

A detailed photograph of the Westwerk (west end) of Westminster Abbey in London. The image shows the large rose window, the central tower with a spire, and the two tall, ornate towers of the west front. The architecture is Gothic, with intricate stonework and flying buttresses. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

# The Westminster Confession of Faith

# Considering Creeds and Confessions<sup>1</sup>

## I. Their Character – Rightly Understood

- A. They are Useful Summaries of the Teaching of Scripture on Key Points.
- B. They are Intended to do Two Things:
  - 1. To Assist the Church in instructing the saints in the Faith (efficiently and sufficiently)
  - 2. To Unite the Church in Communal Praise – to remind us of Who our God is, What He has done, What He is doing, and What He will do so that we can Praise Him in Unison.

## II. Anti-Creedalism Considered: No Creed but Christ; No Book but the Bible

- A. A relatively modern phenomenon
- B. The Phenomenon is Accelerated by the accents of the Modern, Western culture: Independence and Uniqueness
- C. The Real Distinctions:
  - 1. Public Creedalism and Private/Hidden Creedalism
  - 2. Acknowledging a Tradition and Submitting it to Scripture v. Refusing to Acknowledge a Tradition or Refusing to Submit One's Tradition to Scripture

<sup>1</sup> See Carl Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative*

# The Political and Religious Context of the Confession

- I. **The Reformation Comes to England.** The Reformation came to England during the reign of Henry VIII (1509 – 1547) , but it was not decidedly Protestant until Elizabeth’s reign (1558 – 1603). Even then it was a middle ground between the Roman Church and the Reformation Churches of the Continent.
- II. **Political and Religious Alliances.** By the time of Charles I (1625 -1649) there was a strong, and growing (and frustrated) Reformed, Puritan contingent in Scotland (Charles was forced to wage war against them there) and in England. That Reformed, and largely Presbyterian, contingent found political allies among member of the House of Commons who objected to Charles’ consolidation of the Powers of the Crown.
- III. **The English Civil War.** When Charles I calls Parliament back into session in November 1640, the Presbyterian Puritans were clearly in the majority. And, when Charles I, attempted to seize 5 members of the House of Commons whom he accused of treason, a civil war between Parliament and its supporters and the King, along with his supporters, broke out.
- IV. **The Calling for an Assembly.** In 1643 Parliament abolished the episcopacy and, therefore, had need for new documents that would set the doctrine, the worship, and the governance of the church in England (and Scotland). That need led to Parliament calling for an Assembly of 121 clergymen (along with 30 laymen selected by the clergy) (to meet at Westminster Abbey) to produce a Directory of Worship, a Confession of Faith, and a Catechism (they ultimately produce two) for instruction.

# The Marks of the Westminster Confession<sup>2</sup>

- I. **A New 39 Articles.** It was designed to replace (rather than edit) the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. Each chapter was originally entitled an "Article" of faith.
- II. **The Perspective of the Confession.** It is written in the third person (declaring what the Bible teaches) rather than in the second person (what the Christian believes - as in the Heidelberg Catechism, e.g., Q. #1 – What is *your* only comfort in life and in death?) Written from that perspective, the Confession has a more "scholastic" feel.
- III. **Three Great Strengths of the Confession:**
  - A. Its Coherence and Clarity – as the last of the great Reformed Confessions it profits from the best biblical and systematic work of all of the earlier Reformed writers.
  - B. Its Radical Commitment to the Necessity and Sufficiency of the Word of God and the Work of God – nothing that we need for salvation and life is left to our own speculation.
  - C. Its Willingness to deal with the fundamental doctrines that are clear, but difficult –
- IV. **One Difficulty With the Project** – The Problem of the merry-go-round vs. the Slide.

<sup>2</sup> See, Chad VanDixhorn, *Confessing the Faith*

# The Text of the Westminster Confession

- I. **The Pattern.** Thirty - Three Chapters with each generally having several paragraphs.
- II. **Changes to the Original Text**
  - A. **1788 –**
    1. American Amendments that reflect a different perspective on the relationship between the church and the state. (20.4, 23.3, 31.2)
    2. The Removal of the word “depopulations” from a list of actions prohibited by the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment – “You shall not steal.”
  - B. **1887 -** amends 24.4 to allow for marriage to the close relative of a deceased spouse.
  - C. **1903 –** the Presbyterian Church in the USA made substantial revisions to the Confession
    1. Changes 16.7 regarding good works of unbelievers.
    2. Changes 22.3 to soften the requirements for taking oaths
    3. Removes a reference to the Pope as the Antichrist in 25.6
    4. Added two new chapters: (1) a chapter on the Holy Spirit; and (2) a chapter on the Love of God and Missions.
- III. **The Current Text of the Confession used by the PCA –** the version adopted by the OPC in 1936 which retained the changes in 1788 and 1887 and only the changes to 22.3 and the removal of the reference to the Pope in 25.6

# The Starting Point: The Holy Word

## I. The Scriptures are the ONLY FOUNDATION for Faith and Life – Including Our Understanding of the Revelation of God

- A. No attempt at all to deal with Speculative Questions, e.g., Could God have existed without revealing Himself? Is He powerful enough to hide His power?
- B. The Confession Grounds our Understanding of the Revelation of God in the Biblical Text by asking and answering this question: What do the Holy Scriptures say about God's revealing of Himself?

## II. General and Special Revelation

- A. **General** – The Revelation of God in the Created Order and in the Historical Orderings of Life (Providence)
  - 1. Content: (1) the Goodness of God; (2) the Wisdom of God; (3) Power of God
  - 2. Result: Man is Without Excuse
  - 3. Insufficiency: Neither Creation nor Providence Provide Knowledge of Salvation
- B. **Special** – God reveals Himself and declares His Will
  - 1. Previous Methods: Varied
  - 2. Timing: Varied
  - 3. Current Time/ Current Method – committing it wholly to writing (The Holy Scriptures – the 66 Books of the OT & NT) alone. There is no other special revelation.

# The Holy Word

## III. The Authority of Scripture and Our Assurance of Its Authority – Why Do We Believe and Obey It? (1.4 & 1.5)

- A. **External Human Witness.** Not Fundamentally because of an External Witness/Evidence (man or church) even though that may cause reverent esteem in us for the Scriptures.
- B. **Internal Witness.** Not fundamentally because of the Internal Evidence (its glorious Message and its beautiful characteristics – “heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style”), even though that Internal Evidence will work a high and reverent esteem in us for the Scriptures.
- C. **The Sure and Certain Witness.** RATHER: Its Authority, and our Full Persuasion and Assurance that it is authoritative, Rests on two inseparable things:
  1. God is its Author (1.4), and
  2. The Holy Spirit’s witness in our hearts that this Word IS God’s Authoritative Word and that it IS Infallibly True.

# The Holy Word

## IV. The Scope, Sufficiency & Our Saving Understanding of Scripture

### A. Scope of Scripture – To what does it speak?

1. All things necessary for (1) God's glory; (2) man's salvation; (3) man's faith; and (4) man's life
2. It speaks to that scope either (1) Expressly or (2) as a result of Good and Necessary Deduction.
3. It does not speak to some "circumstances" which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word. . . "

### B. The Sufficiency of Scripture, The Darkness of our Rebellion, and the Divine Response

1. As to its Scope, the Bible speaks SUFFICIENTLY – NOTHING (neither traditions nor new revelations) needs to be added.
2. In our rebellion, we close our eyes and stop up our ears – leaving only darkness and deafness.
3. But our God responds. Our need is answered by the Holy Spirit 's work of "inward Illumination" by which the saints are brought to a "saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word."



# The Holy Word

## V. The Clarity (Perspicuity) of Scriptures

- A. **Not Everything in Scripture is Equally Clear - even with the Illumination of the Spirit.**
- B. **But, contra Rome, that does not mean that the Word should be withheld from the people of God.**
- C. **Rather “those thing necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation,” are so clear in one place or another in Scripture that the unlearned may have a sufficient understanding of them for salvation.** Deut. 29:29 – “The Secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

## VI. The Handling of the Word

- A. **Only the Original written texts (autographs) in their original languages are inspired and “authentic.”** - The preserved and reproduced original language texts are the final source for settling any religious controversy (e.g. the Latin Vulgate translates Hebrew and Greek words for repentance as “do penance” and a new doctrine is born).
- B. **The Bible should be translated into the Common Languages** – because few speak the original languages, but all believers are to “read and search” the Scriptures, those original texts should be translated into every language.
- C. **The Final authority of all Christian Controversies is the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture (1.10)** and the only infallible rule of interpreting Scripture is Scripture itself – the more clear interprets the less clear.

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**Foundations for  
Christian Living, A  
Study in the  
Westminster  
Confession of Faith**

# Review: Considering Creeds and Confessions<sup>1</sup>

## Why do we use creeds and confessions?

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# Review: Considering Creeds and Confessions<sup>1</sup>

## **Anti-Creedalism Considered: No Creed but Christ; No Book but the Bible**

1. Public Creedalism and Private/Hidden Creedalism
2. Acknowledging a Tradition and Submitting it to Scripture v. Refusing to Acknowledge a Tradition or Refusing to Submit One's Tradition to Scripture

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# Review: The Starting Point - The Holy Word

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**A. General** – The Revelation of God in the Created Order and in the Historical Orderings of Life (Providence)

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# Review: The Starting Point - The Holy Word

## **B. Special** – God reveals Himself and declares His Will

1. Previous Methods: Varied
2. Timing: Varied
3. Current Time/ Current Method – committing it wholly to writing (The Holy Scriptures – the 66 Books of the OT &NT) alone. There is no other special revelation.

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## III. The Authority of Scripture and Our Assurance of Its Authority – Why Do We Believe and Obey It? (1.4 & 1.5)

A. External Human Witness.

B. Internal Witness.

C. **The Sure and Certain Witness.** RATHER: Its Authority, and our Full Persuasion and Assurance that it is authoritative, Rests on two inseparable things:

1. God is its Author (1.4), and
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# Review: The Holy Word

## **The Scope of Scripture – To what does it speak?**

All things necessary for (1) God's glory; (2) man's salvation; (3) man's faith; and (4) man's life



# Review: The Holy Word

## V. The Clarity (Perspicuity) of Scriptures

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# Review: The Holy Word

## The Handling of the Word

- **The Bible should be translated into the Common Languages** – because few speak the original languages, but all believers are to “read and search” the Scriptures, those original texts should be translated into every language.
- **The Final authority of all Christian Controversies is the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture (1.10)** and the only infallible rule of interpreting Scripture is Scripture itself – the more clear interprets the less clear.

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing

“... Christianity is not primarily about lifestyle change; it is about knowing God.”

~ Michael Reeves, “Delighting in the Trinity”

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

To know and grow to enjoy him is what we are saved for”—  
Michael Reeves

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing

Psa. 27:4      One thing have I asked of the Lord,  
that will I seek after:  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord  
and to inquire in his temple.

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternal proceeding from the Father and the Son.

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

## One God, Three Persons

Hints from the beginning – Gen. 1:26, Hosea 1:7, Psalm 110 – Matthew 22:41-46

Gen. 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

New Testament Clarity

Jesus Baptism

Matt. 3:16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

## New Testament Clarity - The Great Commission

Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”



# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

- The Trinity and the Law of Non-Contradiction
- God is one in essence, but 3 in person
- Three subsistences, not 3 distinct essences
- subsisting within this one essence are 3 distinct personae... and *the distinction is not in their essence*

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

The Trinity is a Relevant Doctrine, Contra Kant & Others

“The doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, has no practical relevance at all, even if we think we understand it, and it is even more clearly irrelevant if we realize that it transcends all our concepts.” ~ Immanuel Kant

We lose the essence of God and his beauty when we lose the doctrine of the trinity

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

What was God doing before he created the world?

John 17:24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit were loving one another

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

John 17:1 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

John 17:24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

## God revealed as Father

- Carried Israel as a father carries his son – Deut. 1:31
- Psalm 103:13 “As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him
- The grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God [the father] and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit – benediction in 2 Corinthians

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

*The Father loving the Son* John 17:24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

## *The Son loving the Father*

Jesus says in John 14:31 “the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me”

they love each other through a 3<sup>rd</sup> person the Holy Spirit

God is personal and Relational - Because God has always been in loving relationship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit



# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

## God revealed as Father

- Jesus, Taught us to pray, “Our Father....”
- it is only when we see that God rules his creation as a kind and loving Father that we will be moved to delight in his providence. ~ Reeves

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity – Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit makes the Father's love known to the Son (and the world)

Matthew 3:16 ..... he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Holy Trinity*

- The Father is “none”
- The Son is eternally begotten of the father
- The Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father & the Son

Jesus says, “But when the Helper comes, (*the helper is the Holy Spirit in this context*) whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. John 15:26

## **Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Aseity of the Triune God***

God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth.

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# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Aseity of the Triune God*

In his sight all things are open and manifest, his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Aseity of the Triune God*

Acts 17:24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Heb. 4:13

# **Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Character of the Triune God***

There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal, most just, and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

# Knowing God Part 1: What's He like, What's He done, and What's He doing – *The Character of the Triune God*

- God is One
- God is a Spirit
- God is Without Limits (Infinite)
  - Infinite in Space
  - Infinite in Time
- God is Immutable (Unchangeable)
- God is Absolute (and we are not, God is absolutely not us and not like us in some exceedingly significant ways –and even this word absolute fails to do justice to the *Creator/Creation distinction*)
- God is a God of Profound Love, Grace and Justice





# **The Westminster Confession of Faith Knowing God – Part 2**

# Decrees and Providence - Chapters 3 & 5

- I. The Freedom of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling
- II. The Purpose of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling
- III. The Extent of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling
- IV. Objections and Responses
- V. God's Sovereignty: An Experiential Postscript

# The Relationship Between Divine Decrees and Providence: Eternity and Time

## I. The Decree (“Immanent” Works of God) – in Eternity

**Chapter 3.1.** God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

# The Relationship Between Divine Decrees and Providence: Eternity and Time

## II. Providence (“Emanent” Works of God) – in Time

**Chapter 5.1.** God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

# The Freedom of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling

## A Key Question:

Is God's Ordaining and Ruling an Action or a Re-Action?

## Answer:

- **Chapter 3.1.** God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, **freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass**; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.
- Psalm 33:11 – The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.

# The Freedom of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling

## A Key Question:

Is God's Ordaining and Ruling an Action or a Re-Action?

## Answer Cont'd:

- **Chapter 3.2.** Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions; **yet hath he not decreed any thing because he foresaw it as future, as that which would come to pass, upon such conditions.**

# The Freedom of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling

## A Key Question:

Is God's Ordaining and Ruling an Action or a Re-Action?

## Answer Cont'd:

- **Chapter 5.1.** God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.
- Acts 2:23 “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. . .

# The Purpose of the Triune God in Ordaining and Ruling

**A Key Question:** Why Does God ordain and rule as He does?

**Answer:** His Own Glory and the Good of His Church

- **His Glory:**

- **Chap. 3.3** “. . . for the manifestation of his glory. . .”
- **Chap. 3.5** “. . . and all to the praise of his glorious grace.”
- **Chap. 3.7** “. . . for the glory of his sovereign power. . .”
- **Chap. 3.8** “So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God. . .”
- **Chap. 5.1** “. . . to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.”



# The Purpose of the Triune God in Ordaining and Ruling

**A Key Question:** Why Does God ordain and rule as He does?

**Answer:** His Own Glory and the Good of His Church

- **For the Good of His Church**
  - **Chapter 5.7** “As the providence of God doth, in general, reach to all creatures; so, after a most special manner, it taketh care of his church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof.”

# The Extent of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling

**A Key Question:** Does God ordain and rule over ALL things or only some things? Does His ordaining and ruling include the fall, sinful acts and actors, and the salvation and judgment of men and women?

**Answer: All Things**

- **Chapter 3.1.** “God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; . . .”
- **Chapter 3.3.** “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.”

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**Answer: All Things**

- **Chapter 5.1.** “God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.”
- **Chapter 5.4** The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first Fall, and all other sins of angels and men,

## Objection 1: Doesn't such a view make God the author or approver of sin?

**Answer: No, while God decrees and orders all things, He is NOT the author of sin.**

- **Chapter 3.1.** God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; *yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.*
- See Ps. 5:4; James 1:13-14; 1 John 1:5: “This then is the message we have heard of him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”

## **Objection 1 (cont'd): Doesn't such a view make God the author or approver of sin?**

**Answer: No, while God decrees and orders all things, He is NOT the author of sin.**

- **Chapter 5.4.** The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first Fall, and all other sins of angels and men, and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God; who being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin. See 1 John 2:16

## Objections 2: Doesn't such a view do violence to the will (free) of men and women?

**Answer: No, men and women still act in accord with their wills. They do nothing that they do not will to do.\***

**Chapter 3.1.** “God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; *nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures,* nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.” See Acts 2:23

\*The most helpful accessible discussion of this can be found in J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*.

## **Objection 3: If God ordains all things, do the actions of men and women matter?**

**Answer: While God's will is the ultimate reason for the outcome, He ordinarily generally ordains and uses means (second causes) to accomplish His will.**

**Chapter 5.2.** “Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.”

**Chapter 5.3.** “God, *in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means,* yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure.

## Objection 4: There is little to no benefit to the Christian who considers the Doctrine of Predestination.

**Answer: When rightly handled, it can be immensely beneficial when to the Christian.**

- **Chapter 3.8.** “The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled *with special prudence and care*, that men attending to the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter [create occasions] of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.”



# God's Sovereignty: An Experiential Postscript

**Chapter 5.5** The most wise, righteous, and gracious God, doth oftentimes leave for a season his own children to manifold temptations and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.

## **J. Newton, *I Asked the Lord***

1. I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith and love and every grace  
Might more of His salvation know  
And seek more earnestly His face

...

7. "These inward trials I employ  
From self and pride to set thee free  
And break thy schemes of earthly joy  
That thou mayest seek thy all in me,  
That thou mayest seek thy all in me."



**The Westminster  
Confession of  
Faith  
Kings, Queens and  
Corruption**

# **Kings, Queens and Corruption: Creation, Fall and Consequences**

- I. Creation (WCF 4.1)
- II. Covenantal Ruling and Covenant Breaking (WCF 7.1 & 7.2)
- III. Image Bearers of the Triune God (WCF 4.2)
- IV. Sin and Its Consequences (WCF 6)
- V. The Promise of Hope (WCF 7.3 – 7.6)

# I. Creation: The Core Biblical Doctrines

- A. The Sole Actor: The Triune God (4.1) – Gen. 1:1-2; Jn 1:1-4
- B. The Purpose: The manifesting of God’s glorious “power, wisdom, and goodness.”(4.1) – Rom. 11:36
- C. The Source: God alone (4.1) – Acts 17:24
- D. The Extent or Scope: All things other than God Himself (4:1)
- E. The Time: “in the Space of Six days” (4.1) – Gen. 1:1-31
- F. The Result: “all very Good” (4.1) – Gen. 1:31
- G. The Crown: Humankind – Male and Female – after His own Image (4.2) – Gen. 1:26 - 31

## **II. Covenantal Ruling & Covenant Breaking (WCF 7)**

### **A. WCF 7.1**

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

## **II. Covenantal Ruling & Covenant Breaking (WCF 7)**

**B. God Must Condescend so that Humankind may have any “fruition (from latin, “frui” – joy) of Him as their blessedness and reward.”**

1. This is a Natural, not an Ethical, Necessity – the condescension precedes the Fall.
2. The manner by which God Condescends is through the use of Covenants.

## **II. Covenantal Ruling & Covenant Breaking (WCF 7)**

### **C. The Confession sees TWO Principal Covenants: (1) The Covenant of Works and (2) The Covenant of Grace (WCF 7.1-7.2)**

1. The Covenant of Works (AKA, “The Covenant of Creation”) with Adam as the Head of Humanity:
  - a. The Covenant Promises and Obligations: Adam, Eve and ALL their posterity will receive Life (in fullness in communion with God) upon the condition of perfect obedience.
  - b. Criticisms: (1) The language of Covenant is not seen in Gen. 1-3; (2) Covenants are only “Redemptive” in Scripture; (3) It fails to recognize the grace that attends creation.

## II. Covenantal Ruling & Covenant Breaking (WCF 7)

### B. The Confession sees TWO Principal Covenants: The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace

2. The Covenant of Grace (WCF 7.2) - Occasioned by the sin of Adam, leading to death, God freely offers/promises a new Covenant. (WCF 7.3) (*considered later*)



# III. Humankind as Image Bearers of God (WCF 4.2)

## A. WCF 4.2.

After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Besides this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.

# III. Humankind as Image Bearers of God (WCF 4.2)

## B. Image Bearing as a Collection of Attributes

1. Humankind bears the image of God because humans have certain attributes that are not shared with the rest of creation, e.g. immortality, reason, conscience.
2. At the Fall, some of these may become distorted, but they continue to remain. Because they remain, human beings continue to bear the Image of God.

# III. Humankind as Image Bearers of God

## C. Image Bearing as an Office

1. The Model: The Suzerain – Vassal Covenants
  - a. Superior King covenants with inferior Kings.
  - b. Inferior Kings will either continue to bear or begin to mar the “image” of the Superior by their faithful or unfaithful representing of the Superior King

# III. Humankind as Image Bearers of God – 4.2

## C. Image Bearing as an Office (cont'd)

2. “Image – Bearing” is not just a collection of attributes, but an office established by a covenant - “. . . a human being does not bear or have the image of God, but *is* the image of God.”

H. Bavinck

3. The attributes are necessary to execute the office faithfully and so human beings are endowed with those attributes by God.
4. After the Fall, human beings are still representatives (albeit rebellious/treasonous ones) of God but they are due the dignity of the office to which God has appointed us.

## IV. Sin and Its Consequences (WCF 6)

### A. How did sin enter the Garden?

1. By the subtilty and temptation of Satan. (WCF 6.1)
2. In the holy counsel of God, He permitted the fall, “having purposed to order it to his own glory.” (WCF 6.1)
3. J. Murray: Temptation here means “solicitation to sin and the placing of an inducement to sin in the way of another. [God is incapable of this] (James 1:13). He did not solicit sin in Adam and Eve; He did the opposite. He warned them against it and placed the inducement in the opposite direction. God did try our first parents. He was the agent of the probation. The serpent was the agent in the temptation. It is of God to try and prove with a view to moral or religious strength, confirmation and increased blessing. It is satanic to seduce and it is designed for weakening and degradation.

## IV. Sin and Its Consequences

### B. Did Adam and Eve have the ability to obey? (WCF 9)

**Answer: Yes.**

WCF 9.1 God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil.

WCF 9.2 Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which is good and well-pleasing to God; but yet mutably, so that he might fall from it. (*posse peccare & posse non peccare*)

## **IV. Sin and Its Consequences (WCF 6)**

### **B. What Were the Consequences to Adam and Eve upon the Fall? (WCF 6.2)**

1. They fell from their original righteousness and communion with God into judgment.
2. They became spiritually dead and this “began a physical death. On the day that Adam and Eve foolishly ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they died, in a very real sense (Gen. 2:17). It was a slow death, yes. But death and decay now entered their bodies and minds, and it was inevitable from that moment they would one day become dust again” – C. VanDixhorn.

## **IV. Sin and Its Consequences (WCF 6)**

### **B. What are the Consequences to all of the Human Race? (WCF 6.3, 6.4 & 6.6) See Rom. 5:12-19; I Cor. 15:21-22; Rom. 7; Eph. 2:1-5**

1. All humanity that descends by ordinary generation from Adam and Eve share the guilt, death, and corruption that they bore after the fall.
2. From this corruption (“utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good and wholly inclined to all evil”) flow all our actual transgressions (any lack of conformity to God’s law).
3. All, by original sin (our by being included in Adam) and by actual sin, stand as guilty sinners before God and are properly are objects of His wrath, “subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.”



# V. Our Only Hope – The Covenant of Grace (WCF 7.3-7.6)

## A. A Second Covenant Appears

1. The Promise of a Seed appears in the midst of the curses in Gen. 3 – A seed of the woman shall crush the head of the serpent even as the serpent strikes him with a mortal wound (heel).
2. When more fully revealed it becomes clear that this Covenant offers life and salvation to all sinners who have faith in Jesus Christ and then gives that faith, by the Holy Spirit, to those “ordained unto eternal life.” (WCF 7.3).

# V. Our Only Hope: The Covenant of Grace (WCF 7.3-7.6)

## B. The Administration of the Covenant of Grace

1. This *Covenant of Grace* is administered differently **in the time of the law** (from the fall to the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, e.g. OT) and **in the time of the gospel** (from the life, death, resurrection of Christ until He comes again).
2. **In the time of the law:** By promises, prophecies, ordinances delivered to the people of Israel – all “fore signifying Christ to come.”
  - a. Those signs were sufficient and effective, by the Holy Spirit, to build them up in faith in the promised Messiah
  - b. Salvation was not a result of trusting in the signs (the blood of bulls and goats), but by trusting in the one signified – Jesus.

# **V. Our Only Hope: The Covenant of Grace (WCF 7.3-7.6)**

## **B. The Administration of the Covenant of Grace**

### **3. In the Time of the Gospel.**

- a. The Substance of the Covenant of Grace has been exhibited – It is Christ. He is the Good News (gospel) to be proclaimed.
- b. The appointed ways in which the Covenant of Grace is now dispensed (supplied), are (1) preaching of the Word and (2) the administration of the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper)

A detailed photograph of the west front of Westminster Abbey in London. The image shows the large rose window, the central tower with its spire, and the intricate Gothic architecture of the facade. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

**The Westminster  
Confession of  
Faith  
Of Christ the  
Mediator**

# Setting the Context of Chapter 8

1. Chapter 7 – Describes a Covenant of Works which Adam and Eve violated (the Fall)
2. WCF 7.3 also Describes a Covenant of Grace: *Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by [the covenant of works], the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein he freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.*
3. *Of Christ the Mediator* – Chapter 8 – provides a more thorough consideration of the Person of Christ and of His Work.

# Brief Overview of Chapter 8

- A. 8.1: The Eternal Covenant of Redemption – The Father and Son purpose together to send the Son to save a people who will be the inheritance of the Son.
- B. 8.2 & 8.7: The Mediator (Christ) Has Two Natures
- C. 8.3: God the Holy Spirit Also Enables the Son to fulfill His Role as Mediator.
- D. 8.4 & 8.5: The Work of the Mediator is further explained.
- E. 8.6: Exclusivity of the Christ - only the Work of the Mediator Saves all of God's People.
- F. 8.8: Christ Applies His Work to His People by the Holy Spirit.

# The Covenant of Redemption – 8.1

*8.1. It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Savior of his church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world: unto whom he did from all eternity give a people, to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.*

# The Covenant of Redemption – 8.1

## The Logic of the Paragraph:

1. The Father and Son determine in eternity that the Father would send the Son to claim lost sinners. The Son would do that by humbling Himself, joining His divine nature to a human nature, being born of a woman. By His obedience he would establish himself as the mediator between God and man. And He would be the surety (the guarantor) for every claimed, lost sinner.
2. In executing His Role as Mediator, He will be a Prophet, Priest, and King. He will be the Head of the Church, the Heir of all things, and the Judge of the World.
3. In executing His office of Mediator
  - a. He will win the people (His seed) that He was promised in eternity.
  - b. In due time, He will redeem, call, justify, sanctify, and glorify that people.



# The Two Nature-One Person Mediator

8.2 - *The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.*

# The Two Nature-One Person Mediator

This is a **repetition** of catholic doctrine of the Person of Christ that was hammered out in the ecumenical Councils of the Church. The Confession does **NOT** add anything to that Doctrine.

## 1. Council of Nicea, 325 AD.

... And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; ...

# The Two Nature-One Person Mediator

## 2. Council of Chalcedon, 451 AD

We. . . confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and body; coessential with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; . .

# The Two Nature-One Person Mediator

**WCF, Following the Ecumenical Creeds, Rejects the Common Heresies.**

1. Denying Christ's Divinity – Arianism (4<sup>th</sup> Century); Adoptionism (3-4<sup>th</sup>) – a man with a substance *similar* to God (Arius) or a man that God adopted as His son at His baptism.
2. Denying Christ's Humanity – Docetism/Gnosticism (3<sup>rd</sup>) – Appearing as a man, but not a man.
3. Dividing the Two Natures Into Two Persons – Nestorianism (5<sup>th</sup>)
4. Combining the Two Natures into One Nature – Eutychiansim (5<sup>th</sup>)

# The Two Nature-One Person Mediator

## The Communication of Attributes – WCF 8.7

*8.7 Christ, in the work of mediation, acts according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature.*

### 1. Essential Points

- a. It is not the human nature of Christ nor the divine nature of Christ that saves us; it's the person of Christ, acting according to both natures, that saves us.
- b. What is true of either nature is true of the person of Christ. What can be said of the humanity of Christ can be said of the person of Christ, and what can be said of the deity of Christ can be said of His person.
- c. Examples: Jesus Sleeping in a boat, Jesus sweating drops of blood.

# The Two Nature-One Person Mediator

## How Biblical Language is Sometimes used (8.7).

- a. Because of the unity of person, sometimes Scripture uses language that ascribes actions to one nature that could be more precisely ascribed to the other nature.
- b. Example. Acts 20:28 – the elders at Ephesus are told to “feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood.”

## The Holy Spirit's Anointing in the Work of Christ

*8.3 The Lord Jesus, in his human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure, having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell; to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator, and surety. Which office he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by his Father, who put all power and judgment into his hand, and gave him commandment to execute the same.*

# The Holy Spirit's Anointing in the Work of Christ

## The Holy Spirit's Ministry to Christ.

1. The Scriptures speak directly of the Spirit's work in/through Jesus (Luke 4:18, Jn 3:34), but also display the Lord Jesus as the One who has the fruit of the Spirit in abundance (Heb. 7:26, Jn. 1:14). See, S. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Chapter 2
2. The Deity of Christ does not make unnecessary the presence and work of the Spirit, "it amplifies it." C. VanDixhorn, p. 114. Christ had to be full of the Spirit because "God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him." (Col. 1:19).
3. Purpose: To equip Christ to execute fully the work of Mediator and Surety.



# The Holy Spirit's Anointing

## How is Christ a “Surety?”

1. Oxford English Dictionary: “One who makes himself liable for the miscarriage or default of another.”
2. Why would God’s people need a surety? -
  - a. Three Reasons: The Sin of humanity, the love of God and the perfections of His nature.
  - b. John Murray Explains: “. . . While it was not inherently necessary for God to save, yet, since salvation had been purposed, it was necessary to secure this salvation through a satisfaction that could be rendered only through the substitutionary sacrifice and blood-bought redemption.” J. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*.

## The Mediator is also the Eschatological King – 8.4

*8.4 This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; which that he might discharge, he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfill it; endured most grievous torments immediately in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body; was crucified, and died, was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day he arose from the dead, with the same body in which he suffered, with which also he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of his Father, making intercession, and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world.*

# The Mediator is also the Eschatological King

## The Key Points

1. Jesus willingly undertook the office of Mediator. There is a mutual delight of the Father and the Son in the work of Redemption (J. Owen). There is no cosmic child abuse here.
2. To execute that redemptive work, the Son “actively obeyed” (“was made under the law and did perfectly fulfill it” and “passively obeyed” the Father’s will (endured grievous torments, most painful sufferings, was crucified, and died).
3. The Lord Jesus was raised on the third day - the same body in which he suffered.
4. He ascended to the right hand of the Father.
5. He makes intercession now.
6. He will return as Judge/King.

## Christ - the Priest and the Sacrifice – 8.5

*8.5. The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.*

### **The Key Points**

1. Here again, there is a repetition of Christ's active (general) obedience and passive (special) obedience from paragraph 4. The believer is not only pardoned by the offering of the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World, but covered with His perfect Righteousness.

# Christ - the Priest and the Sacrifice – 8.5

## The Key Points

2. Jesus is the faithful high priest, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek, who offered Himself, by the Holy Spirit, “once for all.”
3. This Sacrifice satisfied the Justice of Father. “God, the just Judge, cannot pronounce anyone just and give him a right to life except on the ground of some perfect righteousness. . . ; but that righteousness is not of one kind [but two]. For as there are two covenants which God willed to make with men – the one legal {works} and the other of grace – so also there is a twofold righteousness – legal and evangelical. . . The former consists in one’s own obedience or a perfect conformity with the law. . . ; the latter is another’s obedience or perfect observance of the law that is rendered by a surety in the place of him who is to be justified. – Francis Turretin,

*Justification*

# Christ – the Priest and the Sacrifice – 8.5

## The Key Points

4. For all of God's elect that Sacrifice accomplishes reconciliation with God (Rom. 5:1) and secures for them an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.

## **ALL of God's Elect are Saved in Christ – 8.6**

*8.6 Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein he was revealed, and signified to be the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world; being yesterday and today the same, and forever.*

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\* This paragraph reminds us of what we read in 7.6. There is one Covenant of Grace, with varied administrations, the substance of which is the Lord Jesus Christ as the mediator and surety for ALL chosen sinners.

## Christ Secures the Reality of Redemption for His Own.

*8.8. To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same; making intercession for them, and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by his Word and Spirit; overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner, and ways, as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.*

---

\* Christ's mediatorial work does *not secure the possibility* of redemption. It secures the *personal reality of salvation* for each and every one of those given to Him, by the Father, as His inheritance.





**The Logic  
Of Salvation:  
The Holy Spirit  
Brings Life from  
Death**

# Where We Ended Last Time

1. WCF 7.3: The Covenant of Grace: *Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by [the covenant of works], the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein he freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.*
2. Chapter 8: Considers the Wonderful Realities of Christ's Person and His Work as the Mediator and Surety for His People
3. Chapter 8 ends with telling us that Christ's work did NOT secure the Possibility of Redemption. Rather, it secured the **Reality** of Redemption.

## Christ Secures the Reality of Redemption for His Own.

8.8. *To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, **he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same**; making intercession for them, and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by his Word and Spirit; overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner, and ways, as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.*

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\* Christ's mediatorial work does *not secure the possibility* of redemption. It secures the *personal reality of salvation* for each and every one of those given to Him, by the Father, as His inheritance.

## Our Question:

How Does Christ “certainly and effectually apply and communicate” the Redemption that He purchased?

**Through Union with Christ – The Triune God unites Christ to His people and His people to Christ.**

“Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation. All to which the people of God have been predestined in the eternal election of God, all that has been secured and procured for them in the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption, all of which they become as the actual partakers in the application of redemption, and all that by God’s grace they will become in the state consummated bliss is embraced within the compass of union and communion with Christ.” – J. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*

# Union with Christ: The Triune God unites Christ to His people and His people to Christ.

## Consider Ephesians 1:3 – 14

1:3-5: The Father has blessed us in Christ, chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world

1:7-9: In Christ we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, riches of his grace, discloses to us His purpose in Christ

1:11-14: In Him we have obtained an inheritance, In Him we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit – the guarantee of our inheritance

## Consider Ephesians 1:20 – 2:6:

1. Christ and His people share the same pattern: death, life, glory.

2. Christ was united to us in His incarnation and death, that we would be united to Him in His life and glory.

# Our Question:

## How is Christ united to us?

- **Considered from God's Perspective –**
  - Dead in Sin – WCF 9.3
  - Alive in the Grace and Salvation of Christ:
    - WCF 9.4 – Freedom from Bondage
    - WCF 10 - Effectual Calling (AKA, “Regeneration”)
- **Considered From Our Perspective – That Which God Works in Us**
  - Saving Faith – WCF 14
  - Repentance Unto Life – WCF 15

## Our Question:

## How is Christ united to us?

### Our Condition: Dead In Sin (WCF 9.3):

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

**Key Point:** Everything that Christ secures as a Mediator and Surety is naturally **unavailable** to EVERYONE in Adam. Ephesians 2:1.

## **Our Question:**

### **How is Christ united to us?**

#### **God's Action (WCF 9.4)**

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

#### **Key Points:**

1. It is God who converts sinners.
2. God transfers sinners from a state of wrath to a state of Grace.

Cont'd



## Our Question:

### How is Christ united to us?

#### God's Act (WCF 9.4)

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

#### Key Points Cont'd:

3. God, by this act, frees the sinner from the bondage of sin AND enables the sinner freely to will that which is spiritually good.
4. It's all by God's grace.
5. The corruption of sin remains. But, the converted sinner is no longer **"in sin,"** but sin continues **"in" the called sinner** until all sin is put away.

## Our Question:

### How is Christ united to us?

#### **God's Act Cont'd: Move from Chapter 9 to Chapter 10 - (WCF 10.1 & 10.2)**

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

# Our Question: How is Christ united to us?

## God's Act Cont'd: (WCF 10.1 & 10.2)

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

### Key Points:

1. Having Predestined a people in eternity, God “effectually” calls each of them in time. This effectual call is the historical link between God’s counsel in eternity and the everlasting consummation (10.1)
2. The call is “effectual” – those whom God calls do actually come out of a state of sin and death, which is theirs by nature, and into a state of grace and salvation which is theirs because they belong to Christ. (10.1)

# Our Question: How is Christ united to us?

## God's Work Cont'd: (WCF 10.1 & 10.2)

### Key Points:

3. Note all the the biblical imagery that is used to describe the completeness (integrity) of this “effectual” call: (1) enlightening the mind; (2) changing the heart from stone to flesh; and (3) renewing the will. (10.1)
4. While the Father effectually calls, those in whom He works by the Holy Spirit, answer the call and come willingly and freely to Christ. (10.1 & 10.2)
5. The reason for the call is NOT in the one called. It is in the eternal counsel of God (10.2)

# Our Question: How is Christ united to us?

- **Answer From Our Perspective (What God does in us and What we experience)**
  - Saving Faith – WCF 14
  - Repentance Unto Life – WCF 15

# Our Question: How is Christ united to us?

## “Saving Faith”

### How does faith come about?

*14.1 The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.*

### Key Points:

1. Faith is Necessary to one's Salvation. The Elect believe to the saving of their souls.
2. God's grace is the source of faith. The Holy Spirit (Spirit of Christ) is the agent of faith.
3. Ordinarily the Spirit works by the ministry of the Word.

# Our Question: How is Christ united to us?

## What is “Saving Faith?”

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

## Key Points:

1. There is a “fides generalis” – a faith that believes the Word of God and responds to it appropriately.
2. But, saving faith is personal - a “trust” that can be characterized as an “entrustment” of ourselves to Christ, as He is offered in the gospel, for our salvation in all of its parts.

# Our Question: How is Christ united to us?

## Key Points cont'd:

3. “Faith is not the belief that we have been saved, nor belief that Christ has saved us, nor even belief that Christ died for us. . . Faith is, in its essence, commitment to Christ that we may be saved. - J. Murray
4. “It is not faith that saves, but faith in Jesus Christ. . . It is not, strictly speaking, even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ saves through faith.” – B.B. Warfield
5. “. . .we do not mean properly speaking, that it is faith that justifies us - for faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ. . .[it] is the instrument that keeps us in communion with him and with all his benefits” - Belgic Confession (1561), Article 22.



## **Our Question: How is Christ united to us?**

### **Can “Saving Faith” waiver, be weak or strong?**

*14.3 This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may be often and many ways assailed, and weakened, but gets the victory: growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance, through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.*

Our experience of faith waivers. It may sometimes be weak or strong. But, the object of faith, the author of our faith, and the finisher of our faith – Jesus Christ – never does.

# Our Question: How is Christ united to us?

## *“Repentance Unto Life” – WCF 15*

**Question: What is Repentance unto life?**

**Answer (in two parts):**

(1) An “evangelical grace” - a gracious act of God granted to those who rest in Christ as He is revealed in the Gospel.

*WCF 15.1 Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ. **See Acts 11:18.** As Peter reported to the church in Jerusalem regarding the gospel being preached to the gentiles, the church responded with no objections and “they glorified God saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.’”*

# Our Question: How is Christ united to us?

**“Repentance Unto Life” – WCF 15**

**Question: What is Repentance?**

**Answer:**

(2) Upon the apprehension of God’s mercy in Christ, it is the confession of, hatred of, and grieving over one’s sins; the turning from those sins to God; and the endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of His commandments.

*WCF 15.2. By it, a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments.*

## Our Question:

How is Christ united to us?

*“Repentance Unto Life” WCF 15*

**Does it Save?**

**Answer:** No, only Christ saves and we are united to Christ by faith.  
Repentance in no way secures pardon.

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

## **Our Question:**

**How is Christ united to us?**

***“Repentance Unto Life” WCF 15***

**Will it accompany saving faith in Christ?**

**Answer:** Yes; no one should expect pardon without evidence of this grace.

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

**Our Question:**

**How is Christ united to us?**

***“Repentance Unto Life” WCF 15***

**Can one sin so little as to avoid condemnation or so greatly as to be beyond salvation?**

**Answer:** No. All sin deserves condemnation by a holy God, but no sin is so great as to put the sinner beyond salvation in Christ.

*15.4. As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation; so there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent.*

## **Our Question:**

**How is Christ united to us?**

***“Repentance Unto Life” WCF 15***

**How should the Christian repent/confess? WCF 15.6**

- Answer:**
1. Always privately before God
  2. Always particularly before God
  3. Always seeking pardon in Christ
  4. When sin scandalizes a brother or the Church, declare one’s repentance to those offended either publicly or privately as appropriate.

**How should the Christian respond to one’s confession?**

**Answer:** Love and be reconciled to the offender

A photograph of a Gothic cathedral facade, likely Westminster Abbey in London. The image shows the intricate stonework, a large rose window, and a tall spire against a blue sky with light clouds. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**Union with Christ:  
We Have Him and  
All the Covenant  
Blessings He Won**



# A Very Brief Review

1. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are our only infallible rule for Faith (what we believe) and Practice (how we live in light of what we believe).
2. There is ONE true God who exists in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He needs nothing. However, out of the overflow of His love, He created all things. He created Adam and Eve in His image and condescended to relate to them by a covenant – called the Covenant of Works/Creation – by which they, and all of their offspring, would inherit eternal blessing if they would obey the Triune God.

# A Very Brief Review

3. Adam, our Covenant head, did not obey God. Instead, he and Eve rebelled against God. Sin and all of its consequences entered creation. It corrupted Adam and Eve and all their descendants who were born by ordinary generation.
4. The Triune God then announces a new Covenant – A Covenant of Grace- *“wherein he freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ...”*
5. In the Fullness of time, the Eternal Son of God, actually took on our flesh in history and secured life and salvation for those whom the Triune chose in eternity. The Son did this by living an utterly holy life and dying an utterly sacrificial and atoning death for his chosen ones.

## A Very Brief Review

6. Those for whom Christ lived and died are united to Him by **saving faith** - a gift given to them by the Triune God.
7. This faith, which unites the believer to Christ, is not in any way a work that secures God's favor. Instead, it is the instrument by which believers receive Christ and all the covenant benefits that Christ has earned.
8. Therefore, with Christ comes "evangelical graces" – gifts that come to the Christian believer because of his or her "union with Christ." Some of those graces are primarily experiential (e.g., "repentance unto life") and some are primarily "forensic" or "declarative" (e.g., justification, adoption) and some accent both (e.g., sanctification, perseverance and glorification). We consider three of those evangelical graces today: Justification; Adoption; and Sanctification.

# Justification

## WCF Chapter 11

## Justification – WCF Chapter 11

**“The Wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18).**

“This is our situation and it is our relation to God; how can we be right with Him?

The answer, of course, is that we cannot be right with him; we are all wrong with him . . . Because we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Far too frequently we fail to entertain the gravity of this fact. Hence the reality of our sin and the reality of the wrath of God upon us for our sin do not come into our reckoning. This is the reason why the grand article of justification does not ring the bells in the innermost depths of our spirit.” Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 123.

# Justification – WCF Chapter 11

## What is Justification?

A **judicial declaration** that, in Christ, (1) the believers sins ARE pardoned and their just condemnation is removed because Christ's sacrifice atoned for them – He provided "proper, real and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf" (WCF 11.3); and (2) the believers ARE righteous before God because Christ's obedience (fulfilling all righteousness) has been imputed unto them (WCF 11:1). (Compare WLC, Q/A 70)

The Reformers captured this reality in the phrase the "marvelous/glorious exchange" – our sin and guilt being transferred to Christ; His righteousness being transferred to us.

# Justification – WCF Chapter 11

## Seven Crucial Points Regarding This Declaration:

1. This is entirely by God's free grace. The Triune God, in eternity, decreed to save sinners by the Son becoming like them, being righteous in every way, and yet bearing their sin for them and then giving to those sinners Christ's righteousness by uniting them to Himself through faith given to them by the Spirit. Those who belong to Christ receive this two-part declaration by grace alone. They in no way to contribute to it. **(WCF 11.1)**
2. This justification is declared at the **beginning** of the Christian's new life, **not at the end**. It is **NOT** a declaration that results from an infusion of grace that matures into actual and complete righteousness at death or purgatory (the error of Rome). **(WCF 11.1)**

## Justification – WCF Chapter 11

### Seven Crucial Points Regarding This Declaration:

3. The believer's righteousness before God is **NOT** the believer's faith, as if God accepts faith as a substitute for the righteousness that He demands (the error of J. Arminius). Rather, the believer's righteousness is an "alien righteousness" – the righteousness of another. The believer, in union with Christ by faith, receives Christ's perfect righteousness as a gift. It is the righteousness **from** God that matches perfectly the righteousness **of** God. **(WCF 11.1)**.
4. The believer is not partially pardoned (pardoned for sins committed until he/she believes) and then independently secures pardon through obedience and personal repentance for sins committed after coming to Christ. **(WCF 11.5)**.



# Justification – WCF Chapter 11

## Seven Crucial Points Regarding This Declaration:

5. While Justification is necessarily linked to God's decree and Christ's life, death and resurrection, the declaration of pardon and righteousness happens in **our** history, when the individual believer is united to Christ through faith by the work of the Holy Spirit. **(WCF 11.4)**.
6. There is only one method of Justification. All believers, those before Christ came into the world and those after His life, death, and resurrection, are declared to be pardoned and righteous in Christ alone. **(WCF 11.6)**.

# Justification – WCF Chapter 11

## Seven Crucial Points Regarding This Declaration:

7. The declaration of pardoned and righteous in Christ is final. Those united to Christ by saving faith will always be pardoned and seen by God as wholly righteous. But, their ongoing sin may result in God’s “Fatherly displeasure” in order that we would acknowledge and repent of our sins, seek his forgiveness, and be restored in fellowship with Him. **(WCF 11.5)**.

# Adoption

## WCF Chapter 12

## Adoption – WCF Chapter 12

1. All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth [*graciously grants*], in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, have his name put upon them, receive the Spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry, Abba, Father, are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by him, as by a father: yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption; and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.

## Adoption – WCF Chapter 12

- A. Other, earlier Reformed confessions/catechisms did not separately discuss Adoption. Instead, they treated adoption as an aspect of Justification. By the the early part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Scottish and English theologians were treating it as a distinct “evangelical grace” that was separate from, but always joined to, the other “evangelical graces.”
- B. Like justification, it is first judicial, and then experiential. We come more and more to rest in and live out of that our new judicially declared status.

## Adoption – WCF Chapter 12

- C. Its privileges: God's name upon us; have the Spirit of adoption and access to the throne of grace with boldness, we cry, Abba, Father; we are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by God, as by a father: yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption; and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.
- D. The Apex of Grace. "By adoption the redeemed become sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty; they are introduced into and given the privileges of God's family. . . as the term implies, [adoption] is an act of transfer from an alien family into the family of God Himself. This is surely the apex of grace and privilege. We would not dare to conceive of such grace, far less to claim it, apart from God's own revelation and assurance [of it]." – J. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 139 – 141.

# Sanctification

## WCF Chapter 13

## The *Nature* of Sanctification (WCF 13.1)

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



# The *Nature* of Sanctification (WCF 13.1)

## Key Points:

- A. Sanctification is **NOT** to be separated from God's work of calling and regenerating the believer. Rather, it is the Spirit's ongoing work of continuing to bring the Christian from death to life.
- B. Sanctification, like every other "evangelical grace" is found in our **union with Christ**. Our union with Christ in His life, death, and resurrection secures our sanctification (definitively) and **frees us from our bondage to sin** because, in Christ's death, we have been set free from sin's mastery over us and by His resurrection we have been raised in "newness of life," set apart (sanctified) for devotion "to God in Christ Jesus." Romans 6.

# The Nature of Sanctification (WCF 13.1)

## Key Points:

- C. The work of sanctification is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit. The principal means that the Spirit uses to accomplish this work is the Word.
- D. The work of sanctification is NOT a minor reclamation project, nor is it matter rearrangement, nor is it matter of transformation, as we often think of that word. Rather, it is a work of putting to death and bringing forth life – mortification and vivification.

A photograph of a Gothic cathedral facade, likely Westminster Abbey in London. The image shows the intricate stonework, a large rose window, and a tall spire against a blue sky with light clouds. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**Union with Christ:  
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# Sanctification - Revisited

## WCF Chapter 13

## The *Nature* of Sanctification (WCF 13.1)

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

## **The *Nature* of Sanctification – WLC Q/A 75**

**Q. 75. What is sanctification?**

**Answer:** Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby they whom God hath, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are **in time, through the powerful operation of his Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God;** having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, **and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise unto newness of life.**

## **The *Nature* of Sanctification – WLC Q/A 77**

**Q. 77. Wherein do justification and sanctification differ?**

**Answer:** Although sanctification be **inseparably joined** with justification, **yet they differ**, in that God in justification impute[s] the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuse[s] grace, and enable[s] to the exercise thereof; **in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued:** [justification] do[es] equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; [sanctification] is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection.

## **The Experience of Sanctification: (WCF 13.2 & 13.3)**

2. This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man; yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part; whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

3. In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail; yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (See also WLC # 78)

### **Key Points:**

A. A thorough-going sanctification. Since sin is throughout our whole being, the work of sanctification is also throughout our whole being: our hearts, our minds, our wills, our bodies.



# The Experience of Sanctification

## Key Points Cont'd:

- B. An Incomplete experiential Sanctification.* The ongoing work of sanctification is “imperfect” in this life. It is NOT defective; it is incomplete. C. VanDixhorn, *Confessing the Faith*, p. 182.
- C. Life (vivification) at war with death.* There is a WAR between the remaining corruption of the “flesh” and the Spirit. In being joined to Christ by faith, the Christian is “conscripted into ‘a continual and irreconcilable war’” precisely because the Spirit that brought new life is at war with sin and death. C. VanDixhorn, *Confessing the Faith*, p. 183.

# The Experience of Sanctification

## Key Points Cont'd:

- D. We may lose many battles, but the war is won.* In this war, the remaining corruption (that sin still “in us” even though we are not “in sin”) may win many battles over many years, but will not ultimately prevail. The believer’s victory in this war is certain because of the continual supply of strength from the “sanctifying Spirit of Christ” who will cause the saints to grow in grace and holiness.
- E. Become what we already are.* Because of the reality of being united to the resurrected and ascended Christ, having been brought from death to life, having escaped the dominion of sin through the death of the Lord Jesus, having the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit, believers are called to live experientially in light of those truths.

## Sanctification – Some Final Thoughts

1. It is a mistake to think that sanctification is the first important thing we've considered because it is the first “practical” thing that we've considered. The WCF sees everything that went before as “practically” essential to the ongoing work of trusting God in obedience.
2. Do not view “progressive” sanctification as the means by which God equips us to work ourselves OUT of the need for a Savior.
3. Do not lose sight of the fact that a significant part of sanctification is recognizing more and more the deep reality of our sin.
4. Sanctification takes place within the body of Christ. All the members are to be collectively engaged in the ongoing war for each other.
5. Sanctification should never devolve into self-righteousness or self-justification. If those are the outcomes, then the believer is not growing in the sanctification won by Christ.

# Good Works

## WCF Chapter 16

# Good Works (WCF Chapter 16)

## Comment and Context:

1. This is an uncommonly long chapter in this section of the Confession - 7 sections. CF. Adoption has 1; Sanctification has 3
2. It's long because Good Works is being used to address other doctrines: Justification, Sanctification, The Role of Scripture, The Role of the Law, Rebellion and Common Grace.
3. The Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation Doctrine, clearly expressed at the Council of Trent (1545-1565), provides much of the context for this chapter.

# Good Works (WCF Chapter 16)

## Brief Introduction to Roman Catholic Doctrine of Works.

1. Grace was infused at baptism and original sin was washed away. The recipient of baptism was “justified” as to that original sin. But, as to the rest of one’s life, justification was secured only by cooperating with grace which expresses itself in love and good works.
2. “Good works” include conduct consistent with biblical ethics, but also include acts declared “good” by the church, e.g., vow of poverty, vows of celibacy, pilgrimages, crusades, acts of piety.
3. “Good works” assist in securing one’s final justification. If the “good works” in this life are insufficient, then the purging of purgatory will be necessary to secure the righteousness required.

# Good Works (WCF Chapter 16)

## Brief Introduction to Roman Catholic Doctrine of Works.

### Council of Trent

**Canon 24:** If anyone says that the justice [righteousness before God] received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of the increase [of one's righteousness before God], let him be anathema.

**Canon 32:** If anyone says that the good works of the one justified are in such manner the gifts of God that they are not also the good merits [toward justification] of him justified . . . Let him be anathema.

# Good Works (WCF Chapter 16)

## **Brief Introduction to Roman Catholic Doctrine of Works.**

4. The merit secured by the “Good Works” of some exceeds the righteousness that was required of them. Their works of “supererogation” are available in a “treasury of merit” to be dispensed to those whose “good works” fall short of the righteousness required.



# Good Works (WCF Chapter 16)

	<b>Roman Catholic</b>	<b>WCF</b>
What Are Good Works?	Those actions commanded by Scripture AND those determined to be “good works” by the Church.`	Only those actions commanded by the Word of God.

# Good Works (WCF Chapter 16)

	<b>Roman Catholic</b>	<b>WCF</b>
What do Good Works accomplish?	Secure temporal benefits and also secure justification.	Provide evidence of living (“lively”) faith; manifest the believer’s thankfulness to God; strengthen the believer’s assurance; edify the body; adorn the profession of the gospel. . . 16.2 & 16.5

# Good Works (WCF Chapter 16)

	<b>Roman Catholic</b>	<b>WCF</b>
Who has the ability to do “Good Works?”	God AND man independent of God.	God alone, through the Spirit of Christ, working in the believer (16.3). But, the believer is not to be negligent; but be diligent to stir up the grace of God.
Can one secure pardon and eternal life by “Good Works?”	Yes	No

# Good Works (WCF Chapter 16)

	<b>Roman Catholic</b>	<b>WCF</b>
Can one execute more “Good Works” than the righteousness of God requires?	Yes	No 16.4
Are one’s “Good Works” acceptable to (satisfying the righteousness of) God?	Yes. One’s “good works” are acceptable apart from Christ.	NO, to the extent that they are “good”, they proceed from the Holy Spirit (16.6). But, the good works of believers are accepted in Christ

# Perseverance of the Saints

## WCF Chapter 17

# Perseverance: Key Questions

- 1. Will all those whom the Father effectually calls by the Holy Spirit and joins them to Christ by faith (a gift given to them), continue to persevere in that faith throughout life and death and be eternally saved?**

Yes. They “can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.” WCF 17.1

# Perseverance: Key Questions

## 2. How can we be so certain?

Because, perseverance in faith does not depend upon the will of the believer. Rather it depends upon “the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace;” WCF 17.2

See John 10:28 where Jesus says “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

# Perseverance: Key Questions

3. Can this perseverance be messy, falling into grievous sins that do harm to our relationship with God and with others?

**Yes it can be.**

**The cause:** “temptations of Satan and the world,” the remaining corruption of sin within us, and our neglecting the “means of [our] perseverance.” WCF 17.3.

**The consequences:** God’s fatherly displeasure, the grieving of the Holy Spirit, the deprivation of some of the graces and comforts of our salvation, the hardening of our hearts, the wounding of our consciences, the harming and scandalizing of others, and the bringing of temporal [but NOT eternal] judgments upon ourselves as our Father disciplines us for our restoration.



# Perseverance: Key Questions

## 4. How should we understand those passages that seem to describe members of a local church falling away and not coming back?

<sup>4</sup> For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. <sup>7</sup> For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. <sup>8</sup> But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. Hebrews 6: 4-8.

## Perseverance: Key Questions

### 4. How should we understand those passages that seem to describe members of a local church falling away and not coming back?

These are best understood as **warning passages**, recognizing that those who have gone “out from us, . . . 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.”

**These passages our sober reminders** that in the visible church, there are those who are not united to Jesus Christ by faith. That sober reality raises the question of the believers “assurance” of salvation - a topic we take up next week.



**Assurance, Law,  
Liberty &  
Conscience**

Assurance of Grace  
and Salvation  
WCF Chapter 18

# Assurance of Grace and Salvation - Key Questions:

1. Is being assured that one has been graciously saved in Christ by faith edifying to the believer or dangerous to the believer?

Answers:

**Roman Catholic:** It's dangerous to the believer. Justification requires cooperating with God's grace by faith working in love. Doubt motivates working in love. Assurance does just the opposite.

**WCF:** Those who truly believe may "be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. . ." WCF 18.1

# Assurance of Grace and Salvation - Key Questions:

2. Can believers have more than a probable assurance – more than a mere probability of being saved?

Answer:

**WCF:** Yes. Believers can have an “infallible assurance of faith. . .”  
WCF 18.2

## Assurance of Grace and Salvation - Key Questions:

3. How can it be that Christians can have an “infallible” assurance of salvation?

Answer:

**WCF:** Christians can have this “infallible” assurance of salvation because that assurance is grounded in (1) the “divine truth of the promises of salvation,” (2) the inward evidences of evangelical graces (faith, repentance, adoption, sanctification), (3) the Holy Spirit’s testimony to our spirit that we are adopted, and (4) the presence of the Holy Spirit Himself – the pledge of a consummated redemption. - 18.2

## Assurance of Grace and Salvation - Key Questions:

4. Is this infallible assurance an essential element of true, saving faith in Christ? If I have moments (or long periods) of doubt, wondering whether I belong to Christ by faith, can I still be a Christian?

Answer:

**WCF:** This infallible assurance is not of the essence of Christian faith. A true Christian believer may have even long periods of doubt and may experience genuine conflict in the soul. - 18.3



# Assurance of Grace and Salvation - Key Questions:

5. How can doubts arise?

Answer:

**WCF:** There could be several reasons: (1) by not working to preserve our assurance (see next question); (2) by sin that wounds the conscience and grieves the Holy Spirit; (3) by the onset of a “sudden and vehement temptation;” and (4) by God providentially “withdrawing the light of His countenance.” – 18.4

**NOTE:** Each of these relate to our experience of Assurance, not to the sufficiency of Christ as Savior. He is always sufficient.

# Assurance of Grace and Salvation - Key Questions:

6. Should the Christian passively wait to have this assurance or to have it restored?

Answer:

**WCF:** No. The Christian should make his/her calling and election sure by the “right use of ordinary means” - those means by which the Father, in the Son, and by the Spirit communicates His love to us.

**NOTE:** The Confession directs us out of ourselves as we make our calling and election sure, not into ourselves.

# Assurance of Grace and Salvation - Key Questions:

7. Can one deceive oneself into believing that he/she is a saved?

Answer:

**WCF:** Yes. Hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favor of God, and the estate of salvation. 18.1

# Assurance of Grace and Salvation - Key Questions:

8. How do I know whether I'm saved in Christ or just a self-deceived "professor?"

That can be one of two different questions:

- (1) Do I doubt the sufficiency of Christ? Am I doubting whether I am saved, because I believe that I need more than Christ? If that's the question, then go back to Chapter 11 – Justification.
- (2) Do I lack assurance that Christ has died for me? Do I believe that I **am not joined** to Christ by true faith? If that's the question, it's often a sign of a sensitive conscience and the best pastoral advice is, "for every look at self, take ten looks at Christ." R.M. McCheyne.

The Law of God  
WCF Chapter 19

# The Law of God (WCF Chapter 19)

<b>Moral Law</b>	<b>Ceremonial /Judicial Law</b>
<p>Eternal, unchangeable law that displays the character of God and is to rule all humanity (believers and unbelievers) as they execute the office of image bearer.</p>	<p>The laws given to the people of Israel for their unique position in redemptive-history.</p> <p>The ceremonial law, generally given to direct their worship, foreshadowed the work of Christ and is no longer applicable because Christ has come.</p> <p>Judicial laws were given to govern Israel as a political body. These laws no longer apply specifically, but are useful with regard to the principles of general equity that they represent.</p>

# The Law of God (WCF Chapter 19)

<b>Covenant of Works</b>	<b>Covenant of Grace</b>
<p>The Covenant made with Adam and all humanity. Under this Covenant, all humanity, who are not in Christ, are obliged to keep all of the moral law perfectly to secure life.</p>	<p>Because of the fall, God makes a second covenant: He freely offers to sinners life and salvation to all those who are joined to Jesus Christ by faith and giving to them the Holy Spirit, who shall make them willing and able to believe.</p>

# Law of God (WCF Chapter 19) - Key Questions:

**1. Does the Moral Law operate as the rule to be obeyed by the Christian under the Covenant of Works – the keeping of which brings life, the breaking of which brings death?**

**No.** Believers in Christ are **NOT** under the moral law as *a Covenant of Works*.



# Law of God (WCF Chapter 19) - Key Questions:

## 2. Is the moral law then of any use to the Christian? WCF 19.6

Yes.

- (1) It is useful as a rule of life, informing us of the will of God.
- (2) It shows us the sinful pollutions of our nature, hearts, and lives – working in us conviction and hatred of sin and showing us even more clearly our need for Christ.
- (3) It restrains corruptions by forbidding sin. By its threatenings, it shows what sin deserves. The promises of good gifts from the Father encourage us to pursue that which is most worthwhile – the Father’s pleasure – rather than the cheap imitations promised by sin. - **WCF 19.7**

# Law of God (WCF Chapter 19) - Key Questions:

## 3. Is keeping the moral law in anyway contrary to resting in Christ alone for salvation?

No. The keeping of the moral law “sweetly compl[ies] with [the gospel].” In the gospel, we have Christ and all of His benefits, including the Spirit of Christ who subdues and enables us to freely and cheerfully do the will of God which is revealed in the law. 19.7

Christian Liberty, and  
Liberty of Conscience  
WCF Chapter 20

# Christian Liberty & Liberty of Conscience

## **This Chapter Treats Two Related But Distinct Topics:**

- Christian Liberty (Liberation) – That from which the Christian has been set free in Christ. WCF 20.1
- Liberty of the Believer's Conscience. WCF 20.2 – 20.4.

# Christian Liberty – WCF 20.1

The Essential Point is that Christ, by His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and ongoing intercession has

- (1) *freed us from*** various realities that resulted from the fall, and
- (2) *freed us to*** the realities of newness of life in the Son.

# Christian Liberty – WCF 20.1

## **Freed From in Christ:**

1. The guilt of sin
2. The condemning wrath of God
3. The curse of the law
4. This present evil world
5. Bondage to Satan
6. The dominion (enslaving power) of sin.
7. The evils of afflictions
8. The sting of death
9. The victory by the grave
10. Everlasting damnation

# Christian Liberty – WCF 20.1

## **Freed TO:**

1. Freely access the Father, in the Son, by the Holy Spirit
2. Willingly obey God, not out of slavish fear, but as a loving child

**Note:** This is the life of the Eternal Son (free access, lovingly doing the Father's will)

**Note Also:** That while all of these realities were also true of OT believers, there are also additional benefits to the those who believe after Christ has come: (1) no longer have the yoke of the ceremonial law – no need to go back to the sign when we have come to the city; (2) bolder access to the throne of grace – we know with certainty that we are the children of the most high; (3) the Spirit in all of His fullness.

# Liberty of Conscience – WCF 20.2 – 20.4

## Basic Principle: God Alone is Lord of the Conscience

Our final allegiance (and, therefore, our final obedience) is to God as He is revealed in His word. The believer is not obligated to keep any commandment or believe any doctrine regarding matters of faith and worship that is contrary or in addition to (“beside”) God’s Word.

## This Principle Overlaps with Chapter 1 – Holy Scripture

*1.6. The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.*



# Liberty of Conscience – WCF 20.2 – 20.4

**If we put together law, Christian liberty, and liberty of conscience, what does that mean for the Christian?**

1. If the Word of God instructs us, we are to do what it instructs as an expression of our love and gratitude to our Triune God. Practicing sin, cherishing lusts “destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.” WCF 20.3
2. If the Word does not instruct us (expressly or by good and necessary consequence), we are at liberty to express our love and gratitude to our Triune God as we see fit in accord with the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the good of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

# Liberty of Conscience – WCF 20.2 – 20.4

## Relating to Authorities:

**Christian Liberty cannot be used to oppose the lawful (in accord with the Word or the “light of nature”) exercise of God-ordained power, whether civil or ecclesiastical.**

“ . . because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, they who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. . . .”

## **WCF 20.4**

**Note Also in 20.4:** Unlawful exercise of power may be lawfully called to account and proceeded against by the church.



**Life Together in the  
Church, WCF  
Chapters 25-26**

# Jesus is Head of the Church

WCF Chapters 25-26

# Jesus is the Head of the Invisible Church – WCF 25.1

*WCF 25.1. The catholic (that is, universal) church, which is invisible, consists of all the elect who have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ its head. This church is his bride, his body, and the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

# WCF Chapter 25 – Jesus is the Head of the Church

WCF 25.1B - The church is Christ's

A. Spouse (Eph 5) relational image

B. Body (Eph. 1:22, Col. 1:18) – physical image

C. Fullness (Eph 1:23)

# Jesus is the Head of the Church – Fullness of Christ

Ephesians 1:22: “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

“Every ministry is given by Christ. Every office is of his design. Every servant is to do his will. Every law is his creation. Every gift has been purchased by his own blood. The church is his. If we are to learn anything about the subject of the church, we are to learn it in Christ’s school.” Van DixHoorn

## 25.2 – Jesus is Head of the Visible Church

*25.2-A. The visible church, which is also catholic (that is, universal) under the gospel (that is, not confined to one nation, as it was before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion, together with their children.*

- Universal and Visible
- Professors and ‘their children’



# The Visible Church – ...to Professors

1Cor. 1:2: “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:”

# The Visible Church

*WCF 25.2-B It is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.*

- The church as Kingdom
- House and Family

## 25.3 – The Ministry of the Visible Church

WCF 25.3. To this universal, visible church Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the age. For this purpose he makes these means effectual by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise.

# The Ministry of the Visible Church

## *The Gifts of the Visible Church*

WCF 25.3. To this universal, visible church Christ has given the *ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God*

# The Ministry of the Visible Church

*Gathering and perfecting –*

WCF 25.3. To this universal, visible church Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God *for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life,*

# The Ministry of the Visible Church

Ephesians 4:8 Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” ...11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 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, 14 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.

# The Ministry of the Visible Church

*To the end of time by the spirit*

WCF 25.3. To this universal, visible church Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, *to the end of the age. For this purpose he makes these means effectual by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise.*

# The Ministry of the Visible Church

Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”



# The Marks of the Visible Church

*WCF 25.4. This universal church has been sometimes more and sometimes less visible. Particular churches, which are members of this universal church, are more or less pure to the extent to which the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, the ordinances are administered, and public worship is performed more or less purely in them.*

# The Visible Church as a Mixed Bag

*WCF 25.5. The purest churches on earth are subject to both mixture and error, and some have so degenerated that they have become no churches of Christ at all, but rather synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall always be a church on earth to worship God according to his will.*

## 25.6 – Jesus is the Only Head of the Church

*WCF 25.6. There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome be its head in any sense.*

Matt. 23:8: “But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. 10 Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.”

## 25.6 – Jesus is the Only Head of the Church

1Pet. 5:1: “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

United to Christ and to One  
Another  
WCF Chapter 26

# United to Christ and to One Another

26.1 – how we are united to Christ and how we are to find communion with the saints

26.2 – how we are told to hold communion with one another in corporate worship and outside corporate worship

26.3 the limits of union and communion with Christ and his people

## 26.1-A – How we are United to Christ

*WCF 26.1-A All saints—who are united to Jesus Christ their head by his Spirit and by faith—have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory.*

## 26.1 –How we are to Find Communion with the Saints

*WCF 26.1-B “And, being united to one another in love, they participate in each other's gifts and graces and are obligated to perform those public and private duties which lead to their mutual good, both inwardly and outwardly.”*

Eph 4:15: “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 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.”



## 26.1 – How we are to Find Communion with the Saints

1Cor. 12:7: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

1Th. 5:11: “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”

1 Th. 5:14: “And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.”

## 26.1 –How we are to Find Communion with the Saints

Rom. 1:11: “For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— 12 that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.”

John 13:34: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Gal. 6:10: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

## 26.2 –Communing with One Another Inside and Outside Corporate Worship

*WCF 26.2-A. It is the duty of professing saints to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God and in performing such other spiritual services as help them to edify one another.*

Heb. 10:24: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,” 25 “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.”

## 26.2 –Communing with One Another Inside and Outside Corporate Worship

*WCF 26.2B “It is their duty also to come to the aid of one another in material things according to their various abilities and necessities. As God affords opportunity, this communion is to be extended to all those in every place who call on the name of the Lord Jesus.”*

Acts 2:42-47

## 26.2 –Communing with One Another Inside and Outside Corporate Worship

Acts 2:42: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

## 26.3 – Limits of Union and Communion with Christ and His People

WCF 26.3-A The communion which the saints have with Christ does not make them in any way partakers of the substance of his Godhead, or in any respect equal with Christ.

WCF 26.3-B To affirm either is irreverent and blasphemous. Nor does their fellowship with one another as saints take away or infringe upon any person's title to, or right to, his own goods and possessions.

# Words We Can See: The Sacraments



# Chapters:

Sacraments (Ch. 27)

Baptism (Ch. 28)

The Lord's Supper (Ch. 29)

# Outline:

Considering the Word “Sacrament”

What is a “Sacrament?”

Some of the “Less Difficult” Issues

Some of the More Difficult Issues

Some Final Thoughts



# Considering the Word “Sacrament”

- The Word “Sacrament” is not used in the Bible.
- It is a Form of the Latin word “Sacramentum”
- In Roman Law Sacramentum was
  - (1) An Oath of allegiance taken by soldiers – promising to be true to their superiors and their country; or
  - (2) A Pledge, secured by a deposit of money, made by each party to a civil action, attesting that the party’s position is true and right. The litigant that lost forfeited the deposit to the state.
- The Idea of Oath/Promise/Surety is at the Core of its common use.

## What is a “Sacrament?”

**WCF 27.1.** Sacraments are **holy signs** and **seals** of the covenant of grace, **immediately instituted by God**, to **represent Christ**, and **his benefits**; and to **confirm our interest in him**: as also, to put a **visible difference between those that belong unto the church**, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to **engage them to the service of God in Christ**, according to his Word.

## What is a “Sacrament?”

**WLC #162.** A sacrament is an holy ordinance **instituted by Christ** in his church, to signify, seal, **and exhibit** unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of his mediation; to **strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces**; to oblige them to obedience; **to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another**; and to distinguish them from those that are without.

# What is a “Sacrament?”

1. Holy sign (points to), seal (authenticating mark), and exhibition (public display) of the Covenant of Grace – the substance is Christ as he is presented in the Gospel..
2. Immediately Instituted by Christ.
3. Given to Represent Christ and the Benefits of His Mediation.
4. For the Following Purposes:
  - a. To confirm to us our interest in Christ
  - b. To strengthen and increase our faith and other evangelical graces
  - c. To incline us more to obedience
  - d. To testify and to cherish our love with one another
  - e. To put a visible difference between the church and the world.

# What is a “Sacrament?”

**The Principal Accent:** Sacraments are signs, seals, and visible exhibitions of God’s free offer to sinners of life and salvation in Jesus Christ. (WCF 7.3). They are visible Oaths/Pledges of the Triune God.

The Sacraments are NOT to be understood primarily as Oaths taken by a Christian to display the sincerity of his/her faith. They are NOT primarily about our faithfulness. They are about God’s faithfulness.

# Sacraments – The Less Difficult Matters

**1. Efficacy.** Whatever benefits (grace) that Sacraments confer (“the efficacy of a sacrament”) are NOT the result of

- Any essential power in the elements used in the sacrament
- The past, present or future piety of the one who administers the sacrament
- The past, present, future intentions of the one who administers the sacrament

Instead, the benefits from the Sacrament flow from the Holy Spirit and the word of institution which contains “a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.”

# Sacraments – The Less Difficult Matters

**2. Multiple Sacraments - One Covenant of Grace.** God provided “Sacraments” for His people before the coming of Christ:

(1) Rainbow - Noah;

(2) Circumcision - Abraham;

(3) Cloud - Pillar, Tabernacle/Ark of the Covenant – Moses;

(4) Throne – David.

Those sacraments conveyed in substance the same as the two sacraments of the New Testament because they signified and sealed to those OT believers the Covenant of Grace as it was then administered. **(WCF 27.5)**

# Sacraments – The Less Difficult Matters

**3. Two Sacraments.** For those believers who live after the coming of Christ, there are only TWO sacraments (1) baptism and (2) the Lord's Supper. **(WCF 27.4)**

These are the only two signs/seals that Christ immediately instituted:

Baptism – Matthew 28:19

The Lord's Supper – Luke 22:16-20, I Cor. 11:23

*Note the consistency with Chapter 1 of the Confession*



# More Difficult Matters

## Sacraments – The Sign and the Thing Signified

### Two Questions:

1. We know what the signs are (water or bread and wine), but exactly what do they signify? – a particularly critical question in Baptism.
2. How are the signs and the things signified related? When I receive the sign, do I also receive the thing signified? – a particularly critical question in the Lord's Supper.

# Sacraments – The Sign and the Thing Signified

<b>Sacrament</b>	<b>What does the Sign Signify?</b>	<b>What does the one receive when he/she receives the Sign?</b>
<b>Baptism (WCF 28)</b>	Solemn admission into the visible church; Ingrafting into Christ; Regeneration; Remission of sins; Giving up unto God, through Christ, to walk in newness of life. <b>WCF 28.1</b>	All those evangelical graces signified (left) are offered, exhibited and conferred, by the Holy Spirit in time, <b>to all whom God has appointed according to His will.</b> <b>WCF 28.6</b>

# Sacraments – The Sign and the Thing Signified

Sacrament	What does the Sign Signify?	What does the one receive when he/she receives the Sign?
<b>Lord's Supper (WCF 29)</b>	The Body and the Blood of Christ (WCF 29.5)	“Worthy receivers. . . inwardly <b>by faith, really. . . spiritually</b> receive, and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ <b>being then [just as]. . . spiritually present to the faith</b> of the believer. . . as the elements themselves are to [the believer's] outward senses.” <b>WCF 29.7</b>

# Sacraments: Receiving, Administration, & Repetition

	Who is to receive the sign?	How may the Sign be Administered?	Is the sign to be repeated?
<b>Baptism</b>	Those who profess faith in Christ and their children – <b>28.4</b>	Sprinkling, pouring, or dipping. <b>28.2</b>	Not if it was by administered in the Trinitarian formula.
<b>Lord's Supper</b>	“Worthy receivers” <b>29.7</b> The “ignorant and wicked” should not. <b>29.8</b>	By words of institution to set apart to a holy use for only those who are present in the congregation. <b>29.3-4</b>	Yes. <b>The WLC # 177:</b> “... to be administered often . . . to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment.”

# Sacraments – Final Comments

1. Remember again: The Sacraments are principally visible declarations, to the people of God, of Christ and all His benefits. They are NEVER to be turned into works designed to display the sincerity of our faith and to secure God's favor.
2. The Sacraments, in and of themselves, have NO saving power. Therefore, we should be charitable toward our brothers and sisters in Christ who do not share our views regarding them.
3. The grace communicated in Christ, by the Holy Spirit in the sacraments, is the same grace communicated in Christ, by the Holy Spirit in the Word. It's not a different grace, but a different means of communicating the same grace.

# Sacraments – Final Comments

4. But, by recognizing these facts, don't think that the Sacraments are unimportant. They are purposefully ordained by the Father, instituted by Christ, and executed by the power of the Holy Spirit as a means of our common union, our sanctification, and our perseverance.
5. For further study: The Westminster Larger Catechism, Questions 161 – 177.



**God Protects His People as  
They Await Their Rest:  
Church Censures and  
Church Councils**

# Church Censures (WCF 30)

## Starting Points:

### 1. Christ is King & Head of the Church (WCF 30.1)

- a. There is here a Repetition From Chapter 25 “Of the Church”
- b. But a Different Focus: Chapter 25 addresses the question, How should we think about this Bride of Christ?

How does it connect to God’s eternal decrees? Are all that profess Christ members of the Church? Is the church limited to one nation? Is it limited in time? Is it always perfect? Will it ever be perfect? How do I make sense of all the different churches? Are they all true or are they all a lie?

- c. Chapters 30 and 31 focus on **HOW Christ Rules and Reigns as King in His Church**. The Question here is Church Government.



# Church Censures (WCF 30)

## Starting Points:

2. The members of the Westminster Assembly **disagreed** on the proper structure of Church Government. A small number were Anglican, some were Congregationalists, and most were Presbyterian. Chapter 31 will tell us which one of those three positions the assembly ultimately affirms.
3. Chapter 30 focuses not on those differences, but upon that on which they agreed: **Christ rules the church through officers that He appoints. Those officers exercise that rule by the means that Christ instituted and to the end of the good of those who belong to Christ and ultimately to His Glory.**

# Church Censures (WCF 30)

## Church Officers:

1. “The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his church, hath therein appointed a government, **in the hand of church officers**, distinct from the civil magistrate.” – **WCF 30.1**

## Key Points:

- The idea that God creates authorities to rule by serving runs throughout the Scriptures. When the rulers appointed by God to rule do so without serving, God rebukes/disciplines the rulers.
- The New Testament regularly refers to “elders” or “overseers/bishops” as those who are called and appointed to serve the church by ruling. Acts 20:17-28; I Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; Heb. 13:7-24.
- This office is an ecclesiastical office, not a civil (common community) office. The officers are ecclesiastical officers, not civil ones.

# Church Censures (WCF 30)

## **The Authority of the Officers and the Means of Their Rule:**

2. “To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed; by virtue whereof, they have power, respectively, to retain, and remit sins; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word, and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the gospel; and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.”—  
WCF 30.2

## **Key Points:**

- These Officers are given by Christ the “keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Matt. 16:13-19; Matt. 18:17-18; John 20:23. Christ first gave this authority to his disciples and in them to the elders/overseers who govern/rule His Church.

# Church Censures (WCF 30)

## Key Points cont'd:

- The “keys” refer to the authority and responsibility to “guide the body of Christ in determining whether someone is to be treated [by the church] as a brother/sister, an erring brother/sister, or as [on outside of Christ].  
VanDixhorn, pp. 403-404
- The “means” to be used are the “Word” and “Censures.”
  - The reading, the preaching, and the teaching of the Word is the regular and common way that Christ, through the officers, governs and cares for His people. The Word convicts and corrects; it also exhorts, encourages, and confirms.
  - “As occasion requires” Christ will rule over His people, through the officers, by means of a **censure** – a formal act of discipline directed to a particular individual or group of individuals.

# What are these Censures? - WCF 30.4

4. “. . . , the officers of the church are to proceed by admonition; suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a season; and by excommunication from the church; according to the nature of the crime, and demerit of the person.” – **WCF 30.4**

## Key Points:

- These three acts of formal discipline are applicable to **members and officers alike**. As the Word is to be applied equally to all, so the censures are to be applied equally to all. (*See, PCA Book of Church Order, Chap. 30. for additional censures for officer holders.*)
- The decision regarding the severity of the censure is to be made in light of the nature of the wrong, the fault of the person, and the response by the person to correction.

# The Purposes of the Censures - WCF 30.3

3. Church censures are necessary, for the [1] reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren, for [2] the deterring of others from the like offenses, for [3] purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump, for [4] vindicating the honor of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel, and for [5] preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer his covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders. **WCF 30.3**

## Key Points:

- Censures are to be used. They are understood to be **necessary** when an “occasion requires” it.

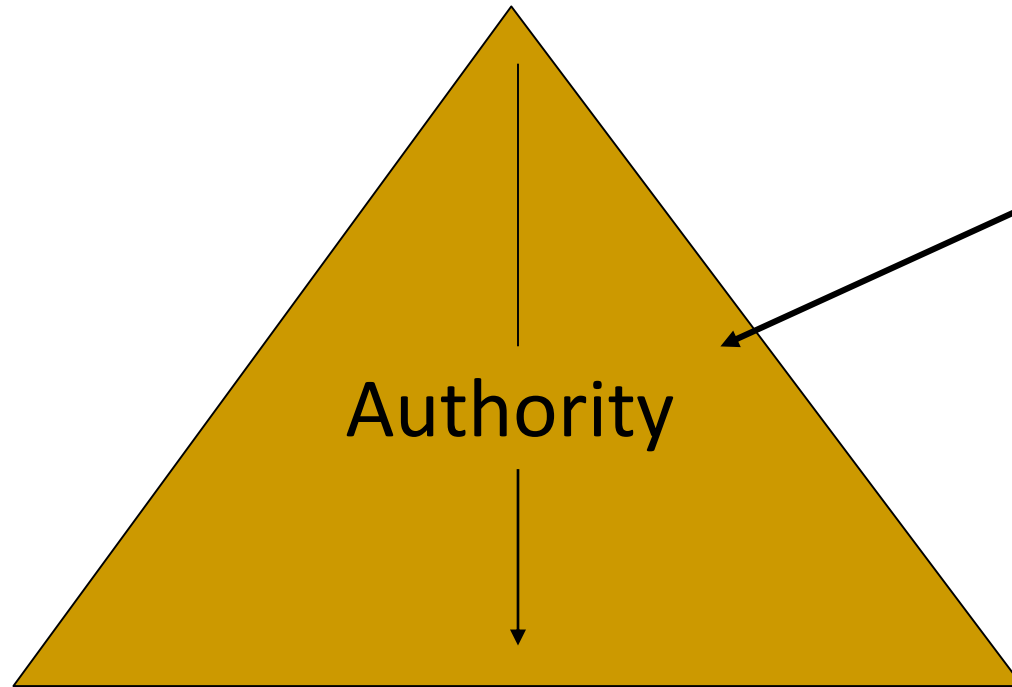
# The Purposes of Censures - WCF 30.3

## Key Points Cont'd:

- The Scriptures indicate that censures are to serve multiple purposes. In listing the various purposes, the divines are careful to be faithful to the Bible's instruction on censures. And, consistent with Chapter 1 (Of Holy Scripture) they list all the purposes that the New Testament provides for the use of censures. The Westminster Divines refuse to reduce the purposes of censures to a single, central or exclusive purpose, e.g., the purpose of every censure is not just a "rescue mission."
- When officers use censures, they must keep in mind all of these purposes. Without that careful and prayerful consideration, the censure will likely be either too harsh or too light.

# Church Councils (31)

Christ is King & Head of the Church



Officers Serving by Ruling  
in Local Congregations

**This is the disputed space:**

1. How does Christ's Authority end up residing in the officers who are overseeing the local congregations?
2. Is the authority of the local officers subject to review by others or is it final?



## How does Christ's authority come to reside in officers of a local congregation? Are decisions by those local officers final? The Choices:

- 1. Indirect and Hierarchical** (Catholic, Episcopal, Anglican, Methodist)-  
Christ delegates authority to one or more Bishops as His representative(s) on Earth. The Bishop then, in a hierarchical structure, delegates limited authority to others who are more locally located. All the decisions of the lower clergy are reviewable by those who hold a higher rank.
- 2. Direct, Representative, but not Formally Connected**  
(Congregationalist/Baptist) – Christ appoints, by selection of the congregation of officers, one or more officers (elders/deacons) to exercise authority in a local congregation. The decisions made by those officers are final unless the congregation alters them by vote. Churches may organize in an association to share common ministry objectives, but those associations do not review decisions.

## How does Christ's authority come to reside in officers of a local congregation? Are decisions by those local officers final?

**3. Direct, Representative and Connected** (Presbyterian, Christian Reformed Church, United Reformed Church) – Christ appoints officers (elders) in each church. Those officers are identified by the members of the congregation through the work of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with the biblical requirements (I Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). They are charged with the spiritual well-being of the church, Representative elders from the local churches within a region gather at times of their choosing (1) to determine controversies of faith; (2) set rules and directions for matters that are for the common good of the whole church, and (3) to review the actions of the officers of the local churches to determine whether those actions are consistent with Scripture and the rules adopted by the denomination for its good order.

**WCF Chapter 31** - Despite disagreements, Chapter 31 takes the Position that the **Third Option** is the one that best represents Scripture and comports with the Light of Nature, Christian Prudence, and the General Rules of the Word (WCF 1.6). See WCF 31.1 and 31.2 below.

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**WCF 31.1** - “For the better government, and further edification of the church, **there ought** to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils: and **it belongeth to the overseers and other rulers of the particular churches, by virtue of their office, and the power which Christ hath given them for edification and not for destruction, to appoint such assemblies;** and to convene together in them, as often as they shall judge it expedient for the good of the church.”

**WCF 31.2** – “It belongeth to synods and councils, **ministerially** to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of his church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same: . . .”

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**Note:** The authority of any council **CAN NEVER** exceed the authority held by the officers of the church under Christ as King and Head of the Church. Because Christ is the Magistrate of the Church, officers of the Church, as undershepherds of Christ, have only **declarative** and **ministerial** authority. They do not, individually or collectively, have authority to bind anyone’s conscience by a law that is not in the Word of God. (See WCF, Chapter 20, Of Christian Liberty . . . )

# What Authority Do Councils Have?

**WCF 31.2** – “. . . [their] decrees and determinations, **if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission**; not only for their agreement with the Word, **but also for the power whereby they are made**, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in his Word.”

**WCF 31.3** - “All synods or councils, since the Apostles' times, whether general or particular, **may err**; and many have erred. **Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both.**”

**WCF 31.4** – “Synods and councils are to handle, or conclude nothing, but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in **cases extraordinary**; or, by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.”

# Back to Our Beginning: Considering Creeds and Confessions<sup>1</sup>

## Why Should We Give Attention to Proclamations of Councils?

- A. They are Useful Summaries of the Teaching of Scripture on Key Points.
- B. They are Intended to do Two Things:
  - 1. To Assist the Church in instructing the saints in the Faith (and are efficient in doing so).
  - 2. To Unite the Church in Communal Praise – to remind us of Who our God is, What He has done, What He is doing, and What He will do so that we can Praise Him in Unison.

<sup>1</sup> See Carl Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative*

# The Triumph of the Lamb and the People of God



# The Christian Asks: Where are we and how did we get here?

- 1. God Creates all things and Creates Humankind in His Image**
  - a. The Triune God is the sole actor.
  - b. His purpose was the Manifesting of His Glory.
  - c. The Crown of His creation was Humankind. They alone were to image Him.
  - d. It was all very good.



# The Christian Asks: Where are we and how did we get here?

## 2. Covenant Failure

- a. Adam, the head of the human race, rebelled as the image bearer; he failed to faithfully execute his role. He broke the Covenant (of works) with God.
- b. A curse results. Humankind will know an ongoing rebellion against and separation from God. They will also die physically; that death is a constant reminder of the reality of our spiritual death.
- c. The creation will also experience the consequences of the covenant curse as well.

# Where are we and how did we get here?

## 3. A New Covenant Promise

- a. In the midst of the pronouncement of curse, God promises salvation. There will be one who shall come. He shall be mortally wounded, but he shall crush the enemies of God and reconcile God to His people.
- b. This New Covenant of Grace is administered throughout the OT by means of various Covenant arrangements (Noah, Abraham, Moses, David). All of those covenant arrangements point to a last Adam, a perfect Adam, who shall fulfill all righteousness and by that shall save His people from their sin. The people of God (a remnant) continue to wait in hope for that One to come. They put their trust in Him even though they don't know His name. They live by faith (Hebrews 11).

# Where are we and how did we get here?

## 4. The Substance of the Covenant of Grace Comes.

- a. In time, the eternal Son comes, sent by the Father and ministered to by the Holy Spirit. He is the Mediator of this Covenant. He is obedient unto death, even death on a cross. He is priest, sacrifice, and temple for His people.
- b. He is raised from the dead, ascends into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
- c. The Holy Spirit – proceeding from the Father and the Son - is poured out on God's people. The Spirit brings them from death to life (effectual call/regeneration) and works repentance and faith in them and they are joined to Christ. They rest and receive Christ and all the blessings of the Covenant that His obedience secured (Justification, Adoption, Sanctification, Perseverance, Assurance).

# Where are we and how did we get here?

## **5. Christ Rules, Provides for, and Protects His People.**

- a. Those who are united to Christ come from every tribe, nation and tongue, and are gathered into a single, catholic, invisible church.
- b. That invisible Church has visible expressions – the local, temporal churches on the earth.
- c. Christ, by His Spirit, feeds these bodies by giving them His Word (through appointed officers) and exhibiting to them His Word (the Sacraments).
- d. Christ gives gifts to His people that they might use them to build up those whom He loves.
- e. Christ also appoints officers to rule in these bodies by serving, and by that He further loves, cares for, and protects His beloved bride.

# The Christian Then Asks: So What's Next?

Much like our time, there were considerable differences among those represented in the Assembly on the particulars of this question. Some thought Christ's return was imminent; others were less convinced. But what they wrote was what they held in common. Here's what Christians are to expect.

1. Death (for all but a few)
2. Resurrection
3. Judgment, and
4. Life in the Presence of God Forever.

## Death (WCF 32)

1. The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.

# Death (WCF 32)

## Key Points:

- There is a distinction between body and soul, but there is no war between them. This is not a physical/spiritual dualism.
- The soul is immortal by God's appointment, but NOT eternal. The body is, by God's decree, also ultimately immortal too.
- At death, the body and the soul, temporarily separate.
  - The body decays – from dust it came, to dust it returns.
  - The soul does not sleep, but goes immediately to God (Luke 23:43 – Jesus' words to the thief, "Today you shall be with me in paradise." and Eccl. 12:7 - "the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.").
  - The souls of the believer and the unbeliever are separated: (1) Highest heavens (Coram Deo) and (2) Hell. No third option.

# Resurrection (WCF 32)

*At the last day, such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed: and all the dead shall be raised up, with the selfsame bodies, and none other (although with different qualities), which shall be united again to their souls forever. **WCF 32.2***

## Key Points:

- There will be a resurrection of the bodies of **ALL** the dead; the bodies of **ALL** those alive “at the last day” will be changed.
- The resurrection body will be uniquely the body of the person who died (or is still alive). It will be recognizable in some way. But, the resurrected body will also be different; it will have “different qualities.”
- There will be a reunion of the body (now resurrected) with the soul for each and every person. That union of body and soul will last forever.



## Resurrection (WCF 32)

*The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonor: the bodies of the just, by his Spirit, unto honor; and be made conformable to his own glorious body. – WCF 32.3.*

### Key Points:

- While ALL shall know a resurrection, the Confession [using the language of Scripture “righteous – wicked” (John 5:25-2) and “just – unjust” (Acts 24:15)] makes clear that different consequences will befall those who are counted “righteous/just” and those who are counted “wicked/just.” That distinction is addressed again in Chapter 33 – Judgment.
- The “just” and the “unjust” are raised by different power: The “unjust” by “the power of Christ,” and the “just” by “his [Christ’s] Spirit.” It signals two things: (1) union with Christ for the “just;” (2) Christ as only Judge, not Savior, for the “unjust.”

## Judgment (WCF 33)

*God hath appointed a day, wherein he will judge the world, in righteousness, by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil. **WCF 33.1***

### **Key Points:**

- The Scriptures make clear that Christ is the Father-appointed Judge/King. John 5:22-29; Acts 17:31; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10. He will judge.
- The judgment shall be all inclusive: every act; every failure to act; every word; every thought. “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you, there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

## Judgment (WCF 33)

*2. The end of God's appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of his justice, in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing, which shall come from the presence of the Lord; but the wicked who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. - **WCF 33.2.***

### **Key Points:**

- The purpose of the judgment is, like Creation, to manifest the Glory of God. The judgment manifests the “glory of [God’s] mercy” in salvation and “the “glory. . . of his justice” in condemnation.

# Judgment (WCF 33.2)

## Key Points cont'd:

- For those who are righteous in Christ, their immortal soul and immortal body will receive “that fullness of joy and refreshing, which shall come from the presence of the Lord”
- For those who are not hidden in Christ and His righteousness, who do not “know God” and do not “obey the gospel of Jesus Christ,” there is eternal torment and an everlasting destruction that comes from being away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His might. 2 Thess. 1:7-10.

## Judgment (WCF 33)

*3. As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin; and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity: so will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come Lord Jesus, come quickly, Amen. - **WCF 33.3***

### **Key Points:**

- The Lord Jesus purposes for **ALL PEOPLE** to be certain that He shall return in judgment for two reasons: (1) that knowledge will deter believer and unbeliever from engaging in more and more sin; and (2) to comfort the believer in the midst of any present adversity.
- The Lord Jesus purposes that **ALL PEOPLE** *not know* the day of his return to shake off carnal security and be prepared to say “Come, Lord Jesus.”

Come, Lord Jesus, Come Quickly, Amen