (2 Kings 2:12). Isaiah calls Gentile kings and queens “foster fathers” and “nursing mothers” (Isa. 49:23). Elders in the church are modeled after fathers in the home (1 Tim. 3:5) and the church is modeled after the family. It is the family or household of God (Eph. 3:15; 1 Tim. 3:15).

Because all authority is God's authority the Christian is to submit to all lawful authorities in the workplace (Eph. 6:5–9; 1 Pet. 3:18); in the state (Rom. 13:1–7); and in the church (Heb. 13:7, 17). The only exception to this is when authorities require us to disobey God's clear

command as with Peter and John in the early church (Acts 5:29). Every authority is limited to its God given sphere. For example the state is to wield the “sword” of justice to keep civil order for the good of its citizenry according to Romans 13:3–4. The state may not infringe on the authority of the family or the church.

God’s authority structure promotes righteousness and health in those who live within it (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13–14). It is the primary commandment with promise. Notice that the promise in the Old Testament is of prosperity in the land, whereas Paul extends that promise in Ephesians 6:3 to the earth. This promise points to the earth inherited by the meek in the beatitudes (Matt. 5:5). This is the new heavens and the new earth of the future state. The key is *meekness* (lit. “harnessed power”). Moses was the meekest man in all Israel because he had learned to submit his whole being to the service of Christ (Numb. 12:3; Heb. 11:24–29). He learned the lesson of God’s authority structure. His one great moment of impatience with that structure at Kadesh (Numb. 20:12–13) caused him to lose the blessing of inheriting the land. Because of Christ he will inherit the heavenly city.

All of this begins in the home. Notice that authority in the home is exercised in the atmosphere of love and truth. It promotes confidence, trust, holiness, productivity and health. Parents are to cultivate their children in the training and correction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). The tyrant has no place here. Only the firm and loving hand of parents committed to the temporal and eternal welfare of the children can begin to obey this beautiful commandment. It should also be remembered that the institutions of the state, the school, and the family are temporary, whereas the church is eternal, “a pillar and buttress of truth.” (1 Tim. 3:15). Thus, in spiritual matters, the officers of the church have primary ministerial authority in each the lives of the members of Christ’s body.

#6 The Sixth Commandment: The Sanctity of Life

Thou shalt not kill.

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#67 Which is the sixth commandment? A. The sixth commandment is, Thou shalt not kill.

Q.#68 What is required in the sixth commandment? A. The sixth commandment requireth all lawful endeavors to preserve our own life, and the life of others.

Q.#69 What is forbidden in the sixth commandment? A. The sixth commandment forbiddeth the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbour unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto.

This commandment protects and promotes human life (Gen. 9:6). This is commandment institutionalized the divine protection already given to Cain (Gen. 4:13–16). After the flood the Lord commanded Noah to institute the death penalty for the unlawful taking of human life. The reason given was that man is unique among his creatures in being made in the “image of God”. This same divine protection is now provided through civil government, which Christians are commanded to obey (Rom. 13:1–7).

The prohibition of “killing” in this commandment is not a blanket prohibition, even when human life is concerned. “Murder,” as the ESV translates it in Exodus 20:13 captures the intent of the command. There are several ways in which Scripture allows and even commands the taking of human life. One of those is given in the passage we have just referred to in Genesis 9. The life of a murderer must be forfeited in order that justice might be done. Besides capital punishment life may be legitimately taken in self defense, defense of one’s

family, friends or neighbors, in fulfilling the duties of an officer of the law, and in a just war. John the Baptist told repentant soldiers, “do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14). He did not rebuke them for military service itself, which often involves the taking of human life. All other taking of human life is sinful and criminal, and if premeditated requires the death penalty.

Suicide is also prohibited. The only examples we see of suicide in Scripture are by unbelievers such as King Saul and Judas Iscariot. This does not mean that it is unforgivable, any more than any other sin (except recalcitrant rejection of the gospel). But it is sin, characteristic of unbelief.

Evolution and self-esteem psychology have enabled our culture to rationalize abortion. This is clearly a violation of this commandment. Life is created in God’s image at conception. Scripture assumes that life in the womb is fully human from day one (Ps. 139:13–16). The Mosaic law protected the unborn child along with its mother (Ex. 21:22–25).

Closer to home is the prohibition of the inner attitude at the root of murder: hatred of our neighbor. Jesus plumbs the depth of the sixth commandment in Matthew 5:22, “everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable judgment.” The opposite attitude is one of love that seeks the blessing and welfare, body and soul, of our neighbor (3 John 2). This is the positive principle undergirding the commandment.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ underscores the importance of both body and soul. The fact that our bodies are presently under the curse and subject to death should not eclipse our responsibility to take care of our bodies. Abuse of drink, tobacco and food are forbidden by this command. Our Bodies after all are the temples of the Holy Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:19–20).

#7 The Seventh Commandment: The Sanctity of Marriage

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#70 Which is the seventh commandment? A. The seventh commandment is, Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Q.#71 What is required in the seventh commandment? A. The seventh commandment requireth the preservation of our own and our neighbour’s chastity, in heart, speech, and behaviour.

Q.#72 What is forbidden in the seventh commandment? A. The seventh commandment forbiddeth all unchaste thoughts, words, and actions.

This commandment promotes faithfulness in the marriage covenant in particular and sexual purity in general (Prov. 31:10–31; Eph. 5:21–33). The marriage covenant is the most basic and intimate human covenant. Its centrality in Scripture is highlighted by the constant reference to marriage as a picture of the relationship between God and his people and therefore between Christ the heavenly husband and his bride the church (Jer. 3:9; Eph. 5:32). Like the Sabbath command marriage is a **creation ordinance** (Gen. 1:27, 28; 2:18–25).

Sexual union is not the basis of the marital relationship, but is based on the covenantal union (“one flesh”) which is a lifetime commitment to one’s partner. It involves an intimacy in every area of life based on trust (“troth”) which is expressed in the promises made in the marriage vows. The covenant is one of companionship (Jer. 3:20, marginal note has “companion” for “husband” NKJV) which gives supreme expression to love of God and neighbor.

In a Christian marriage the husband is called to reflect the headship of Christ over the church (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:28). This means that his authority and leadership is to be characterized by self-sacrificing love for his wife (Eph. 5:22–24; 1 Pet. 3:7). The domineering macho is a pagan perversion of that headship. The wife is called to be a suitable helper in the husband's covenant task to subdue the creation for God's glory. She is in every way equal to the husband as an image bearer of God and as an heir of the grace of life (Gen. 1:27; 1 Pet. 3:7). Her submission is willing subordination of her gifts and graces to the covenant task of glorifying God through her marriage and family. Self-assertive feminism is also a pagan perversion of her femininity. Now since the fall Christians are to bring God glory by worshiping and serving in his redemptive kingdom, the church.

The Bible clearly teaches that single Christians are to seek only believers as marriage partners (Gen. 6:1–8; 1 Cor. 7:39). This means that Christian young people should be on the lookout for biblical virtues as well as natural attraction in a potential mate. They should also seek friendship before romance. Those who become Christians after they are married are to remain faithful to their unbelieving spouses (1 Cor. 7:13–14; 1 Pet. 3:1–6).

The prohibition of adultery implies the prohibition of all sexual sin. This means that all sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage is forbidden. This includes married people looking on someone besides their spouse lustfully (Matt. 5:28; Ps. 119:37; Job 31:1). This prohibition also includes sex before as well as outside of marriage (Exod. 22:16; Prov. 5 & 7), homosexuality (Rom. 1:26–28), bestiality (Exod. 22:19) and pornography. Clothing should therefore be modest. Our current “liberty” in this area betrays naïveté as well as wickedness. God clothed Adam and Eve immediately after the fall for good reason (Gen. 3:21; 1 Pet. 3:2–4). Positively, sexuality is to be fully enjoyed within the marriage bond as an expression of the most intimate self-giving. The Song of Solomon is a tribute to the entire range of the enjoyment of companionship in marriage, which points to our relationship with the Lord.

Divorce is a breaking of the marriage bond which grieves God deeply (Mal. 2:16; cf. Jer. 3:9–11; 5:8–9; Hosea). The permission of divorce by Moses was due to the hardness of the Israelites' hearts (Matt. 19:1–12; Deut. 24:1–4). In a fallen world, however, divorce is sometimes necessary as a last resort. Thus Scripture permits divorce in the case of adultery (Matt. 19:9), and abandonment (1 Cor. 7:10–16; 1 Pet. 3:1–6), often referred to as “the Pauline exception”. Divorce is not, however, an unforgivable sin, for those who truly repent and trust in Christ. That so many Christians divorce so easily, however, is a sign of how little self-sacrificing faithfulness means to many in the modern church.

#8 The Eighth Commandment: The Sanctity of Property

Thou shalt not steal.

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#73 Which is the eighth commandment? A. The eighth commandment is, Thou shalt not steal.

Q.#74 What is required in the eighth commandment? A. The eighth commandment requireth the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others.

Q.#75 What is forbidden in the eighth commandment? A. The eighth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever doth or may unjustly hinder our own or our neighbour's wealth and outward estate.

This commandment is rooted in the principle of the responsibility and privilege of private property. Undergirding the word “private” is the concept of God appointed stewardship, not a

license for selfishness. In the beginning God created man to subdue the earth to his glory (Gen. 1:26, 28; Pss. 8; 115:16). This is often called “The Cultural (Creation) Mandate.” Man was thus called to be a *vice-regent* of God, acting in behalf of and representing the Lord of the earth. He was called to cultivate and develop the rich potential of God’s creation (Gen. 2:15). For the Christian all cultural activity and work is sanctified when done as unto the Lord. As his image bearers we are creative by nature. Cultural activity here is not restricted to “high” culture or fine arts, but all creativity from the most menial task to the noblest achievements of art, literature, and science. Adam’s naming of the animals (Gen. 2:19) and Solomon’s architectural, zoological and literary achievements were a fulfilling of the cultural mandate. Nothing, not in itself sinful, is *worldly*. The Fundamentalist abandonment of culture is itself sinful. However, in a fallen world all of this activity is under the curse and therefore is temporary. Thus we labor in hope of the new heavens and earth (1 Cor. 15:58). Work itself is not part of the curse, but the curse is reflected in the difficulties associated with work. Christians are not called to redeem the culture. Christ’s death fulfilled the cultural mandate due to his perfect obedience. All work in this world for the Christian is eschatological—done with eternity in mind.

Private property is simply a necessary condition for pursuing the cultural mandate, which God has allowed all people to due in order to preserve history as the context for completing his kingdom. “The Protestant Work Ethic” growing out of the Reformation and Puritan era was predicated on the idea of stewardship. Unfortunately, when this devotion to work and property is severed from its source and goal it easily becomes a greedy pursuit. This is Materialistic Capitalism. But Communism and Socialism are no alternative because they undermine the idea of stewardship almost completely. It is important to note that the communal sharing of property in Acts 2:44–45 was entirely *voluntary* and extraordinary due to the circumstances surrounding the rapid growth of the church at Pentecost. One of the purposes of work is to use our wealth to express love to our neighbor and the Lord (Prov. 11:24–26; 19:17; Eph. 4:28; 1 Tim. 6:17–19). Diaconal work is predicated on this motive.

The Bible promises prosperity and health to good stewards (Prov. 10:4). The righteous will never go begging bread (Ps. 37:25). This not to be confused with the “health and wealth” gospel which makes our happiness the goal of Christian living. As Ecclesiastes reminds us in a fallen world the natural reward for hard work may be destroyed and the thief may temporarily prosper (Ps. 73). Perfect justice will only be realized on the day of judgment.

This commandment prohibits laziness (Prov. 6:6–11; 18:9; 20:13; 22:13; 2 Thess. 3:10–12), and encourages diligence. Theft of all kinds is obviously prohibited (Exod. 22:2, 7–8; Prov. 24:34; 29:24). Gambling is also wrong, not because of the chance element in most forms, but because it comes from covetousness (Prov. 13:11). Misuse of credit cards is a form of theft when it ends, as it often does, in bankruptcy. Living within our means is a way of trusting and thanking God for his provision. A lack of contentment displays a lack of thankfulness, which in turn is a form of unbelief.

Tithing is a primary way of putting God first in our lives. This is why the offering is an element of public worship. We acknowledge Christ’s lordship and thank him for his grace and care. Giving the first tenth (*tithe* is literally “tenth”) of our gross income to the Lord is the perfect check on covetousness. Malachi is clear in calling the withholding of tithe “theft” (Mal. 3:8–10). It is God’s money to begin with. The Lord promises to “open the windows of heaven” on the person who tithes (3:10), not as a reward for works, but as a demonstration of his goodness and grace. This includes all temporal and eternal benefits. “Honor the LORD

with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce” (Prov. 3:9). If the Lord is truly our King then tithing is a benchmark of true discipleship. The new covenant, rather than abrogating this commandment, assumes it. The practice in the apostolic church was to bring the tithe before God on the Lord’s Day (1 Cor. 16:2) as a testimony of the kingship of the risen Lord. The chief motive for giving is thanks for the “indescribable gift” of salvation in Christ (2 Cor. 9:15). The progress of the church is hindered by the absence of tithing (1 Cor. 9). The tithing church will have a fruitful ministry in Word (ministry of the Word) and deed (diaconal ministry). Thus, “fundraising” gimmicks, such as pledging and church bazaars, are an evasion of responsibility and dishonoring to God. The person who tithes will also be a good steward of the remaining ninety percent of his income.

Finally, obedience to the eighth commandment implies that our daily work is a “calling” rather than a “career”. It is a service of God rather than ourselves. We should discern the natural gifts that God has given us and develop them through education and experience, with an eye to serving God. Normally becoming a Christian should not involve a change of callings (1 Cor. 7:20–21). We should serve God wherever we find ourselves (Eph. 6:5–9). “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” (Col. 3:23; cf. Eccl. 9:10).

#9 The Ninth Commandment: The Sanctity of Truth

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#76 Which is the ninth commandment? A. The ninth commandment is, Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Q.#77 What is required in the ninth commandment? A. The ninth commandment requireth the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbour’s good name, especially in witness-bearing.

Q.#78 What is forbidden in the ninth commandment? A. The ninth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbour’s good name

Truth is rooted in the nature of God. He is light and “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:16). God’s presence through his Word, written and incarnate, brings truth to light (Eph. 5:13). God’s way of salvation is a blessing of his light (Ps. 27:1). Jesus Christ is the “Light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5). he comes to dispel the darkness introduced by the original liar, the Serpent, Satan (Gen. 3:1–6; John 8:44). The Devil distorts the truth, especially regarding God and his Word. He fosters worship of the creation in the place of God, usurping dominion of the world through his deceptions. He especially hates Christ the Redeemer, who saves people from darkness and death. Thus he tempted Jesus in the wilderness at the inception of his public ministry (Matt. 4) by distorting the Scriptures. Now he accuses the church in order to undermine the sufficiency of Christ’s all atoning death (Rev. 12:10).

The tongue is to be used to tell the truth in the service of God and man (James 3:1–12; Eph. 4:23–35, 29; cf. Prov. 8:6–7; 12:17). The tongue was made to communicate reality from God’s perspective, according to his Word. Even the Word incarnate quotes Scripture in answer to the Devil (Matt. 4). “False witness” focuses on judicial witness (Prov. 14:25; 19:9; 20:28; 21:6). The Bible is still used in Western courtrooms as a testimony that God is the ultimate Judge. The courtroom is a replica of life being observed by the Judge of all mankind. Thus all gossip and falsehood regarding one’s neighbor is forbidden (Prov. 6:16–18; 10:18). Slander and flattery are forbidden expressions of the self-centered life (Prov. 26:28). The church is called to deal with sin honestly by direct communication which seeks the benefit of

the erring brother (Matt. 5:21–26; 18:15–20; Gal. 6:1–2). This is not to be confused with bluntness, which uses the tongue to tear down a person. We are to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15).

Finally, truth telling does not mean that we give information to an enemy whom we know to be seeking information in order to harm others. In war deception is necessary in order to camouflage positions and confuse the enemy. The motive of such deception is the opposite of self-serving gossip. Love of our neighbor and the kingdom of God will sometimes require us to withhold truth or even tell a lie. If a strange man asks me where my daughter is I am not obliged to tell him. If a persecuted Jew seeks refuge in my home, I am not obliged to tell the truth to the soldier who inquires at my door. Rahab deceived the authorities of Jericho when she was hiding the Israeli spies in her home. The Bible praises her actions (Josh. 2:4–5; Heb. 11:31; James 2:24; cf. Exod. 1:15–22). This is known as the *mendacium officiosum*, a lie which serves another. Giving correct information is not in itself obedience to the ninth commandment. How that information is to be used is crucial to our ethical reasoning. Gossip is the classic example of using correct information to damage one’s neighbor. The *mendacium officiosum* is an example of using incorrect information to serve and love one’s neighbor.

#10 The Tenth Commandment: The Sanctity of the Heart

Thou shalt not covet.

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#79 Which is the tenth commandment? A. The tenth commandment is, Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor’s.

Q.#80 What is required in the tenth commandment? A. The tenth commandment requireth full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour, and all that is his.

Q.#81 What is forbidden in the tenth commandment? A. The tenth commandment forbiddeth all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbour, and all inordinate motions and affections to any thing that is his.

This last commandment brings us full circle. We began with the central object of our devotion, God. Now we come to the seat of that devotion, the human heart. The goal of creation and redemption is a heart that puts God first and loves its neighbor (Matt. 22:37–39). Thus, the Bible enjoins us to guard our hearts diligently (Prov. 4:23).

Coveting is the essence of the self-centered life. The covetous person views everything and everybody in terms of his own benefit. Covetousness is the root of idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). It is the root of every sin. It demands the neighbor’s wife, his home, his job. It steals, murders and lies. It withholds the tithe and uses the Sabbath for its own gain. Jesus warns us: “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15; cf. Jer. 22:13–17). Rather “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt. 6:33).

Only the Lord Jesus Christ can cure covetousness. He embodies the perfectly kept heart, which serves God and his purposes without reservation. “Not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Ours must be the motto of John Calvin: “*Cor meum tibi offero domine prompte et sincere*” (“My heart, O Lord, I give thee, promptly and sincerely”).

The Means of Sanctification

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#82 Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God? A. No mere man since the fall is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed.

Q.#83 Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous? A. Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.

Q.#84 What doth every sin deserve? A. Every sin deserveth God's wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come.

It is one thing to know the commandments, or ethical demands, of our Lord. It is quite another to obey them daily. How may this be done?

To begin with we must recognize our daily sins in thought, word and deed, and never make excuses for our sin due to the fact that, in this life, we will always have sin with us.

Get Saturated with the Word of God

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!” (Ps. 119:9–11, 25).

The Bible, the whole counsel of God, is given to us, not only to teach us God's commandments, but to stimulate our sanctification through the knowledge of God himself. In his great high priestly prayer in the upper room our Lord prayed to the Father for his church, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). The word of God sheds a sanctifying light on the pathway of life. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105).

Cultivate the Proper Motivation

Through daily Bible reading and prayer we come face to face with God through Jesus Christ our Mediator. Bowing before God in his Word cultivates the humility needed to turn from sin regularly. Without this discipline of daily devotion to God little progress will be made.

At the center of our devotion is the cross of our Savior. His death and resurrection are the chief motivation for sanctification. In Romans 6 Paul points to our union with Christ in his death and resurrection as the heart of yielding ourselves to the service of God. We must daily render ourselves God's servants because we are no longer our own, we have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). The amazing love of our Father and the wonders of our sonship alone furnish the proper motivation to obey him. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God” (1 John 3:1). We are not following a list of rules, but submitting to the lordship of our gracious and holy Master.

It is crucial to come before the Lord in daily confession of sin. Be specific. It is the love and forgiveness provided in our Savior that motivates us to live lives pleasing to God. If we try to earn God's favor we will be constantly guilty and turn from the pathway of righteousness. “Stand fast therefore in the liberty, by which Christ has made us free” (Gal. 5:1 NKJV). This means that as we confess our sins at the outset of our day and put our trust in the completed work of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9–2:2). Then throughout the day we need

to continue this pattern of moment by moment confession and trust. This maintains a clear conscience before God (1 Tim. 1:19). Keep close accounts with God. Do not allow sin any room in your heart or life. “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom. 13:14).

This is what Jesus meant by taking up your cross daily in self-denying love (Matt. 16:24). Positively, this means living a life of thanksgiving to God for his amazing grace.

Use the Proper Power

Romans 8 teaches us that along with being motivated by the cross, we are to be filled with the Spirit of the enthroned Christ. He empowers us in sanctification. We need to abide in Christ as the vital source of new life in the Spirit “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” (John 15:5). “I can do all things through him [Christ] who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). There is no sanctifying power without the Spirit of Christ. “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). This is what the Puritans called the “ordinary” work of the Holy Spirit. This is the Lord’s main business in our lives. A quest for extraordinary blessings or experiences will only lead us astray and disappoint us in the end.

Mortify Your Sin Daily

The Spirit of the crucified and risen Lord enables us to *mortify* sin. “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” (Rom. 8:13). Colossians 3:5 enumerates the idolatrous desires and practices which we are to crucify, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Idolatry competes for our loyalty. The Spirit gives us power to execute or exterminate our sin. This is what the King James Version means by *mortify*. The cross that we take up daily is not Christ’s cross, it is ours. It is an instrument of execution or death by which we imitate our Savior’s self-denial and hatred of sin. Putting sin to death daily means the power to say “No!” to the passions and practice of sin. The Puritan John Owen has a powerful exposition of this practice in volume 6 of his works.

Follow the Proper Models and Modes

When we think of obeying God it is important to remember that Scripture gives us several models and modes of obedience. Following God’s commandments is the **legal foundation** of and written guide for our obedience. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

The motivating power and source of obedience is our **communion with God** through meditation on his Word and prayer. “[T]hat which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the

Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). This means spending time with the three persons of the Trinity.

Based on God’s revealed will for our lives we are called to **imitate** both Christ and God, as well as one another. Imitation flows out of our communion with God. “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph. 5:1). The goal of salvation is our likeness to Christ, “predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29).

Obedience is pictured in several modes in Scripture. We are called to engage in **spiritual warfare**. “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6:12, cf. Eph. 6:10-20). “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh” (2 Cor. 10:3). Obedience is a battle in which we are engaged with the church militant all of our lives.

We are also called to **walk as pilgrims** in this present evil age. After describing saints in the old covenant who lived by faith the writer of Hebrews declares: “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth” (Heb. 11:13). In the new covenant we are also pilgrims awaiting the consummation. “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:11–12).

Finally, we are called to be wise and apply the truth of God’s Word to every area and situation in life. This is not black and white. **The way of wisdom** takes experience, which means that we will make mistakes and do foolish things that are not necessarily sinful. “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes” (Prov. 26:4–5). The apparent contradiction here indicates that wisdom will have to be exercised in order to determine what kind of answer will be appropriate for a particular fool in a given situation. “Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time” (Col. 4:5). “But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb. 5:14).

In sanctification the Lord wants us to grow, through a long and often difficult process, “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). “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” (2 Cor. 7:1).



Chapter 5

The Church: The Context of Our Profession

5. Do you promise to participate faithfully in this church's worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline, even in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life?

Christians are never on their own. They are always part of the body of Christ. This body is referred to in Scripture as the church. The church is not only a body but also an institution with an organized structure. Every Christian must be an active member of the local church. This is not an option but a biblical necessity. It is assumed throughout the Bible.

The Definition of the Church

Westminster Confession of Faith - Chapter 25

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 fulness of him that filleth all in all.
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; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.
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.
4. This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. 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.
5. The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth, to worship God according to his will.
6. There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ.

Scriptural Names

The church is essentially the same in both the old and the new covenants. The church was confined to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Now under the new covenant the church is a nation among the nations. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own possession" (1 Pet. 2:9). Of the Lamb John says, "by your blood you ransomed people to God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). Beginning at Pentecost the risen Lord began to gather his elect from among all nations (Acts 2:5). Thus, at the coming of the Spirit of the enthroned Messiah his command to

disciple the nations began to be fulfilled (Matt. 28:18-20). The church today continues to be part of this grand final movement of the Lord in redemptive history.

The word “congregation” is first used in connection with the Passover during the exodus from Egypt (Exod. 12:3). This referred to the gathered people of God considered as an “assembly,” assembled by the LORD and called to live before him in worship and service (Ps. 149:1; 82:1). The Old Testament “synagogues,” formed as the people of God were dispersed among the nations, were referred to as congregations (Acts 13:43). Stephen refers to the entire congregation in the wilderness as a “synagogue” (Acts 7:38). The word “church” in the new covenant has essentially the same meaning of “gathered people.” It is used over 100 times in the New Testament. The New Testament word for “church,” *ekklesia*, is the same word that the Greek Old Testament (LXX, the Septuagint) used in many places to translate the Hebrew word for “congregation”. The writer of Hebrews quotes the Septuagint (Greek) version of Psalm 22:22 using the word *ekklesia* to refer to the Old Testament “assembly” or “congregation” (Heb. 2:12). Many preachers and commentators define *ekklesia* as “the called out ones.” Actually it refers to the citizenry of a city assembled or gathered as a body. “Called out ones” emphasizes the individual, whereas the word actually refers to an assembly as a *unified entity*. The biblical idea of the church stands in stark contrast to the radical individualism of American culture.

The biblical descriptions of the church are rich and varied. The church is called the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16); the “commonwealth of Israel” (Eph. 2:12). These names define the church as a citizenship or nation united in one purpose, and bound together in mutual love for the king and his fellow subjects. The church is the “city of God” (Ps. 87:3); and the “people of God” (1 Pet. 2:10). The church is also the “dwelling place of God” (Eph. 2:22). This refers to the church as a home or family. The church is in fact a building, but not one made of wood and stone. It is rather the people of God themselves. “[Y]ou yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). “In whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21). The church is also the “body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12); the “bride of Christ” (Rev. 21:2, 9); and the mother of God’s people, “But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother” (Gal. 4:26).

This summary of Scripture names for the church clearly teaches us that we are never to think of ourselves as Christians apart from the church. As soon as we become the children of God through repentance and faith we immediately become part of the church, the body of Christ. In fact, in the New Testament the only evangelistic organization is the church. So at Pentecost when Peter preached, he did so in obedience to Christ’s command to the apostles to disciple the nations. Consequently, when a number of Peter’s hearers repented and believed the gospel they immediately became a vital part of the church of which Peter was one of the pastors. The 3,000 were “added” (Acts 2:41) to the 120 disciples who had prayed for the coming of the Spirit since the resurrection of Christ. They became disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ under the ministerial authority of Christ’s appointed leaders—committed and accountable.

Scriptural Attributes

There are four attributes that describe the essential characteristics or qualities of the church.

Apostolicity – The church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11) as he has revealed himself in his infallible Word the Bible. The church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). The church is therefore *apostolic*. It is built on the written revelation which was given to the apostles and prophets of the new and final revelation of God by the risen Lord through his Holy Spirit as he had promised in the upper room before his crucifixion (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). To continue the building analogy we might think of the Old Testament as the footings and the New Testament as the finished foundation, all of which form the basis for the building of the church in the new covenant era. Paul built his teaching on the Old Testament (cf. Rom. 1:1–4; 4:1ff.; 15:4). At the end of his ministry as the New Testament canon was nearing completion he instructed Timothy: “Follow the pattern of sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13). This is what Paul meant when he referred to the church as “the pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). The church is the institution entrusted with the “oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2).

Catholicity – The word *catholic* does not mean *Roman Catholic*. It means *universal*. The church is made up of people from every nation and place in all ages of history. John’s vision of the church in Revelation pictures “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes” (Rev. 7:9). The church in the new covenant has no racial or geographic boundaries. The Old Testament hinted of this universality when God saved the Ninevites, Naaman the Syrian, Naomi and Ruth, Rahab, and several others. The church is the only true United Nations on earth.

Unity – This attribute refers to the *oneness* of the church. All true Christians are united to their glorious head, Jesus Christ, no matter what denomination they belong to. Denominations of faithful Christians are varied expressions of this unity. While different cultures and varying interpretations of Scripture may distinguish Christians denominationally, they are truly one in Christ. “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4–6). Because our Lord Jesus prayed for the unity of the church (John 17:22–23), we must seek to maintain that unity and exemplify it to the watching world (Eph. 4:3). The unity of the three persons of the Trinity is to be reflected in the church in all of its varied expressions.

Holiness – This attribute distinguishes the church from the world. Holiness means spiritual “separateness”. In worship and service we are to exhibit the uniqueness of God’s children as we imitate Jesus Christ as the new humanity. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:9–12; cf. Eph. 5:25–27). Holiness is maintained by seeking both doctrinal and moral purity, and with love. Furthermore, this separateness is not to be

confused with *separatism*. *Separatism* seeks to be culturally and even geographically separate. But Biblically we are called to be *in* the world but not *of* it. Jesus said “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” (John 17:15–16). He makes this distinction clear to the Corinthian church, “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 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” (1 Cor. 5:9–11). Our allegiance is to the enthroned Lord, as opposed to Satan and self as with the world (1 John 2:15–16). The Lord’s desire is “that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world . . .” (Phil. 2:15).

Visible and Invisible

There are not two churches, the *visible* church and the *invisible* church. The distinction between visible and invisible refers to two different perspectives on the church, ours and God’s. The invisible church “consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof” (WCF 25.1). This is God’s perspective. He and he alone knows who are truly his people (Eph. 1:10). He alone sees and knows the hearts of men. Normally, *all* who are God’s elect, and members of the invisible church, are also members of the visible church. The thief on the cross and Robinson Crusoe are rare exceptions. Thus, nobody should say, “Well, I’m a member of the invisible church, I don’t need to be part of the visible church.” This is an unbiblical excuse, and an evasion of the Lord’s authority and lordship.

The visible church is the church as we see it on earth. The visible church “consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children” (WCF 25.2). Note the word *profess*. The visible church is made up of those who name the name of Christ and claim him as their Lord and Savior. The fact that their are people who claim to be Christians but are not committed to a local church is a testimony to the fact that radical individualism is the rule in much of western culture, dangerously isolating people from contributing to the life of the church, and from enjoying the blessings of participation.

The Bible never explicitly commands us to become part of the visible church because it is assumed. When three thousand repented and believed the gospel on the Day of Pentecost they were baptized and “added” to the visible church (Acts 2:41, 47). All of these converts were already part of the Old Testament church through the synagogue. They had come to celebrate an Old Covenant feast. Note also that the word “church” in the text refers to the visible church. We know this because baptism was administered by officers (the apostles) of the church as an organized body. Baptism is a visible sign and seal of inclusion in the professing body. The command to be baptized implies becoming a member of the visible church. Furthermore these converts participated in the regular life of the church. They “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

The visible church is primarily manifested in the *local* church. The broader or higher expressions of the visible church are manifested in the church at a regional or national level, as a presbytery, synod or general assembly, exemplified in the Jerusalem council in Acts 15.

All of the members of these assemblies are first and foremost officers and members of local churches. As noted above we must never think of the church as a body without at the same time thinking of the organization of that body. Both are essential to a biblical understanding of the church. When Paul wrote his letters to Christians as a group it was always to a local, visible church, as “To the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2).

The Westminster Confession also makes this startling statement, when referring to the visible church: “out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation” (WCF 25.2). In other words the local church is *the* evangelistic organization of the New Covenant era. *Parachurch* ministry is a uniquely Western, and especially American, idea, which finds no biblical support. Voluntary organizations are one of the great strengths of American society, but not when Christians organize them to do the work of the church independent of its biblical authority structure and organization. Ordinarily, no one becomes a Christian independent of the local church. The Confession says “ordinary” so as to account for rare exceptions like the thief on the cross. Although even there the thief made his public profession before the head of the visible church, the Lord Jesus.

Since the visible church is made up of all *professing* Christians and their children not everyone who *professes* to be a Christian *is* one. The Bible gives many examples of hypocrites. A hypocrite is someone who is not what he appears to be. As fallible and limited people we can only make decisions based on what is visible, on what we see and hear. Therefore we must exercise the “judgment of charity” with regard to that profession. We are to accept that profession until someone gives us evidence in doctrine or life to think otherwise. Some in the visible church of the apostle John left the church because they were not truly part of the church (1 John 2:19). They appeared to be members for a time, but eventually proved that their professions were not genuine. The apostles accepted Simon the magician’s profession of faith in Acts 8. That profession turned out to be bogus. If the apostles could be fooled then surely the ordinary officers of the church can be too. Only God knows the heart.

Jesus warns us that not everyone who claims to be his are truly so. They claim to have done great things in his name, but on the Day of Judgment we show them to be what they are: “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ ” (Matt. 7:22–23). One may be to all appearances a zealous member of the church, even an elder or pastor, and yet be lawless at heart. May no one reading this booklet find themselves in such a state on the last day.

Confessional

The visible church confesses of the truth of the Risen Lord. “No book but the Bible, no creed but Christ,” as we saw in chapter 1, sounds good on the surface, until one asks and attempts to answer the question “What does the Bible teach?” Actually every Christian has a creed, written or not. The question is it based on the wisdom of only a few individuals or upon the wisdom God has given the church through the ages? The historical creeds respect the corporate work of the Holy Spirit working in the body of Christ.

Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13–16) is really a summary of hundreds of verses of Scripture in both Old and New Testaments. In a sense it is a summary

of the whole Bible. Paul uses expanded summaries in several places to describe the essential apostolic message. “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures . . .” (1 Cor. 15:3–4). “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16). Such summaries define the body of truth revealed in Scripture and mark the boundaries of the truth which the church is called to guard and propagate. The confession quoted by Paul in 1 Timothy comes immediately after his description of the church as the “pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

Confessions are not meant to replace Scripture. In fact, they must be based entirely upon Scripture for them to be valuable to the church and pleasing to the Lord. The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms has been called the “crowning creed” because it comes at the end of the most prolific creed-writing period in the church’s history. Over one hundred and twenty theologians and pastors took five years (1643–1648) to debate and formulate this great statement of faith. It is built on the church’s entire creedal history going all the way back to the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon in the ancient church. A church without an orthodox historical creed is a church in danger of going adrift in the sea of human opinion. So a healthy church will teach the contents of its confession and catechisms so that the clear confession of the church forms the biblical mindset of God’s people, young and old. A confessional church knows what it believes and seeks to live accordingly.

Three Modes of the Church’s Existence

Militant – The church in this “present evil age” is the church at war with the world, the flesh, and the devil. From the beginning to the end of the Covenant of Grace the church, represented by the seed of the woman which is Christ, is at war with the seed of the Serpent (Gen. 3:15). Throughout this period in both Testaments the church is engaged in spiritual warfare. The image of the spiritual soldier comes to its fullest expression in Ephesians 6:10–20. The Christian soldier is to don the whole armor of God, which is the person and work of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, and wage war against the threefold enemy (the world, the flesh, and the devil) of God. The armor is put on in direct communication with and dependence upon the captain of the Lord’s host in prayer to the one into whose hands all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Matt. 28:18–20). “Militant” is not belligerent, but is willing to stand for the whole truth of the gospel, even to the point death.

Triumphant – The church which goes immediately to be with the risen Lord in paradise at death is the church triumphant. This is known as the “intermediate state” (pp. 31, 32; 2 Cor. 5:2–8). The perfected souls of the church await the final resurrection in the presence of the Lord.

Glorious – The church in its consummate and final glory, raised from the dead at the second coming of the Lord is the church glorious. This is the church perfected in body and soul in “the new heavens and the new earth.” In this state all the purposes of God in redemption in Jesus Christ are fully realized (Rom. 8:23).

Christians must be careful to appreciate that what we now possess in Christ is sufficient to keep the pilgrim church in the way of salvation. However, the glory yet to come is ours to inherit in the future, not ours to possess in its fullness now. Now we live by faith, “So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:6–8). “Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (Heb. 2:8). Christians are always tempted to want more now. So various forms of perfectionism and the experience oriented Charismatic movement seduce believers and then disappoint them. What we enjoy now in Christ anticipates what is yet to come. Our full glory in Christ is yet to be revealed. “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3).

The Spirituality of the Church

The Westminster Confession of Faith 25.2 states, “The visible Church . . . is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus.” The church is called to pay attention to its God-given task in this world. This means that it must not take on responsibilities that are not mandated in the New Testament. Nowhere is the church commanded to “redeem culture.” God rules in the sphere of common culture through common grace, that is, his providential gifts of general revelation and natural law. All of the imperatives in Romans 13:1–7 are to Christians to respect this God-given authority in civil government. The ruler is not told to do anything. The Christians are commanded to submit to legitimate authority, not to transform the culture. Redemption is for people, calling them into relationship with their creator through a redeemer.

This is not, however, to be confused with “separatism,” which wrongly teaches that Christians should separate themselves from culture. The church attends to the salvation of its members, and the creation of a new community of God’s people. But the church is called to live in and be a witness to the world. Thus, Paul exhorts the Corinthians, “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 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” (1 Cor. 5:9–11). The church is to be an embassy of Christ, declaring the excellence of his kingdom in word and deed to a fallen world.

God rules in the common kingdom of this world through general revelation; and he rules over his kingdom, the church, by special revelation.

The Marks of the Church

True and False Churches

While many groups claim to be the church, not all are truly so. The Bible gives us clear guidelines to help us distinguish the true from the false. These “marks” define the essential characteristics of a true church. Since no church is perfect we must look for the marks to be **substantially** present. “The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and

error” (WCF 25.5). We do not want to be **perfectionists**. Even though the church in Corinth was full of problems the apostle Paul calls them “the church of God” (1 Cor. 1:2). In the parable of the good seed the Lord teaches that there will always be imperfection in the church while it is in this world (Matt. 13:24–30). We should not approach the church with our personal agenda or list of distinctive beliefs on minor issues.

On the other hand some churches gradually depart from the faith to such a degree that they become false churches. “Some (churches) have so degenerated, as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan” (WCF 25.5). Jesus warned some of the churches in John’s day that if they did not repent their candles would be removed. In other words they would no longer be the light of the world because they would no longer truly represent him (Rev. 2:9; 3:9; Rom. 11:18–22). Those who fail to recognize this are guilty of *Latitudinarianism*, compromising the message of the church.

There will always be a true church on earth until our Lord returns, because the Lord Himself has promised: “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18).

The Three Marks

The “marks” (*notae*) are characteristics that must *all* be present for a church to be a true church.

The Word – A true church preaches the whole counsel of God, confessing the apostolic truth, summarized in *The Apostles’ Creed*. Such a church takes the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible to be God’s infallible Word (Isa. 8:20; Acts 20:27; John 8:31).

The Sacraments – A true church administers the two, and only, sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper faithfully according to their institution in Scripture (Matt. 26:26–30; 28:18–20; Acts 2:38, 42).

Discipline – A true church faithfully exercises the keys of church discipline by which its members are held accountable to Scripture in doctrine and life (Matt. 16:18, 19; 18:15–20; 1 Cor. 5:1–5; Gal. 6:1).

Separation from an Unfaithful Church

If one is a member of a church that does not substantially display these marks it is the duty of the Christian to separate from such a body (2 Cor. 6:14–18). No one should leave a church, however, when it is possible to pursue discipline in order to call that church back to faithfulness. However, if this is not possible then separation is the only option. This is true for individual members of local congregations as well as for congregations within a denomination. To remain a member of a false church is to bring dishonor to the glorious head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. In some cases a person might leave a true church for other reasons, such as doctrinal weakness. In either case this should always be done, patiently—taking all the necessary steps to seek change—graciously and wisely, seeking to communicate the specific reasons why one is leaving the church in a gentle and honest way.

The Government of the Church

Christ Is the Only Head

Christ alone is the head of his church (1 Cor. 3:11; 11:3; Eph. 1:20–23; 5:23; Col. 1:18). The center and throne of the government of the church is in heaven not on earth. The pope of Rome has no biblical warrant for claiming to be Christ’s vicar on earth. Each Christian, and, therefore, every church member and officer, is directly responsible first and foremost to the enthroned Lord Jesus Christ.

Presbyterian Government

As we have said above the church is an organized institution as well as a vital body. As an institution it has a structure; and that structure is revealed in the Bible. Following the basic principles of this structure is as important as being faithful to any other doctrine given to us by our Lord. This is not optional for the Christian who takes discipleship seriously.

In the Old Testament God’s people were organized first as an extended family (patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), then as tribes, and finally as a nation. The nation dispersed during the captivity laid the foundation for the organization of the New Testament church. The organization of the Jerusalem church spread through the synagogue to all the nations of the earth as newly saved converts left Pentecost for home. The government of the New Testament church is rooted in the old (Exod. 18:13–27; 1 Cor. 9:13–14). The apostles and prophets were temporary officers who mediated the formation of the canon (standard of measurement) of New Testament Scripture and the structure of the new covenant church. They left a pattern for the continuing government of the church. Near the end of his ministry Paul left specific directives for the church planter evangelists Timothy and Titus. These letters are known to us as *The Pastoral Epistles*. They teach us about “how one ought to behave in the household of God” (1 Tim. 3:15); give qualifications for church officers; and generally reveal the basics of church government.

The Bible is the constitutional foundation of the church—primary standard. The so-called “subordinate standards” of the church are the doctrinal summaries (The Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) and governmental documents (The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Containing the Standards of Government, Discipline and Worship), which explain and apply the principles of Scripture to our particular church denomination.

Christ delegated *ministerial* authority to his church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:8–11). He gave the keys of doctrine and discipline to the apostles (Matt. 16:18–19). Notice that the authority given to the church is *ministerial* not *legislative*. Christ has given all the legislation we need through his apostles in his Word, which is now complete. The authority he delegates to the church is to be exercised on the basis of his written Word and that alone. Subordinate standards help give order to this exercise.

The word **Presbyterian** comes from the biblical Greek word *presbuteros* (1 Tim. 5:19), which means “elder”. It refers to those who are experienced (thus the reference to age) and gifted with wisdom to lead God’s people. The word **Episcopalian** comes from the Biblical Greek word *episkopos* (1 Tim. 3:1), which means “overseer” or “governor”, and is translated as “bishop” in the KJV, but more properly by the ESV “overseer”. Contrary to the distinction

in offices made by Episcopalians *bishops* or *overseers* and *elders* are different names describing the same office (Acts 20:17-28).

Presbyterian church government is based on the biblical principle of **rule by elders and the connection of local churches** within a region. We see this in the local churches established by Paul (Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1) and in the gathering of the regional church at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). We refer to the larger gatherings of the regional church as **presbyteries**. Presbyteries deal with issues that effect all of the churches within a given region, issues such as such as the ordination of ministers (1 Tim. 4:14), missions, and discipline (Acts 15). In each congregation there is to be a **plurality of elders** (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1), which with the minister of the Word constitute the session.

Historically there have been three basic types of church government:

Prelatical (hierarchical) – Spiritual power resides in individual prelates in a hierarchy (archbishops, bishops, etc.). This would include: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Church of England, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Methodist.

Congregational (independent) – Spiritual power resides in each individual congregation and its members. This would include: Congregational, Baptist, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches.

Presbyterian (connectional) – Spiritual power resides in the office bearers as they function in different jurisdictions: local sessions (ministers and elders in the local church, also known as a consistory in continental Reformed churches), presbyteries, synods and general assemblies. This would include: Presbyterian, and continental Reformed churches.

The Offices: General and Special

Every Christian holds the **general office of believer**. We are all prophets, priests and kings by virtue of our union with the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:6). This great doctrine of the Reformation, known as “the priesthood of all believers,” does not mean that everyone rules in the household of God. In fact, **priesthood** points to service in God’s house. Pure democracy would lead to chaos. Rather the Lord has given the church spiritual overseers or undershepherds of Christ to guide and lead the flock of God (1 Pet. 5:1–4). **Ministers, elders and deacons** lead the congregation in word and deed ministry, respectively. These are the **special offices of the church**. All participate in the ministry of the church, but all do not lead (Eph. 4:11–16; 1 Cor. 12).

The beauty of rule by a plurality of elders, working with the minister, is that it prevents both tyranny and chaos at once. It prevents tyranny by protecting the church from one man dominating; and because the biblical model for leadership calls leaders to be servants of God and his people (1 Pet. 5:3; 2 Tim. 2:24–25; Matt. 20:25–28). It prevents chaos because Scripture clearly gives church officers authority to rule (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:7, 17). And those who rule must be called and qualified by the Great Shepherd of the sheep, and recognized as such by the congregation (Eph. 4:7–11; Acts 14:23).

Part of shepherding the flock involves **church discipline**. The session, made up of ruling elders and the minister(s), exercises positive discipline by promoting the ministry of the word and the means of grace. Through the ministry of the Word and visiting the people the session encourages self-discipline. Negatively they need to correct those who stray in doctrine or life

(2 Tim. 2:24–25; Gal. 6:1). They must lead the congregation in exercising discipline with the proper motives and methods (Matt. 5:23-26; 18:15–20; 1 Cor. 5:1–5). They must also promote the proper goals of church discipline: restoration of the erring brother; preservation of the purity of the church; maintenance of the honor of Christ.

Respect for the God-given authority of the session is essential to the health of the church and each of her members. The spiritual authority of the session is clearly revealed in Scripture (2 Cor. 8:5; 1 Thess. 5:12; Titus 1:5, 7; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5. Ministers and elders have spiritual authority in their congregations as a session (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13; 1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17). Ministers and elders have spiritual authority in the presbytery, synod, and general assembly with respect to the jurisdiction of those bodies (1 Tim. 4:14; Acts 15:1–29). They deal with conflicts in or among the churches, in or among the sessions or presbyteries. They oversee the training and ordination of ministers. They plan and execute mission work. The fifth membership vow, which promises to submit to the spiritual leadership of these officers is a crucial part of true discipleship (cf. Appendix A).

There are **three regular, continuing offices** in the church: **Ministers** (teachers of the Word 1 Tim. 3:1–7; 5:17; pastor-teachers Eph. 4:11), **Elders** (helpers, rulers, governors Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28) and **Deacons** (Acts 6:1–7; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8–13). The minister and elders shepherd the flock together as a session. The minister of the Word shepherds, especially through teaching and preaching the Word. Deacons lead in caring for the temporal needs of the church. The qualifications for these offices are summarized in 1 Timothy 3. Officers are to be **ordained** by the laying on of hands because authority is conferred upon those who are called to bear office by those who already bear it. Ministers are ordained by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Elders and deacons are ordained by the laying on of hands of the session (1 Tim. 4:14). The inner call of God must also be recognized by the church (the outer call). Therefore, officers are chosen by the people with the recommendation of existing officers (Acts 14:23).

The History of Presbyterianism

In Europe during the Reformation in the sixteenth century Calvin and the Genevan churches began to look to Scripture for the structure of church government. Calvin’s ecclesiology spread to Germany, Holland, France, England, Scotland, etc. The term “Presbyterian” was first used in England by the Puritans in the sixteenth century: Preston and Cartwright. Presbyterianism took root in Scotland under John Knox, who had ministered and studied in Calvin’s Geneva. The first presbytery was formed in Scotland under Knox in 1572. Presbyterianism was first articulated systematically in *The Westminster Standards* 1648.

In first American Presbyterian, Francis Makemie, came to the middle colonies from Scotch-Irish Donegal in 1683. he helped organize the first presbytery in Philadelphia in 1706. The “Adopting Act” of 1729 adopted *The Westminster Confession* as the doctrinal standard of the new church. The first General Assembly, representing many presbyteries, was held in 1788. It should be noted that a major revision of the confession took place in the area of the relationship between the church and the state. The separation of the two is more in line with the teaching of the New Testament. This is essentially the version of the confession used by the OPC today. The church was divided during Civil War into Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA, Northern) and Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS, Southern). The Orthodox Presbyterian Church came out of the PCUSA in 1936

because of the departure of the PCUSA from historic Christianity. For more on this general history of Presbyterianism see, Darryl Hart and John Muether, *Seeking a Better Country*.

The History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

While the proliferation of denominations, especially in the United States, is not in itself desirable, there are good reasons why many denominations exist. The idea of a *non-denominational* church may sound good initially. In fact this is misleading. A denomination is simply a name designating a particular body of Christians who hold to a particular body of teaching. Every so-called *non-denominational* church has a name and a set of beliefs.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church was founded in 1936 under the leadership of Princeton Theological Seminary scholar and professor Dr. J. Gresham Machen in order to continue the witness of historic Presbyterianism as expressed in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms*. The church believes that the message of the Bible is as relevant today as it was in the days of the apostles. The church upholds the historic doctrines of Christian orthodoxy, focusing on God's sovereign grace revealed in the crucified and risen Christ, the Savior who changes people's hearts, forgives their sins and gives them the hope of eternal life. The church has been known for its intellectual defense of the truths of the Bible and its missionary efforts throughout the world. For more on this history see, Churchill, *Lest We Forget*, and Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict*, Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, and Hart, *Between the Times*.

Membership in the Church

As we have said above membership in the local, visible assembly of Jesus Christ is absolutely essential to biblical discipleship.

The Necessity of Membership

Along with the fact that the visible, organized church is the God-ordained institution in which the Lord has deposited the truth of the gospel, the visible church is the only biblical context in which public profession of faith is made. "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:12). In the New testament era there was no such thing as going up front at an evangelistic crusade in response to an alter call and then going home uncommitted to the local church. The day of Pentecost is ample testimony to this fact. "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:47" (Acts 2:47). "For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved" (Rom. 10:10; Matt. 10:32). This is done in the presence of the congregation of God's people. Reference to "the number" indicates membership among God's people.

In American culture Christianity has been so much part of the culture that the line between the church and the world has often been blurred. Furthermore, the volunteerism, which has been such a blessing in many areas of culture, has subtly undermined the sense of importance attached to the biblical concept of the church. One of the legacies of the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century is the notion that formality and institutional

organizations and their protocols are, by their very nature, inauthentic. That nineteenth-century seed blossomed in the countercultural revolution of the sixties. It is now part of the currency of popular culture. The disdain for history, which characterizes the modern temperament, has covered the tracks of this development so that well-meaning Christians believe their disdain for membership and other church formalities is a more spiritual attitude than that of those who are requiring these forms. It comes as a shock if they come to realize that in holding this position on membership and many other things, they are conforming to the world in a way that the Bible itself warns us against. The modern bias against forms of all sorts is contrary to the biblical doctrine of the goodness of the created order; and it is contrary to the punctuation of that reality by the incarnation and resurrection of our Lord. It is also a denial of our creaturely limits in space and time. Beneath the appearance of humility in these denials is a thinly veiled hubris of sinful rebellion. But how do we as officers in the church go about showing people how important the formality of membership is from Scripture?

A very important aspect of the session's care for the flock is keeping the written rolls of the congregation. Keeping written records of membership are part of the warp and woof of heavenly citizenship, and clearly revealed in the Bible. Roll books—both actual and metaphorical—are very important in the Bible (Numb. 1:17–19; 1 Chron. 4:41; Ezra 2:61–63; Neh. 7:64; Ezek. 13:9; Ps. 69:28). They are the concrete record of inclusion with the visible people of God. The genealogies of the Old Testament demonstrate the importance of such written records.

The idea of being *written* in the Lamb's book of life, while a metaphor, comes from something concrete, an actual roll book. Written records were very important in the ancient world, going back to at least the third millennium BC. By the time of the Exodus in the mid-second millennium BC written records were an essential part of public governance. So it is not surprising then to encounter a strong emphasis on such records in the early history of Israel.

The situation of the new covenant people is the same despite the dramatic change in the form and administration of the visible people of God. The governing center of the kingdom has moved from earth—the Jerusalem below—to heaven—the Jerusalem above (Gal. 4:25–26; cf. Heb. 12:18–24). The disappearance of the outward forms of worship indicates the fulfillment inaugurated by the coming Messiah. This prophetic realization does not, as some mistakenly believe, call us to disparage forms *per se*. Citizenship papers prove one's commitment and relationship to one's country and one's people throughout history. "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels" (Rev 3:5). Finally, Hebrews 12:22–24 gives a powerful testimony for the importance of roll books: But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Our Book of Discipline embodies this biblical concept of the importance of written records of membership in the visible church. While many cultural forms are relative to a given society, such as codes of dress, other forms reflect our essential humanity, such as the need for written records of all kinds, especially the need to distinguish those who profess the

true religion from the lost world. This is a good commandment of our Lord, one that expresses the commitment of the pastor and overseers of the church to care for each one of its members. Maintaining them should never be a mere matter of keeping good records, but keeping good records of membership should be an expression of the care of the Great Shepherd, through his under-shepherds, for God's people. In the church the written roll is an accurate way of keeping track of membership as under-shepherds who care for the sheep of Christ's fold.

The word for "added" in Acts 2:47 is used to express military order and authority in Luke 7:8, and implies an official record of membership. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). As the church continued to grow we are told that "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). Being added to the church was a publically recognized declaration of allegiance to the risen Lord and his people, the church.

The Benefits of Membership

The church nurtures the believer in perseverance. "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. 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" (Heb. 10:22–25). Note that continuing to maintain a good confession of Jesus Christ without wavering is closely connected with mutual encouragement and exhortation in the local assembly of saints on the Lord's Day.

The Bible presents the church as a place of blessing and delight, a foretaste of eternity. "They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, to declare that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him" (Ps. 92:13–15). "For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps. 84:10). Paul presents the church as the place where we grow and mature into the likeness of Christ. "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Eph. 4:11–16).

The Responsibilities of Membership

The fifth membership vow is a "promise to participate faithfully in this church's worship and service . . ." Along with benefits come responsibilities and duties. In the atmosphere of extreme self-orientation fostered by consumerism the church is often approached and presented as another product designed to meet our needs. In fact God has designed the church

to teach us to deny ourselves and bring glory to God and blessing to our neighbor. The Lord calls us to meet his desire to be glorified and our neighbor's needs. "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13). Each part of the body of Christ needs every other part (Eph. 4:16; 1 Cor. 12). "What is my part?" That is an important question to ask. If you ask, "Am I being loved?" you will probably always be disappointed. If you ask, "How am I worshipping my God and loving my brothers and sisters in Christ?" then you will bear fruit. Faithful service means participating in the various activities and ministries of the church, praying regularly for her needs, and tithing to support her ministry and mission.

Our Bylaws summarize these duties:

All members are responsible for striving to believe and live according to the Scriptures in every area of life (1 Cor. 10:31). To this end they are obligated in the Lord to attend faithfully all stated meetings of the church (Heb. 10:25), unless providentially hindered; live faithfully in the marriage relationship (Eph. 5:18–33), the family relationship (Eph. 6:1–4), and their particular calling (Eph. 6:5–9); read the Bible and pray regularly in the family and in private (Ps. 1:2); use their gifts within the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:4–11); spread the message of the gospel according to their gifts; and fulfill the membership vows which were made publicly before the Lord and His people. (Bylaws IV.3.[2])

Procedure

At this point in the course you may be wondering what comes next in terms of membership in this local church.

If you desire membership the pastor will meet with you and go over the four *Questions for Public Profession of Faith in Christ* in Appendix A. If you can affirm all four questions without reservation then you will come before the session of the elders of the church. They will want to hear how you came to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Then they will ask questions based on the four Public Profession Questions. Remember you are not being asked to be a theologian, but a sincere Christian.

After making a good profession before the session you will take the membership vows during public worship in the near future on a date agreed upon by you and the elders.

The Means of Grace

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#88 What are the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption? A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

Definition

The **means of grace** are outward channels of God's undeserved covenant favor. A water pipe is a means of getting water into our houses. So the **Word, Prayer** and the **Sacraments** are means by which God gives his grace to the church. Just as the family meal is our ordinary means of nourishment, the means of grace are the ordinary means of our spiritual

nourishment. Many problems in the Christian life can be traced back to a neglect of the means of grace.

In the early church at Pentecost the means of grace were central. Notice that the “charismatic” sign gifts were used to authenticate the apostolic message, not as a means of edification. “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Remember too that these means are not, by definition, ends in themselves, but means to the end of maturing in the image of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Implicit in this doctrine is the context in which the means of grace function—the fellowship of God’s people in worship and service.

The Word

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#89 How is the word made effectual to salvation? A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

Q.#90 How is the word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation? A. That the word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.

The **Word of God** is the primary means of grace. The reading and preaching of Scripture should never be pitted against worship and praise, but rather understood as the supreme act of worship. Notice that it is “especially the **preaching of the word**” that God uses to save sinners and sanctify the saints. This does not exclude private reading of the word. But it does correct the individualistic idea that all one needs is the private reading of word. Hearing the Word should be first. The Head of the church has ordained that preaching in the church should be the context in which private reading of the word grows. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25–27). In Troas Paul preached on the evening of the Lord’s Day. “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7).

A student at a local college once told the group leader that she had a difficult time understanding the Bible. The leader wisely answered that she needed to learn the Scriptures under the regular pastoral exposition of God’s word by a Minister of the Word in the local church. In the context of the church every Christian should be reading the “whole counsel of God” on a regular daily basis. David wrote of the godly person: “his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:2). McCheyne’s daily reading schedule is a very helpful guide.

The heads of households should have regular family devotions (Deut. 6:4–6; Eph. 6:4). This is an essential means of family nurture. Christian’s should have and use the tools to assist them in learning God’s word (see “The Proper Tools for Bible Study” on page vii–x).

Along with this essential library each Christian should build a sound library in every area of truth, if possible. Good Christian biography is an interesting and entertaining way to learn from the example of others.

A very helpful way to warm up for Bible reading and prayer is to read C. H. Spurgeon's classic devotionals such as *The Valley of Vision*, *Voices from the Past*, *Morning and Evening* and *Faith's Checkbook*.

This may seem like a lot, but is there any more serious business in life than studying God's Word? Calvin in commenting on Daniel 12:10 said that we should "earnestly apply ourselves to the pursuit of heavenly doctrine . . . [and] heartily desire to be taught by God." Calvin Knox Cummings, in *Confessing Christ* (in the chapter, "God's Provision for Growth") enjoins us to diligence, preparation, prayer, faith, love, memory and practice in the study of Holy Scripture.

The Sacraments

The Shorter Catechism

Q.# 91 How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation? A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his spirit in them that by faith receive them.

Q.# 92 What is a sacrament? A. A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.

Q.# 93 Which are the sacraments of the New Testament? A. The sacraments of the New Testament are, Baptism, and the Lord's supper.

A sacrament is "a sign and seal of the covenant of grace." Romans 4:11 teaches us that Abraham "received the **sign** of circumcision as a **seal** of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised." A **sign** is a visible symbol or representation of a spiritual reality. So, for example, the wine in the Lord's Supper signifies the shed blood of our Savior. A **seal** is a guarantee or authentication of a promise. Thus our drinking of the wine, by faith in what it represents (Christ's finished work), is an assurance of God's promise to save us by the sacrifice of our Mediator. It assures each partaker that Christ applies to them.

Sacraments are instituted by Christ in his Word. Thus we have only two "signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace" in the New Testament: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The five sacraments added by the Roman Church are not sacraments instituted by our Savior. Marriage, for example, is a creation ordinance, enjoyed by all people inside and outside of the covenant community.

Furthermore, sacraments are to be administered after the preaching of the Word and with an explanation from the Word. Otherwise they become superstitious rites. This is also the reason why an ordained minister of the Word is the only one who may administer the sacraments. In the Old Testament the priests who administered the sacrifices and other rites of the temple were ministers of the Word.

The efficacy of the sacraments is not magical. There is nothing in the elements themselves that saves or sanctifies us. They are not automatic blessing in partaking as taught in the Roman Church (*ex opere operatum*). Nor does their efficacy depend on the faith of the one who administers them. We reject the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation, because it teaches that the priest administers a change in the elements so that they become the actual body and blood of Christ in the form of bread and wine. This is based on Aristotle, not the Bible. On the other hand, we must not overreact, however, to Roman Catholic error and

evacuate the sacraments of their profound meaning. The sacraments are not mere memorials of the past redemptive acts of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is present by his Word and Spirit in the administration of the sacraments. He strengthens us we receive the sacraments by faith.

The Sacrament of Baptism

The Shorter Catechism

Q.# 94 What is baptism ? A. Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's.

Q.# 95 To whom is baptism to be administered? A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him;(1) but the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized.

The Meaning of Baptism

Baptism is the **sacrament of initiation** into the visible church (Acts 2:38). It fulfills, and therefore replaces, circumcision because Christ has accomplished redemption (Matt. 28:19; Col. 2:11, 12; Rom. 4:11). Thus the rite of initiation changes from a bloody rite to a non-bloody rite. Christ's atoning work as the Second Adam eradicates the original sin of the First Adam. Just as circumcision baptism symbolizes the work of God's sovereign grace in the fallen heart. True circumcision is that of the heart (Rom. 2:28–29). This was also true in the Old Testament (Deut. 10:16). Circumcision was never merely a "national badge" as Baptists insist. Baptism symbolizes the cleansing work of God's Spirit as he applies the finished work of Christ to the hearts of his elect people.

The baptismal formula, "**into** the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," teaches us that through the application of the atoning work of Christ we are brought into union and communion with the triune God (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 1:13, 15; 10:2; John 14:16–17). The goal of God's redeeming work is covenantal, spiritual, vital, and mystical union: "I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev. 26:12). The sprinkling of water symbolizes the Spirit's cleansing of the sinful heart in order to bring us into fellowship with God. Christ's work is the foundation; the Spirit is the agent who applies it. Thus we are ingrafted into Christ (Gal. 3:27; see Larger Catechism #165); receive remission of sins (Mark 1:4); purification and cleansing from the guilt and penalty of sin (Eph. 5:26); regeneration of the Spirit (Tit. 3:5); and resurrection unto everlasting life (1 Cor. 15:29; Rom. 6:5).

The Old Testament people were familiar with baptisms among the Levitical rites (Lev. 4:6; 8:11); and expected a forerunner of the Messiah to baptize (Eze. 36:25-28; Isa. 52:13-15). The cleansing theme comes into its own with the accomplishment of Christ in the New Testament (Acts 2:38, 3:19, 8:12, 37, 38, 10:47–48, 16:30-33, 19:4–6, 22:16; Tit. 3:5).

Contrary to Baptist thinking baptism is not a symbol of faith. Such is the thinking of Arminianism which emphasizes the efficacy of the fallen human will. Baptism symbolizes the sovereign grace of God applied **in** Christ and **by** his Spirit from heaven (Rom. 4:11). Faith is merely an instrument (Rom. 4:16).

Baptism is also not a symbol of the death and resurrection of Christ, although baptism is rooted in Christ's death and resurrection. The passage from which Baptists get this idea is Romans 6:1–14. Baptism unites us with the saving benefits of Christ's death and

resurrection. But baptism does not symbolize it. Rather it symbolizes the application of the death and resurrection of Christ. Verse 3 teaches that we are baptized into Christ's death (Matt. 20:20–23). "Burial" in Romans 6:4 emphasizes the definitive nature death, not the mode of burial. We are united with Christ in his death for and to sin. Paul's point is that our union with Christ in his death and resurrection forms the basis for living a righteous life. This does not mean that Christ's accomplishment is pictured in baptism. It is the Spirit's application of Christ's work that is pictured.

Finally, Christ's death is depicted as a water ordeal in which, like the Noachic flood, sin is judged. He bore the overwhelming flood of God's wrath for us. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:50; cf. Ps 69:2, 14–15).

The Mode of Baptism

The mode of baptism is not mentioned in Romans 6. Verses 1–4 should not be separated from verses 5–14. Paul's point has nothing to do with the mode. The Baptist idea that we go "down into" the water to symbolize death to sin; and we "rise out of" the water to symbolize resurrection unto newness of life has no basis in the theology or practice of the New Testament. Christ died on a cross, not in the water. He was buried in a tomb above ground, entered by a door on the side; he was not buried. We have no record of how he rose from the dead (Luke 24:12). He may have simply stood up and walked through the stone door.

The account of Christ's own baptism by John says nothing about the mode (Matt. 3:13–17). The idea that "he went up from the water" is naturally understood as going up from the river to the river bank. It describes a sequence of actions (indicated by the word "when"), not the mode of baptism. Furthermore, Jesus' baptism was not the same kind of baptism as ours. He was fulfilling all righteousness not as a sinner needing cleansing, but as a priest needing to be baptized into his priestly office as our Great High Priest (Ps. 2:7; 110:1; Heb. 5:5, 7:11–14). John the Baptizer was a Levite. Numbers 8:6–7 teaches the initiatory baptism of Levitical priests into their office (Heb. 3:1, 4:14, 9:11).

The baptisms of the Old Testament were all some form of sprinkling. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) is instructive in this regard. The essence of the meaning of the Greek word *bapto* or *baptizo* is cleansing. The mode of cleansing may be immersion, pouring, sprinkling or washing. In Daniel 5:21 it is used to describe the action of dew falling on Nebuchadnezzar. Various rites of purification by washing are described by the same word (Numb. 19:16–19; Lev. 8). All of these rites are referred to in Hebrews 9:10 as "various washings (lit. baptisms)". Sacrificial blood was "sprinkled" (Heb. 9:13). We are the elect through the "sprinkling of his (Jesus Christ's) blood" (1 Pet. 1:2).

In Acts 1:5 the disciples, waiting for Pentecost, were told: "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." When the Spirit came he was "poured out" (Acts 2:17) from heaven. No one was immersed in him.

The evangelist Philip baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch in a desert place where water was scarce (Acts 8:26, 36). Both Philip and the Ethiopian went "down into" and "came up out of" the water. To be consistent the Baptist minister should imitate Philip. Common sense tells us that the mode of baptism is not in view. Again the prepositions are naturally understood as referring to going up and down from the river to the river bank. Most notable is the passage of Scripture which moved the Eunuch to desire baptism. Isaiah 53:7–8 is from the last

Servant Song of Isaiah (52:13–53:12). At the beginning of the Song Isaiah promised that the Servant would “**sprinkle** many nations” (52:15).

Finally, Paul was baptized in the house of Ananais in Damascus (Acts 9:17–19). There is no mention of a tub or pool. Not having eaten in three days Paul was in a weak condition. We are told that “he rose and was baptized”. In other words he stood to be baptized, presumably sprinkled. We may also imagine the improbability of baptizing three thousand people on the day of Pentecost in an Ancient Near Eastern city in which water would have been a precious commodity. The Westminster Confession sums it up nicely: (28.3) **Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person** (Heb. 9:10,19–22; Acts 2:41; Acts 16:33; Mark 7:4).

The Application of Baptism

Baptists demand a New Testament command to baptize infants. This reminds us of the simplistic thinking of cults demanding the use of the word “Trinity” to prove that God is triune. The application of the sacrament of initiation to the children of believers is, in fact, commanded explicitly in Genesis 17 and implicitly in Acts 2:38. But one needs to understand the unity of the Covenant of Grace in order to see the full force of these commands with respect to the baptism of infants.

God’s covenant blessing was promised to Abraham and to his “seed” for an “everlasting covenant” to “all nations” (Gen. 17:1–14). This Old Testament promise, restated by the prophet Joel, is referred to by Peter as the reason God had poured out the Spirit of the Risen Lord on his people at Pentecost: “for the promise is for you and for your children” (Acts 2:39). For over two millennia the expectation of God’s people for Messianic blessing on the nations was rooted in the pattern of God’s dealing with families and including the offspring of believers in his promise of salvation.

Now at the historical moment of fulfillment a radical change in God’s mode of dealing with his people would be required in order to implement the Baptist exclusion of children from the blessings of the visible church. Such a change would have been an abrupt removal of blessing for the old covenant person. It is not conceivable that, were such a change in view, the new covenant would not deal explicitly and extensively with the subject, while in fact it is entirely silent. The so called “argument from silence” is then, in fact, an argument from the loud and clear revelation of the Old Testament Scriptures including the infants of believers in the visible community of God’s people. Such would have been assumed by Peter as he called the families gathered for the feast of Pentecost to believe and be baptized. The burden of proof is on the Baptist who would withdraw a millennia old practice which was based on the clear command of God. Where in the New Testament is such a withdrawal of blessing warranted?

The newness of the new covenant church is not undermined by appreciating the essential unity of God’s purposes and institutions (cf. Acts 7:35–38; Eph. 2:11–22; Gal. 3:7, 29; Rom. 11). As we have seen above the church is essentially the same from the Garden of Eden to Pentecost. Despite the evident deepening of the spirituality of the new covenant community, its visible nature remains the same. The accomplishment of the crucified and risen Christ stands at the center to the newness. Thus the bloody rites of initiation and communion are replaced with two sacraments of fulfillment. The need for visible signs and seals remains. The distinction between the visible and invisible aspects of the church must of necessity

remain until sin is no longer present in the church. It is the failure of Baptists to make this important ecclesiological distinction that leads them to err at this point.

At the center of the Baptist concern is the place of faith in new covenant salvation. Peter can only be addressing adults when he commands, “Repent and be baptized.” Only adults can repent therefore only adults can be baptized. The problem with this line of reasoning is that it fails when tested by a central Pauline text on the subject of faith: Romans 4. In stressing the centrality of faith in connection with the sacrament of circumcision, Paul demonstrates that Abraham first believed and only then was the sacrament of initiation into the Covenant of Grace administered to him. The problem is that when it was administered God also commanded Abraham to circumcise all of his children. Thus to say that we cannot administer a sign and seal of God’s grace to someone who has not appropriated that grace by faith is to say that God did not command what is proper. This is to set human reasoning above God’s ways.

Furthermore, Paul uses Abraham as a model for the New Testament believer. The Pharisaic misuse of circumcision for legalistic, self-justifying purposes does not negate the integrity of the sign and seal in God’s gracious purposes. It should also be noted that the command to repent and be baptized is always addressed to adults outside of the covenant. In the New Testament there are two categories of those outside. There are old covenant people who are called to embrace the new covenant in Christ; and there are those who come from the lost world into the new covenant. Both are to include their children in the visible church through the sign and seal of baptism. Even those who are baptized as infants must affirm God’s grace by confessing Christ in the Covenant community before they may include their children. We would expect, then, to see evidence of such inclusion in the documents and life of the New Testament church, remembering that such evidence will not be by way of explicit command, but rather by way of practices which assume the command already given in the old covenant economy.

What then is God’s attitude toward the children of believers as reflected in the New Testament writers? In Mark 10:13–16 Jesus blesses the children of the covenant. It was far more than mere sentiment that moved these Covenant mothers to desire the blessings of the Messiah upon their children. In recording the same incident Luke uses the Greek word *brepfos* to refer to the children. *Brepfos* means “infant” or “babe in arms”. He reminds the offended disciples that “of such is the kingdom of God.” At this point he is not saying that their childlike trust should be imitated. That this application is secondary is proved by its absence in Matthew’s account (Matt. 19:13–15). he simply asserts that they are part of God’s kingdom and that the offense taken by the disciples is not God’s way of viewing these helpless babes. Is there a better **picture of sovereign grace** than the blessing of Christ on helpless infants, or the sprinkling of the waters of baptism on an infant in the arms of a minister of the gospel? Is there anyone more helpless than a sinner dead in sin? The Baptist requirement of faith places the emphasis on the wrong element. “That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace” (Rom. 4:16).

It is significant that Paul addresses the children of believers as part of the visible church in Colossians (3:20) and Ephesians (6:1–3). In 1 Corinthians 7:14 Paul encourages the believing mothers in mixed marriages that their children are “holy”. This does not mean that they are morally pure, but that they are “set apart” by God as members of his church.

The five household baptisms recorded in the New Testament are strong presumptive evidence of the baptism of infants. In an era when birth control did not exist and extended

families were in view it is stretching credulity to believe that there were no infants present in the households of Cornelius (Acts 10:47–48; 11:14); Lydia (Acts 16:14–15); the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33–34); Crispus (Acts 18:8); and Stephanus (1 Cor. 1:16). Here was the Lord blessing “all the **families** of the earth” as he had promised Abraham. Our radical individualism often prevents us from thinking in terms of families.

Early church history simply confirms apostolic practice. As early as 180 AD Origen matter-of-factly reports that he was baptized as an infant. First century Christians would still have been around. In the fourth century Augustine asserts that infant baptism was “always retained” as the practice of the apostolic church; and that no church council had instituted the practice.

The Efficacy of Baptism

While affirming the Biblical practice of infant baptism, we must distance ourselves from the unbiblical ideas of “baptismal regeneration” or “presumptive regeneration”. Baptism does not save anyone. Esau was circumcised but not saved. This should not, however, lead us to underestimate the power of God’s Spirit and grace in the lives of children. John the Baptizer was regenerated in his mother’s womb. he leaped in his mother’s womb when Elizabeth heard the greeting Mary who was pregnant with the Messiah (Luke 1:41).

We baptize infants because God has commanded us to, not because of anything present in the infant. Each baptized person raised in the covenant must come to point of ratifying the blessing signified in his baptism by publically professing faith. Each child of the covenant must confess Christ as Lord and Savior through repentance and faith (cf. Jacob, Gen. 32:24ff; Nicodemus, John 3:1–21; 7:50; 19:39).

The Bible also gives evidence of God’s grace being applied to covenant infants dying in infancy. David expressed such a hope at the loss of the child he bore to Bathsheba. After the child died David asserted, “I shall go to him, but he will not return to me” (2 Sam. 12:23; cf. Ps. 22:10; Luke 1:44; 2 Tim. 3:15).

The Responsibility of Parents

Infant baptism, far from mitigating parental responsibility, undergirds and mandates it. Baptismal vows are taken because God uses the means of parental nurture and training, along with the means of grace in the church, to bring his children to repentance and faith. Baptism is an essential part of the context God has provided for the nurture and training of covenant youth. Treating them as outsiders to God’s grace, by denying them baptism, undermines that nurture. A consistent Baptist cannot teach his children to pray “Our Father . . .”. Thus every believing parent is bound by God’s covenant commandment to have their children baptized. God took the failure of Moses to circumcise his son very seriously. The Lord had warned Abraham of the consequences of disobedience in this area (Gen. 17:14; Exod. 4:24-26).

Unbiblical substitutes must be avoided. Consistent Baptists do not dedicate their children. Inconsistent Baptists do, based on Hannah’s dedication of Samuel in the temple (1 Sam. 1). The problem is that this dedication involved the Nazarite vow, which is part of the Mosaic economy done away with in Christ. It was not enjoyed by all of the old covenant children, only those set apart to special ministerial service. In fact, however, the instinct of covenant parents to dedicate their children to the Lord is a healthy one. So why not do it

God's way and have them baptized? Then parents may nurture them to repent and believe the gospel from within the covenant of grace where God has graciously placed them (Deut. 6:4ff; Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:15). The norm is that our children should never remember a time when they didn't know the Lord as their Savior. Nurture, rather than pushing them to a "crisis" experience, is God's way of making Christians out of our children. That God may use various crises to get our attention and mature us is not an excuse for a failure to nurture our children throughout their lives under our roofs. But our nurture does not guarantee our children's salvation any more than baptism does. The idea of "covenant succession," guaranteeing that baptism and nurture will make every child of the covenant a believer comes dangerously close to the Roman Catholic view of the sacraments. There is nothing automatic about either baptism or parental nurture. Most important in the nurture is the exhibition of grace in the lives of parents, not leaving the impression that being a Christian means being obeying God's commands.

I have written an aid for covenant young people and their parents in preparing for public profession, *Jesus Is My Lord and Savior: Public Profession for Covenant Youth*, available at our church website www.amoskeagchurch.org.

The Sacrament of The Lord's Supper

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#96 What is the Lord's supper? A. The Lord's supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is showed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace.
Q.#97 What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's supper? A. It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's supper, that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience; lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.

The Lord's Supper is the sacrament of spiritual communion and sustenance. Baptism represents our initiation into the covenant. The Lord's Supper represents our continual renewal in the covenant through the shed blood of our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. The institution of the Lord's Supper by the Lord Himself is recorded in each of the three synoptic gospels (Matt. 26:26–30; Mark 14:22–26; Luke 22:14–21) and by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23–34. This fourfold witness emphasizes the importance of the feast in the early church. Although the Bible does not prescribe the frequency of the supper's administration, our Lord's words "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26) indicate that it should be celebrated frequently in the Lord's Day worship of the church. The Lord's sacrificial death is the foundation and life of the church.

The fact that the Lord's Supper was instituted during the Passover in the upper room certainly indicates that the bloody rite is replaced by a non-bloody rite of fulfillment. However, it should not be forgotten that our Lord's atoning death fulfills the entire sacrificial system of the old covenant. "For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:13–14).

As a **sign** of the Covenant of Grace the Lord's Supper pictures the finished work of Christ as the atonement for the sins of his people (Isa. 52:13–53:12; Matt. 26:26ff). As a **seal** the Lord's Supper assures us of the sufficiency of the Lord's sacrifice to cover our sins as we partake of it in faith. The very act of eating pictures and assures us through faith that our trust is well founded due to the nature of Christ's death and his promises to those trusting him. We actually "fellowship" with the death of Christ and Christ Himself is truly and really present through his Word and Spirit in the Supper (1 Cor. 11:16).

The biblical doctrine of communion is at odds with the Lutheran view called "**consubstantiation**." This view mediates between the Roman view and the Calvinistic view. According to Luther the body and blood of Christ is "in, with and under" the elements. The body of the risen Christ is thereby thought to be ubiquitous. This compromise undermines the distinction between the divine and human natures of Christ. Christ's body is finite and located at the right hand of God in heaven. "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" (Heb. 8:1–2).

The biblical doctrine of communion also refutes the Roman Catholic error of "**transubstantiation**." Transubstantiation is based on the Aristotelian distinction between form and substance. When the priest consecrates the elements they are supposedly changed into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ while remaining under the appearance of bread and wine. This explains the extreme care taken by the priest in handling the elements, placing the wafer into the communicants mouth and forbidding the wine to the clumsy laity. In trying to take Christ's statement "This is my body" seriously Rome has forced the word "is" to refer to physical reality. In fact, when Christ says "I am the true vine" no one interprets this literally. Only by understanding it as a metaphor is the real meaning discovered. So "This is my body" teaches us that the bread is a sign and seal of the historical-spiritual reality of Christ's death on the cross as a substitute for his people. The idea that the Mass is considered a re-sacrifice of the Savior stands in clear contradiction to the finished nature of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice (Heb. 9:23–28; 10:10).

Perhaps in reaction to the Roman error the so-called Zwinglian view (it is doubtful that Zwingli himself actually taught this) sees the Lord's Supper as a mere memorial of the Lord's death. By contrast Calvin correctly set forth the rich Biblical view of the "real presence" of the Lord in the Supper. The reality, however, is not physical but spiritual through the Word and Spirit of Christ who dwells in the midst of his church.

As a renewal of the covenant the Lord's Supper calls us to come to the table repenting of our sins and trusting in the complete sufficiency of Christ's death to cover them. In 1 Corinthians 11:23ff we are instructed regarding our attitude toward the supper as we partake: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning 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" (1 Cor. 11:27–29). Many introspective Christians refrain from the Lord's Supper by misunderstanding this requirement. Worthy partaking does not demand sinless perfection or else no one could partake. The Lord's Supper is meant to nourish us in the present state of imperfection. Unworthy partaking is failing to discern the significance of Christ's death. His death calls us to repent of sin and trust Christ. The warning is to the lax and undiscerning. Everyone who

has a due sense of their unworthiness and purpose to live a holy life are called to be strengthened and nourished by the efficacy of Christ's death. The supper is meant to build our confidence in Christ, to be assured of his love for us, and to be strengthened to live for him by pursuing righteousness in our daily lives. Self-examination is meant to lead to repentant believing, not morbid doubt. This confidence alone will enable us to mortify sin and live for our Lord's glory.

The Table of our Lord is to be fenced by the elders of the church, so that all who partake must be baptized and professing members in good and regular standing in a true church of Jesus Christ. Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 11 is meant for those who are part of the covenant community. Members who in good conscience refrain from partaking must deal with the obstacle that stands in their way and should enlist the counsel of the elders in doing so. The elders should take note and lovingly inquire in order to minister to the refraining brother or sister.

The early church referred to the supper as the "eucharist". When our Lord instituted the supper he did so with thanksgiving. That is the meaning of the word "eucharist". "when he had given **thanks**, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me' " (1 Cor. 11:24). The ultimate attitude fostered by the Lord's Supper is thanksgiving for the wonder of God's grace: "Amazing love! How can it be that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?" "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Prayer

The Shorter Catechism

Q.#98 What is prayer? A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.

Q.#99 What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer? A. The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer, but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples, commonly called The Lord's prayer.

Q.#100 What doth the preface of the Lord's prayer teach us? A. The preface of the Lord's prayer (which is, Our Father which art in heaven teacheth us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others.

Q.#101 What do we pray for in the first petition? A. In the first petition (which is, Hallowed by thy name we pray, That God would enable us and others to glorify him in all that whereby he maketh himself known; and that he would dispose all things to his own glory.

Q.#102 What do we pray for in the second petition? A. In the second petition (which is, Thy kingdom come we pray, That Satan's kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened.

Q.#103 What do we pray for in the third petition? A. In the third petition (which is, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven we pray, That God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven.

Q.#104 What do we pray for in the fourth petition? A. In the fourth petition (which is, Give us this day our daily bread we pray, That of God's free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy his blessing with them.

Q.#105 What do we pray for in the fifth petition? A. In the fifth petition (which is, And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors we pray, That God, for Christ's sake, would freely pardon all our sins; which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by his grace we are enable from the heart to forgive others.

Q.#106 What do we pray for in the sixth petition ? A. In the sixth petition (which is, And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil we pray, that God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted.

Q.#107 What doth the conclusion of the Lord’s prayer teach us? A. The conclusion of the Lord’s prayer (which is, For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen teacheth us to take our encouragement in prayer from God only, and in our prayers to praise him, ascribing kingdom, power, and glory to him. And, in testimony of our desire, and assurance to be heard, we say, Amen.

The amount of space given to prayer by the Westminster Divines in The Shorter Catechism is a testimony to the importance of prayer in the Christian life. Prayer is a powerful and central part of the Christian life. It is one of only three “means of grace”. In our personalistic and practical age it is easy to assume that prayer is merely a means of personal psychological strengthening which bears little relationship to everyday reality. In fact prayer strengthens us to build the kingdom of God according to God’s sovereign working in history.

The Catechism gives an excellent and memorable definition of prayer: **“Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.”**

Prayer is actually our response to God’s gracious word to us in Scripture. It is our response through the mediator, Jesus Christ: our prophet, priest and king. “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:13, 24). To pray in Christ’s name is not a magic formula, but it means to pray in the richness of his threefold mediatorial office.

Through Christ’s prophethood we pray *only* in accordance with his word and *all* that his word teaches us about prayer. “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him” (1 John 5:14–15). This means that we are to be God centered in prayer, and not self centered. “You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:2–3). We submit not only to the preceptive will of God but also to his providential will. God is not a vending machine from which we obtain our wishes. Our wishes are to be his wishes. “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

The Lord’s Prayer is the most comprehensive model for prayer in the Bible. Like the Ten Commandments it is a summary of all prayer (Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4). It was given as an answer to the disciples’ request “Lord teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). All of the prayers in the Bible make excellent examples. The Psalms of David are incomparable in this regard.

Through Christ’s Priesthood we are enabled to come as sinners before the throne of grace with boldness in prayer. A holy God does not answer the prayers of the wicked, but only the prayers of the repentant sinner (Luke 18:10–14; Prov. 15:29). It is only through our Advocate that we can or may pray at all. “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”

(Heb. 4:14–16; Ps. 116:1–2). We must always come before our gracious God with confession of our sins and trust in the righteousness of our Substitute.

Through Christ's Kingship we have confidence that he to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Matt. 28:20; cf. Acts 4:24–31) is able to do far above what we can either ask or think (Eph. 3:20). Our prayers must focus on building his kingdom and bringing all to his glorious name.

The normal pattern of prayer in the Bible is to pray to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit. However, by virtue of the fact that all three persons of the Trinity are equally God, we may at times pray to each separately and all together. All three are always the object of our prayers. Stephen, just before being stoned to death for his faith, prayed to his risen Lord: "And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:59–60). While the Greek word *kurios* (translated *Lord*) is used to refer to Jehovah in the New Testament, it most often refers to the *Lord* Jesus Christ. The prayer of the persecuted disciples in Acts 4:24–31 is instructive in this regard.

The basic parts of prayer are often remembered by the acrostic **ACTS**: **A**doration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving and **S**upplication. This order is fine except that confession perhaps ought to come first. It is a simple way to remember the essential elements in biblical prayer, not meant to a rigid rule. **Adoration** is usually completely overlooked, or done in a perfunctory manner. In fact it is the heart and soul of prayer and communion with God. True prayer ought to begin and end with adoration (Ps. 138). **Thanksgiving** is the acknowledgment that all good things for body and soul come from the Father (Ps. 136; 1 Thess. 5:17; Phil. 4:6). Thanksgiving should be specific and will help curb a lack of contentment. **Confession** of our sin and sins should also be specific and heartfelt (Ps. 51; James 4:8; 1 John 1:8–2:2), and made with confidence of forgiveness in Christ. **Supplication** brings our requests for others and ourselves, in that order, before God. He knows what we have need of before we ask, but wants us to learn the true source of blessing (Matt. 6:8). All things great and small should be brought before our Father in heaven (Phil. 4:6). Pour out your heart like David and Paul (Ps. 62:8).

The benefits of prayer are manifold. True prayer builds confidence and love (1 John 5:14, 15; Psalm 116:1); curbs our fears (Luke 18:1ff); and guards against sin and temptation (Mark 14:38; Ps. 66:18–20). In all of this the kingdom of God grows in our hearts and in the world which the Lord uses us to effect. The greatest benefit of prayer is that it gives all glory to God to whom it belongs.

Public Worship

The worship of God in Jesus Christ in public and private is the great goal of the Christian religion. Public worship is the corporate adoration of God's people as the body of the risen Savior and Lord. This is central to the life of the church. The mission of the church is to call the nations of worship the Lord (Psalm 2). Public worship is the primary use of the means of grace. The entire Psalter is a testimony to this great neglected fact.

Christ promises his special presence to his gathered people (Matt. 18:20); and through the writer of Hebrews commands us not to neglect the worship assembly (Heb. 10:25). Public worship is essential to our perseverance unto the end. It is a blessing to the whole church (Ps. 92:13–14; 1 Cor. 12:12–27). We should declare with David: "For a day in your courts is

better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Ps. 84:10).

The liturgy, or order of public worship, should reflect the Covenant of Grace. It is a covenantal dialogue, that is, God speaks to us and we respond to him. We **approach** God through his mercy and grace in Jesus Christ by invoking his presence, confessing our sins, and being assured of his complete pardon. We hear and obey the **proclamation** of his Holy Word. Our **response** to the Lord moves us to confess the faith once delivered to the saints, to bring our prayers before the throne of grace, and gladly bring our tithes in acknowledgment of his Lordship in our lives, and offering ourselves as his willing and glad servants. public worship is seasoned throughout with the singing of praise to God. The Lord’s Day and the public worship of our God is meant to form and flavor our lives throughout the week.

The atmosphere of worship should be dignified, majestic and joyful. Following the latest fads, especially with an easy familiarity, or aping popular culture, detracts from God’s glory and awesome holiness. The way we worship is part of the message about what we think of our God and his worship. This will follow as the night the day if we bear in mind that above all public worship gives supreme glory to the Triune God. “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.” Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD” (Ps. 96:8–12).



Chapter 6

Mission: The Propagation of Our Profession

The Task of the Church

The church is the missionary organization in this world—the heavenly embassy of the exalted Christ. In the Book of Acts we do not find missionary organizations outside of the church. The healthy church is self-governing, self-supporting, and **self-propagating** (cf. John L. Nevius, *Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*). We are too often satisfied when we have achieved the first two. The church is the missionary organization of the New testament era. She alone is called to fulfill the Great Commission given by our risen Lord, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18–20).

After Paul preached in Pisidian Antioch we are told “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region” (Acts 13:48–49). Paul told the Thessalonian church “For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything” (1 Thess. 1:8). Acts 1:8 gives us the scope of our missions enterprise in concentric circles starting in Jerusalem and encompassing the earth. Paul’s missionary journeys are ever widening circles of witness. As a city set on a hill (Matt. 5:14) we are continuing that circle of gospel witness. We are called to nothing less than discipling the nations, including teaching and administering the sacraments to the converted (Matt. 28:18–20). The church is always in the mission mode or else it is less than a biblical church. One of the chief failures of the old covenant church was its failure to be a light to the Gentiles (Acts 13: 16–47; cf. Isa. 42:6; 49:6).

Those who possess the rich historical expression of the whole counsel of God known as “the Reformed faith” have an awesome missionary responsibility. Rather than inhibit aggressive evangelism the sovereignty of God in salvation should call and embolden us to spread the word of God. After Paul preached at Antioch we are told that “as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). In Corinth God’s elective purposes formed the ground of his confidence to preach: “And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.’ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:9–11).

We ordinarily think of missions as something that happens elsewhere. But in the Bible what happens elsewhere begins at home. Paul and Barnabas were originally sent from Palestinian Antioch (Acts 13:1–3). Home and foreign missions are simply discipling the nations near and far. The task and goals are the same: to spread the Good News for God’s glory. Thus evangelism and missions are one task. Evangelism is the means of promoting missions and the glory of God through worship and service is the goal.

We must be careful to distinguish this task from less than biblical views. We are not multiplying disciples for the sake of numbers. Outward success is not our goal. Inner change of heart and a consequent change of life is what we pray for, but only God can do this. Ours is to be faithful in spreading and living the message. In fact, instead of “saving souls” we are making disciples to worship and serve the risen Lord. Those who become disciples are called to spread this worship and service. Thus the worship services of the church are not evangelistic meetings. We are to go out from worship to call others to worship and serve the King. Furthermore, the call to salvation is not a call to be forgiven only. It is a call to discipleship through repentance and faith.

The Message of Missions

God is a speaking God who constantly speaks through his creation and providence (Rom. 1:20); but because of the blindness caused by sin has spoken by the sending of his Son the Speech or Word of God incarnate (Heb. 1:1–3). The message of evangelism is the message of the good news that God has sent his Son to save the world from sin and death. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of his message: “how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:20–21). This is the message of the entire Bible in essence (Luke 24).

The minister of the word is the chief ambassador. He is responsible for the actual public proclamation of the word. But the entire church is responsible for missions in two ways: as personal witnesses themselves, and by using their gifts and graces to promote missions. Every Christian is to pray for missions, especially that people would *beg to hear* the gospel (Acts 13:42); that God would create a hunger; as well as praying for family, friends and neighbors. Every Christian is to pray for the preacher regularly and specifically (Eph. 6:19; 2 Thess. 3:1). Church members and especially elders should make sure that the minister of the word is free to pursue the ministry of the word and prayer. This is why the first deacons were ordained (Acts 6:2). Every Christian is to give self-sacrificially to missions. Every Christian is to ask what else can I do to help spread the word? Natural gifts and training in every area can aid the missionary task. Medical services is one excellent example.

Furthermore, every Christian is to be ready with an answer for the hope that is in them (1 Pet. 3:15). The New Testament indicates that all Christians spread the word by telling the good news to others. “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” (Acts 8:4; cf. Matt. 10:32). The word “preaching” here is literally “evangelizing”. The news was too good to keep to themselves.

Many Christians feel inadequate to the task. Many do not have many contacts outside of the church. Some thoughtful preparation, fervent prayer and the cultivation of love for the lost will make up for all of these deficiencies. Be ready to tell the basic facts of the Bible about who God is, what sin is, what Christ has done for sinners and how to repent and trust in him. Will Metzger’s *Tell The Truth* is helpful in preparation for the task. John Blanchard’s evangelistic booklet *Ultimate Questions* gives the basic message in the Biblical order, and is therefore excellent to remind you of the message and to give to unbelievers. All God expects you to do is tell what you know. Being *ready* of course means that we need to study to know more (2 Tim. 1:12; 2:15). If someone asks a question that you cannot answer, just say “I don’t know. But I’ll find out.”

The gospel message is central to our witness, but personal testimony to what the Lord has done for us is an excellent personal supplement (1 Tim. 1:15; cf. Paul's testimony Acts 22:1ff; 26:1ff). Personal testimony, however, is never a replacement for the message by which we were saved.

Deed Ministry in Missions

Demonstrating God's love for sinners in our personal lives is an essential aspect of our witness to a loveless world. Deed ministry is never a substitute for the message of the gospel, but we must be examples of the reality of the gospel. We need to develop God's attitude toward people. "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16; cf. 7:16). "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). "You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all" (2 Cor. 3:2). Exhibit the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–26). The gospel makes a difference in the lives of sinners, and we must demonstrate the difference it makes.

Deed ministry is not just doing nice things for people. It is the coming of the kingdom of Jesus Christ through his people with deeds of truth and love in a false and loveless world. This means that we will imitate Paul when he says "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). We need to be sensitive to the humanity of sinners and try to meet them on their own turf. Of course, this never means compromising the truth or ethical standards. But it does mean we are to have genuine love for people as God's image bearers, and compassion because we too are sinners saved by grace alone. Remember they are dead in sin and blind to the truth you see so clearly. We need to earn their respect. This is the reason that personal evangelism is far more effective than simply passing out tracts, though there is a place for both. "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds" (Matt. 11:19). "When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34; cf. Luke 15:1ff).

We should distinguish between the church and the common kingdom of the world. The church is called to maintain the means of grace and spread the good news. As individual Christians we should engage in different areas of the common kingdom as we are called to seek the genuine peace and good of the world in which God has placed us, while maintain the antithesis of our ultimate allegiance to the king and kingdom of heaven.

The Method of Missions

Far too much emphasis is placed on methodology in the modern church. If we practice word and deed ministry our methods will be obvious with a little common sense. Whatever we do should be done honestly and done well. Look at examples of personal encounter in the Bible and learn from the approach of evangelists like Jesus in John 4 and Philip in Acts 8. Good literature, brochures, and tracts should be used. Invite unbelievers into your home and to church if they show an interest in the gospel. There is no magic method. But every

legitimate avenue should be explored by the church, especially in the marketplace and the public forum, where the church is presently least visible. One reason for this is that ministers of the Word are often expected to be CEO's, administrators, and psychologists, when their primary calling is to minister the Word of God to the church *and the world*. Every member should take responsibility by making suggestions to the session, supporting their efforts and praying for their planning.

Apologetics in Missions

Apologetics is literally a **defense of the faith**. "I am put here for the **defense** of the gospel" (Phil. 1:17). "but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to **make a defense** to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame" (1 Pet. 3:15–16). The gospel has intellectual integrity because it is the truth. It can therefore be argued, but this must be done humbly and in love. We are to love God with all of our minds. Paul argued in the synagogue and in the pagan forum "So he **reasoned** in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there" (Acts 17:17; cf. 18:4). Proud argument is condemned in Scripture: "he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain" (1 Tim. 6:4–5). However, godly argument is commanded: "We **destroy arguments** and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

Paul spoke the language of his hearers. This means that while he quoted Scripture in the synagogue he did not use it in the same way in the pagan marketplace. he knew his audience and started wherever they were in their thinking, knowing that living in God's world, with minds and consciences made in God's image, he could bring them face to face with the claims of the gospel. We need to be aware of what our culture is thinking. Like the men of Isaacher we should have "understanding of the times" (1 Chron. 12:32).

We must also remember that **sinner are not neutral in their thinking**. They are living in active denial of the claims that their Creator has upon them. "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. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen" (Rom. 1:18–25).

Because **he has clearly revealed Himself to sinners** in his creation, in their consciousness and consciences they are without excuse. Furthermore, sinners attempt to replace God with idols of their own making. We must lovingly confront them with their idols and **unveil their false presuppositions** (the assumed ideas of one's worldview). Show them the inconsistency of their position and warn them compassionately of the eternal consequences of their beliefs. Greg L. Bahnsen's *Always Ready* is an excellent book on this subject.



Chapter 7

Last Things: The Fulfillment of Our Profession

Eschatology simply means the study of *last things*. In Paul’s great exposition of the resurrection he uses the word *eskatos* “And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The **last** Adam *became* a life-giving spirit.” (1 Cor. 15:45). In Revelation Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* **End**, the First and the Last.” (Rev. 22:13; cf. 1:17; 2:8). Peter refers to “scoffers will come in the **last** days” (2 Pet. 3:3). he also refers to the very end of history, the last of the last days: “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the **last** time. ... he indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these **last** times for you” (1 Pet. 1:5, 20). “Hath in these **last** days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Heb. 1:2). “How they told you that there would be mockers in the **last** time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts.” (Jude 18). John uses the word in his gospel to refer to the day of judgment: “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all he has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the **last** day” (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54). At Pentecost Peter asserted that the coming of the Spirit on the church was a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy regarding the **last** days: “And it shall come to pass in the **last** days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh” (Acts 2:17). Paul warns that “in the **last** days perilous times will come” (2 Tim. 3:1).

At the end of the last days will be **Jesus Christ will return** and execute **the last judgment**. “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, 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. And he will send his **angels** with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Matt 24:30–31). “I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season.” (2 Tim. 4:1–2). “Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 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. 20:11–13).

Personal Eschatology

The intermediate state referred to on pages 31–33, is not the goal of our salvation. Paul refers to this state as a period of waiting for our proper clothing, i.e. our resurrection bodies (2 Cor. 5:1–8). This is **heaven**. But our resurrection should not be viewed in isolation from the great historical event of which it is part. “Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thess. 4:17). God’s elect from all nations will be vindicated

before the great throne of final judgment, and ushered into his glorious presence in the new heavens and the new earth depicted symbolically in Revelation 21:1–22:5. Heaven and earth shall meet in perfect harmony. God shall be our God and we shall be his people forever. “Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.” (Rev. 21:3). All of created reality shall be a temple of worship and service and the great plan of redemption in Jesus Christ shall be consummated in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. “we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” (Rom 8:23). “Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” (Rev. 19:9).

The other side of the great and final divide caused by God’s judgment is **hell**. This is as much a Biblical reality as heaven. The absolute justice of God demands it. There is no room for the unrepentant sinner in the presence of an absolutely holy God. “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (Rev. 21:8). The gentle and merciful Jesus speaks of hell more than anyone else in the Bible. “And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched -- “where ‘Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.’” (Mark 9:45–46). “*it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, when he comes, in that Day, to be glorified in his saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.” (2 Thess. 1:6–10).

Three errors must be condemned regarding the reality of heaven and hell: Purgatory, Annihilationism and “near death experiences.” Purgatory is rooted in the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation by works. The Bible simply gives no evidence of a “second chance”. As to Annihilationism the Bible is clear that the suffering of the wicked is eternal, not temporary. “And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” (Rev. 20:10; cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:10–15).

Historical Eschatology

The church historically has held to several views of last things. This subject really involves the Christian view of history and especially the proper method of interpreting the Bible (hermeneutics). All orthodox Christians hold certain elements of this truth in common. History is a battle between the City of God and the City of Man (sin and the Devil). Through the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ the City of God is sure to be victorious. At the Second Coming of Jesus Christ the last judgment will take place at which there will be an eternal separation between the wicked and the justified. The wicked will be cast into hell forever; and the justified will dwell in the new heaven and the new earth in the presence of God and the Lamb forever.

The word associated with these views is used in only one place in the Bible in Revelation 20:1–10): **millennium**. Thus the following four views are called *millennial* views.

The word literally means “one thousand”. It is clear from Revelation 20 that the period referred to is one of extraordinary blessing. The question is “When does this period become an historical reality?” Thus the names of the views reflect the relationship of this *millennium* to the Second Coming of Christ. The first two views are **Premillennial** (Classical and Dispensational): Christ returns at the beginning of the millennium (a literal thousand years). The second is **Postmillennial**: Christ returns at the end of the millennium (a symbolic thousand years). The third is **Amillennial**: Christ comes the first time (incarnation) at the beginning of the millennium and at the end (a symbolic thousand years).

Classical Premillennialism teaches that at the height of the power of the Antichrist Jesus Christ will appear, raise his people from the dead, and usher in a literal thousand year period of Kingdom peace on earth, centered in a rebuilt Jerusalem. At the end of the thousand years Christ will raise the wicked, execute final judgment and usher in the new creation. From the ancient church to the present biblical Christians have held this view.

Dispensational Premillennialism arose in the nineteenth century and is believed by a large number of biblical Christians today. John Nelson Darby and C. I. Scofield initiated and popularized this view in England and America respectively. Dispensationalism teaches that the nation of Israel and the church of the New Testament are on two different historical tracks in God’s plan. Biblical history is divided into seven dispensations: Innocency (creation to the fall); Conscience (the fall to the flood); Human government (the flood to the Tower of Babel); Promise (the patriarchs to Moses); Law (Moses to Christ); Grace (Christ to the millennium); and Kingdom (the millennial period). Jesus offered the kingdom to the Jews when he came into history; but they refused. Thus the period of Grace is a parenthesis in God’s plan which was unknown to the prophets. Dispensationalists look for history to get worse and worse until Christ returns to rebuild the temple, reinstitute the sacrificial system and reign in Jerusalem. Judgment will come at the end of this thousand year period of peace and heaven will be ushered in.

The biblical problems with this scheme are legion. It undermines hope of the success of the gospel among the nations. It makes the lordship of Christ a future reality, thus fostering *easy believism* and the doctrine of *the carnal Christian* (one can accept Christ as Savior without accepting him as Lord and still be saved, based on a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 3). It reads the Bible, especially the prophetic books, such as Ezekiel and Revelation, in a literalistic way, which evacuates the apocalyptic literature of its profound symbolic meaning. It views the *last days* as future, thus focusing on the Second Coming as if Christ is not already the King. It is also, therefore, essentially antinomian, believing that the law only applied to Old Testament believers. Because of its negative view of the present Dispensationalism teaches a weak view of the “organized church”, expecting it to be apostate as it nears the end of this dispensation.

The real question is: “What does Revelation 20 teach?” It teaches an overview of the entire period between the first and second comings of Christ, in which Satan is bound with respect to his blinding of the nations to the gospel. The Great Commission is based on this assumption. When Peter explained what the coming of the Spirit meant he asserted that Jesus Christ was enthroned at the resurrection (Acts 2:30–31). He is presently the Lord of his people who are to go to the nations with his good news. Thus, as with all of the numbers of Revelation, one thousand is symbolic of a complete period of God’s dealings in history, leading to the consummation of his plan in Jesus Christ.

Postmillennialism teaches that the millennial period will come before the second coming through the preaching of the gospel to all nations. This Golden Age will come to an end when the great apostasy occurs. Then Christ will return to judge and usher in the eternal kingdom. Most of the Puritans and many Reformed Christians hold to this view.

Unfortunately, nineteenth century Liberals set forth a similar view based on moralism and the social gospel, rather than the supernatural power of the gospel. Iain Murray's *Puritan Hope* is an excellent treatment of the Puritan doctrine of Postmillennialism.

Amillennialism teaches that the millennial period encompasses all of these last days between the two comings of Christ. There will be no golden age of the gospel, though the gospel will triumph in the hearts of God's elect from all nations before the great apostasy occurs; Christ will return to judge the living and the dead; and the new heavens and the new earth are ushered in. Many Christians throughout history, particularly during the Reformation, and also at present, hold to this view.

Postmillennialism and Amillennialism best capture the Scriptural data of the whole counsel of God. Amillennialism does this most consistently of all. What is critical is that we labor in light of the Second Coming to disciple the nations by teaching and preaching the Word of God and aggressively build the Church of Jesus Christ through the power of his wonderful Gospel.

“ ‘I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.’ The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.” (Rev. 22:16–17).



Conclusion

What next? As noted in the introduction, this course is meant to help prepare you to make a good profession of faith in Jesus Christ. In order to do this you do not need to agree with every detail of what has been said above, understand everything you have read, or be able to repeat it all. This course is a beginning, not an end. As a foundation it is meant to stimulate you and give you a structured guide for further study.

The question you now need to ask is “Can I answer ‘yes’ to each of the questions for public profession of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?” (cf. Appendix A) Are these your considered and heartfelt convictions based on the Word of God? If your answer is “Yes” then you are ready for the next step.

You should meet with the pastor to make your desire for membership known. At that time be sure to ask him any doctrinal or personal questions you may have. It is also important to state any disagreements you may have with what has been taught here.

Then, if the pastor thinks you are ready, you will come before the session for examination. This is not something to be feared. The elders are delighted to hear God’s children profess their faith in Jesus Christ. The elders will want to hear how you came to know the Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. They will also want to know why you wish to join this particular church. Then they will ask you each of the four questions for public profession. The elders may want to ask further questions in each of the four areas. They will also want to hear your expectations of the church and how you intend to serve your Lord in his church. There will be no trick questions. You do not need to be a theologian to become a member of the church. You need to be a genuine Christian. That is what the session is interested in.

As you make your profession take the inspired words of Paul to heart: “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6:12).



Appendix A

Questions for Public Profession of Faith in Christ

1. Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?
2. Do you believe in one living and true God, in whom eternally there are three distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—who are the same in being and equal in power and glory, and that Jesus Christ is God the Son come in the flesh?
3. Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, that you repent of your sin, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?
4. Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord and do you promise, in reliance on the grace of God, you will serve him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?
5. Do you promise to participate faithfully in this church’s worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline, even in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life?

from: “The Directory for the Public Worship of God” Chapter IV.B.2
The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church 2011, page 158.

Appendix B

The Apostles' Creed

Although not written by the apostles, the Apostles' Creed, is a concise summary of their teachings. It originated as a baptismal confession, probably in the second century, and developed into its present form by the sixth or seventh century.

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
and born of the virgin Mary.
he suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Appendix C

The Lord's Prayer

(The Authorized King James Version)

Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

Appendix D

The Ten Commandments

(Exodus 20:1-17, ESV)

And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.
3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Appendix E

The Five Points of Calvinism

The Five Points represent the response of Reformed theologians to five errors set forth by Jacobus Arminius in the early seventeenth century. These theologians met at the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619). The document which came from their deliberations is called *The Canons of Dordt*. This forms one part of the confessional documents of the Continental Reformed churches known as *The Three Forms of Unity* (the other two are *The Belgic Confession* and *The Heidelberg Catechism*). They are the Five Points of “Calvinism” because the theologians of Dordt were followers of Calvin’s theology. He died almost seventy years prior, and taught the sovereignty of God’s grace as he learned it from Scripture. The acrostic TULIP is used as a mnemonic device. This is especially appropriate since Dordt is in Holland, the land of tulips.

TOTAL DEPRAVITY (TULIP)

Man in sin is completely unable to please God. he is “dead in sin” and a rebel against the ways of righteousness and love. There is nothing about him that recommends him to a holy God.

Sin is the breaking of God’s law, which is best summarized in the Ten Commandments. “Sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). Sin is failing to do what God has commanded and doing what he has forbidden. When the Bible says that man is a sinner it means that he is not only breaking God’s law as a matter of course; but also that he a natural disposition to do so. In what sense is mankind *totally* depraved or sinful?

First, **every person is a sinner**. This is so because of the covenant that God made with Adam in the beginning. As the representative of all mankind, he brought all into sin by his fall (Rom. 5: 12-21). Thus everyone born of Adam’s race inherits a sinful nature. No one is exempt from Original Sin. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Second, **every aspect of each person is sinful**. The intellect, the will and the emotions as well as the body are corrupted by sin. “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” (Gen. 6:5).

Third, **every thought, word and deed is corrupted by sin**. “Actual transgressions” proceed from our sinful selves. “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matt. 15:19).

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION (TULIP)

God’s choice of who he will call to Himself is *not* based on anything in them. It is due entirely to his sovereign election. God’s eternal plan (his decrees) includes his election of a portion of mankind to be saved (Rom. 8:28–29; Eph. 1:4–6). This aspect of God’s sovereignty over all things, known as *Predestination*, is his specific sovereignty in the salvation of his people (for more on God’s sovereignty see Chapter 2, pp. 13–14).

The point here is to emphasize that God’s choice of us is *unconditional*. That is it is not based on any qualities in the sinner. No one is any more “redeemable” than anyone else. This

truth is meant to humble us and give all the glory to the Author of our salvation. God told Moses: “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Exod. 33:19). Jacob and Esau were chosen before they were born, before they had done any good or evil “in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls” (Rom. 9:11). “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (Rom. 9:16). In fact God often chooses the least likely candidates in order to display the wonders of his grace. “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’ ” (1 Cor. 1:26–31).

LIMITED ATONEMENT (TULIP)

There is one very important question concerning the nature of Christ’s accomplishment which needs to be answered. For whom did Christ Die? Christ died for his elect, *all* of them and *only* for them. If in fact, as some (Arminians) maintain, he died in the place of every single person in the whole world, then according to justice *everyone* must be saved. If the penalty is paid then God will not exact that penalty again. To say otherwise is to impugn God’s absolute justice. Of course, the Bible clearly teaches that many will not be saved (2 Thess. 1:6–10; Matt. 25:46). Thus the Arminian makes the effect of Christ’s work on the cross depend on man’s choice. Such an atonement then provides only a *potential* salvation. No actual payment is made. This is not the teaching of Scripture because this is not the nature of the finished work of Christ on the cross.

The Bible teaches that Christ died for his elect people. His work on the cross had a definite object: to procure the salvation of his elect people. The very nature of Christ’s work as a substitute involves his *actually* taking our place under God’s judgment for our sin. Redemption requires that the price of the penalty *actually* be paid. God’s design in sending Christ was to “save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Anything less than this undermines the effectiveness, power, and purpose of Christ’s death. Furthermore, the nature of God’s love in Christ is such that he rescues people who are dead in sin and unable and unwilling to come to him. If the effectiveness of Christ’s death depended on human choice nobody would be saved. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

As to the *definiteness* of the atonement the nature of love itself teaches us that love must have a definite object. No woman would be impressed with a lover who claimed to love all women in general. She is only impressed when he makes her the actual object of his love. True love always has a definite object. Such is the love of Christ, the husband, for his bride the church (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:4; 5:25). The word “foreknew” in Romans 8:29 does not mean that God foresaw who would choose him. It means that God in eternity set his love upon us. “Know” in Hebrew referred to a relation of intimacy and delight: “Adam knew his wife Eve” (Gen. 4:1). “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2; cf. Gen. 18:19; Jer. 1:5; John 10:14; 2 Tim. 2:19). Christ’s giving of Himself for his church was to

make her holy, nothing less. If his death only potentially saves everyone then it is a failure. No Christian would wish to impugn his work in this way. The problem is that few think through the logic of their beliefs. Paul says Christ “loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

C. H. Spurgeon used an excellent illustration to distinguish this biblical truth from the error of an unlimited or indefinite atonement. The Arminian bridge of salvation is wide enough for all of humanity, but only goes half way to the other side, thus giving hope to all but actual salvation to none. The biblical or Calvinistic bridge is narrower, only designed for God’s elect, but though it is limited it goes all the way to the other side, actually saving all for whom it was designed.

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE (TULIP)

This is what is known as the *effectual call* of God’s Spirit. This call occurs when God’s Spirit causes the Gospel Call to take effect (an effective call) as it did in Lydia’s heart when she heard the gospel message: “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul” (Acts 16:14). When Paul writes to various churches he often refers to them as those “who are called to belong to Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:6; Eph. 4:1). This refers to those who are *effectually called*. Jesus tells us that his sheep hear his voice (John 10:3, 16). “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:18, 24).

Some object to this as if God works against the will of the sinner. In fact, he changes the will of the sinner by giving him a new heart. When someone is effectually called they desire what they once opposed or *resisted*. When God sets his love and affections on someone from eternity he wins them by changing them. Thus his grace is *irresistible*. If our wills initiated our salvation then several impossible and undesirable ideas would result. First, God would not be in control of history. History would be under the control of sinful people. Second, we would attribute salvation to our wise choice and steal part of the glory due to God alone. The logic of Scripture as you can see begins with man as a helpless, spiritually dead, sinner. Once this clear biblical truth is affirmed the rest of what we call Calvinism follows necessarily. Only sovereign, irresistible grace can save such a sinner.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS (TULIP)

This doctrine has been a source of much confusion in the church. As with God’s sovereignty in salvation in general, if we let all of Scripture be our guide we will be on sure footing and get a full account of the matter. We may sum it up this way: God’s elect *will* persevere and God’s elect *must* persevere. We must not try to reconcile God’s sovereignty with man’s responsibility but accept them because they are both clearly revealed in God’s Word for our benefit. Furthermore this is the nature of our covenant relationship with God. he has *sovereignly* called us into a *living* relationship with Himself.

Some Christians err on this doctrine because they only accept one side of the Scripture’s teaching. Arminians take the threats and warnings of Scripture seriously, but wrongly conclude that we can lose our salvation. Others who hold to the doctrine of “Eternal

Security” take the promises of Scripture seriously but wrongly believe that once you are saved you are always saved no matter how you live.

The Biblical doctrine teaches that we are guaranteed by God’s grace that we will continue in the way of salvation to the end. Stated this way we take into account both the security of God’s gracious promises and importance of our continuing in faith and faithfulness to the end.

God’s elect *will* continue in faith and faithfulness to the end, by God’s grace, and based on **his promises of preservation**. “Being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6 NKJV). The Lord Jesus Christ “will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:8–9; cf. Rom. 8:28–30). The nature of God’s sovereign grace dictates that he will finish what he has begun. To say with the Arminian that we can be saved one day and lost the next impugns the perfection and power of Christ’s work. Furthermore God does not want us to live insecurely, not knowing from one day to the next if he loves us. As our heavenly Parent he never stops loving us. This is the foundation of his nurture and our growth in grace.

On the other hand, God’s elect *must* persevere to the end, based on **his commands to persevere**. Along with God’s promises of preservation Scripture gives us commands to persevere, along with warnings of the consequences of not persevering. These function as the goads of the Good Shepherd which keep us on the right path and direct us back when we stray (Ps. 23). Jesus said, “The one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt. 10:22). Paul exhorts the Philippians to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). The book of Hebrews is filled with exhortations to persevere. “Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope” (Heb. 3:6). After speaking of the degree to which one may participate in the life and blessings of the church and yet turn one’s back on the gospel under the pressure of persecution, the writer of Hebrews says, “Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. . . . And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end” (Heb. 6:9, 11). “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:23).

On the surface such warnings look as we can lose our salvation. However John tells us that certain professing Christians left the church and turned their backs on salvation because they were never truly Christians: “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” (1 John 2:19). We make our calling and election sure by continuing in God’s grace (2 Pet. 1:10). To say, as those who teach “Eternal Security” do, that “we are saved no matter what we do” is to foster a dangerous “easy believism” that undermines the purpose of God’s grace and gives “false assurance” to those who have never truly repented and believed the gospel. The Biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is both a comfort and a command designed to lead us to heaven.

