

The Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647

Translated into 21st-Century American English

Edition: March 13, 2018

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Helpful Notes to the Reader

Words or phrases in brackets [] are generally synonyms or short definitions of the word just preceding the brackets. Occasionally brackets contain explanatory material. Footnotes give longer definitions or explanations. Also, some footnotes point out variations between the source texts used in this translation;¹ such variations are typically very minor. Helpful Hint: When using Adobe Reader, you can click on a footnote to jump to it. Then use <alt><left-arrow> to return to the main text. Other PDF readers and non-Windows computers will have a similar keyboard shortcut; check the menus or toolbars in the browser or PDF reader.

Scripture Proof Texts - Important Information

Scripture proof texts are an important concern in this document; the WCF is, after all, only a summary of teachings from the Word of God. Portions of the WCF are typically *followed* by superscripted letters that correspond to the same superscripted letter *preceding* one or more Scripture references. These superscripted letters mirror the WCF/Scripture proof text linkage of the original WCF. These letters are omitted when all references pertain to the whole paragraph. Also, in certain cases, the letters may not exactly mirror the original linkage due to rearrangement of the text for readability.

All Scripture references are followed by four hyperlinks: ESV, KJ3, NASB, and WEB, standing for the English Standard Version, the King James 3 Bible, the New American Standard Bible, and the World English Bible respectively. Some comments on these four versions and their differences are in order. These four are the only faithful, reliable, and contemporary Bible versions for which the editor was able to obtain permission to quote extensively. At the time of the writing of the Westminster documents, both the Geneva Bible and the King James Version (KJV) (also known as the Authorized Version) were in common use, but quotations within the Westminster documents are from the KJV, and much of the wording of the Westminster standards comes straight out of the KJV. In light of this, the KJ3 and the WEB are quite helpful as they are direct descendants of the KJV and of the original language manuscript streams from which the KJV was translated. Of these two, the WEB is by far the more readable. The KJ3 is a “literal translation” of the original languages. It can be extremely helpful to the careful reader by showing idiomatic and other features of the original languages that are often lost by other translations; knowledge of such features adds color and depth to our understanding of God’s Word. On the other hand, the KJ3 can mislead the reader for this very same reason. By way of example, consider Daniel 10:4 in the KJ3: “And in the

¹ The two primary source texts were those found in the *Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, A-5, <http://reformedpresbyterian.org/downloads/constitution2010.pdf> (accessed September 30, 2014) and Schaff, Philip, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom, With a History and Critical Notes*, vol. 3, Revised by David Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), 598. See Appendix B for more information.

four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the hand of the great river.” Other versions put “side” or “bank” instead of “hand,” which makes the meaning immediately clear. It is the editor’s considered opinion that most readers should not use the KJ3 without simultaneously consulting another translation. This caution applies to all other literal translations as well. The ESV and NASB draw upon different original language manuscript streams (at least to some extent) than did the KJV, and thus, in some cases, the reasons that the Westminster Divines chose a particular passage may be harder to discern. The NASB has long had a reputation for precision, while the ESV is among the easiest of contemporary and faithful translations to read. The careful seeker of Divine Truth will routinely consult multiple translations (Proverbs 11:14) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.²

These hyperlinks will jump to the referenced text, which text is included in this document. Each proof text also has a nearby “Back” link. The reader should note the difference between these Back links and the browser or reader Back button: the included Back link returns the reader to the proof text hyperlink, while the browser or reader Back button returns the reader to the former page location. Also, on the web version *only*, pausing the mouse over a hyperlink will display the passage in a screen tip, up to the first 256 characters. (This is true whether the web version is accessed online or as files on your computer.) Most web browsers and PDF readers will allow the user to open a “New Window” displaying the same document in two windows. Some readers will find this feature helpful as they study the WCF text and proof Scriptures together, something the editor highly recommends. Also, some Scripture passages may seem incomplete to some readers. This is because the WCF was written for those with significant Bible knowledge; they would recognize the context. In such cases, the reader is strongly encouraged to study the broader context of the Scripture passage.

² The editor is well aware of the “KJV Only,” Westcott-Hort, Majority Text, and other schools of thought and the attending, often uncharitable, controversies concerning them. He does not apologize for the simplifications presented here, since these topics are outside of the scope of this document.

Introduction

The original *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) was finished by the Westminster Assembly in 1646 without Scripture proofs. Parliament required the Assembly to provide Scripture proofs, which were finished in 1647.³ Since that time, various denominations have incorporated the WCF into their denominational standards, beginning with the Church of Scotland in 1647. However, most denominations have either produced revisions of the WCF or declared exceptions to parts of the original WCF prior to incorporating the WCF into their denominational standards. Although some of these later editions of the WCF have been translated into twentieth-century or later English, the editor is aware of only a single translation of the original 1647 WCF into contemporary American English.⁴

While the editor does not presume to replace any denomination's standard text, the present translation is given in order to make the original richness of the 1647 WCF accessible and easily read by the contemporary reader, all to the glory, praise, and honor of God. The editor has endeavored to faithfully retain the meaning of the original text, translating word for word when possible. At the same time, the goal of readability is paramount with the intent that one may read with ease, focusing on the material without being distracted by antique spelling, vocabulary, grammar, or difficult sentence constructs. For this reason, there are times when the original text is quite considerably modified and rearranged. Details on the translation process and philosophy may be found in Appendix B.

Regrettably, no human work can be translated without some loss of finer shades of meaning. It is the editor's opinion, however, that this loss is small compared to the loss imposed on many readers by changes in word and phrase meanings over time. Readers interested in more detailed study are encouraged to consult the referenced Scriptures and some of the many commentaries on the WCF, as well as the original WCF itself.

The editor has endeavored to translate faithfully without interjecting his own opinions. Nonetheless, the WCF is a human work that is a product of its place in history and geography. God has continued to raise up able theologians in the intervening 370 years, and we now know that there do exist a very few theological errors in the WCF. The editor is conscience-bound to point out these errors for fear of propagating that which is not in accordance with Scripture. All such editorial opinions are clearly designated in the footnotes. Let the reader be as the Bereans, searching the Scriptures, guided by the Holy Spirit.

³ William Maxwell, DD, Hetherington, LLD, 346.

⁴ Board of Education and Publication, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, *The Modern Language Revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2000). The editor acknowledges some helpfulness of this work for the present document. Other similar editions of the same translation exist. See, for example, http://opc.org/documents/MESV_frames.html. (Accessed May 18, 2015)

Change Log

Unlike traditional paper book publishing, electronic publishing allows fairly rapid increments to new additions. This log allows the reader to know what changes have been made from an earlier version.

August 5, 2015

So that readers do not have to go online to access Scripture proof texts, four versions are now included for which the editor was able to obtain permission. The Helpful Hints section was updated to reflect this. Small changes were made throughout the text for typographical error correction, clarity, and modernization.

February 16, 2015

The English Standard Version (ESV), by kind permission, was added to the versions available both within the document itself, and in screen tips.

February 7, 2015

Original release.

Chapter 1: Of the Holy Scripture

1. The light of nature and the works of creation and providence so clearly display the goodness, wisdom, and power of God that they leave men inexcusable.^a However, they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of His will that is necessary for salvation.^b Therefore it pleased the Lord, at various times, and in different ways, to reveal Himself and to declare His will to His Church.^{5, c} Afterward, He was pleased to commit this revelation entirely into writing:

- For the better preservation and propagation of the truth
- For the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against:
 - The corruption of the flesh⁶
 - The malice of Satan
 - The world^{7, d}

This makes the Holy Scripture absolutely necessary^e because those former ways of God’s revealing His will to His people have now ceased.^f

^aRomans 2:14–15; Romans 1:19–20; Psalm 19:1–3; Romans 1:32; Romans 2:1; ^b1 Corinthians 1:21; 1 Corinthians 2:13–14; ^cHebrews 1:1; ^dProverbs 22:19–21; Luke 1:3–4; Romans 15:4; Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; Isaiah 8:19–20; ^e2 Timothy 3:15; 2 Peter 1:19; ^fHebrews 1:1–2

2. Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, which are these:

Of the Old Testament:

Genesis	Ecclesiastes
Exodus	The Song of Songs
Leviticus	[Song of Solomon]
Numbers	Isaiah
Deuteronomy	Jeremiah
Joshua	Lamentations
Judges	Ezekiel
Ruth	Daniel
1 Samuel	Hosea
2 Samuel	Joel
1 Kings	Amos
2 Kings	Obadiah
1 Chronicles	Jonah
2 Chronicles	Micah
Ezra	Nahum

Of the New Testament:

Matthew	1 Timothy
Mark	2 Timothy
Luke	Titus
John	Philemon
Acts	Hebrews
Romans	James
1 Corinthians	1 Peter
2 Corinthians	2 Peter
Galatians	1 John
Ephesians	2 John
Philippians	3 John
Colossians	Jude
1 Thessalonians	Revelation
2 Thessalonians	

⁵ When the WCF uses *Church* (capitalized), it refers to the whole body of believers in Jesus Christ, His bride.

⁶ Scripture uses *flesh* in many ways and space prohibits a full exposition herein. As used in “the corruption of the flesh,” it refers to man as a whole creature (body, mind, will, and soul) who, in all parts, is sinful and fallen from holiness. Thus, the flesh is a source of temptation to sin, and is often set in contrast to the Holy Spirit, who indwells believers in Jesus Christ.

⁷ the world: anything on earth that is against God

Nehemiah	Habakkuk
Esther	Zephaniah
Job	Haggai
Psalms	Zechariah
Proverbs	Malachi

All of these books are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith⁸ and life.

Luke 16:29, 31; Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 22:18–19; 2 Timothy 3:16

3. The books commonly called *Apocrypha*,⁹ not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon¹⁰ of Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God. They are to be no more approved or made use of than any other human writings.

Luke 24:27, 44; Romans 3:2; 2 Peter 1:21

4. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, does not depend upon the testimony of any man or church, but solely upon God (who is truth itself), the author of Scripture. Therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.

2 Peter 1:19, 21; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 John 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:13

5. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture.^a And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy¹¹ of the doctrine,¹² the majesty of the style, the consistency of all the parts, the intent of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full revelation it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection of Scripture—these are arguments by which it abundantly evidences [shows] itself to be the Word of God. Yet nonetheless, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of Scripture is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.^b

^a1 Timothy 3:15; ^b1 John 2:20, 27; John 16:13–14; 1 Corinthians 2:10–12; Isaiah 59:21

6. The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory and man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and

⁸ In the context of the Christian religion, stated most briefly, *faith* is unconditional trust in Jesus Christ—a spiritual gift of God. *Faith* is the noun form. *Believe* is the verb form. More broadly, *faith* may include all of the consequences of this trust in Christ, including all that Christians believe, how they live out their lives, establish systems of doctrine, form churches, and so on. It is in this light that we may speak of the *Christian Faith*.

⁹ Examples of apocrypha include: 1, 2, 3, 4 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Esther chapter 10 past verse 3 (canonical Esther ends with verse 3), Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) (not to be confused with canonical Ecclesiastes), Baruch, Epistle of Jeremy, Song of the Three Children, Story of Susanna, The Idol Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manassas, 1, 2, 3, 4 Maccabees, and many others.

¹⁰ canon: the collection of the inspired books of the Bible

¹¹ efficacy: completely effective in accomplishing a particular result

¹² doctrine: teaching, whether simple or complex

necessary consequence¹³ may be deduced from Scripture. Nothing at any time is to be added to this whole counsel of God, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men.^a Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word.^b Also, there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.^c

^a2 Timothy 3:15–17; Galatians 1:8–9; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; ^bJohn 6:45; 1 Corinthians 2:9–12;¹⁴ ^c1 Corinthians 11:13–14; 1 Corinthians 14:26, 40

7. All things in Scripture are not equally plain in themselves nor equally clear to all.^a Yet those things that are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are quite clearly propounded¹⁵ and opened in some place of Scripture or another. Thus, not only the learned, but the unlearned, by a due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them.^b

^a2 Peter 3:16; ^bPsalms 119:105, 130

8. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the native language of the people of God of old. The New Testament was written in Greek, which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations. These, being directly inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic.^a Thus, in all controversies of religion the Church is to appeal to them as the ultimate authority.^b But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who:

- Have a right to, and a valid claim to have, the Scriptures
- Are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them^c

Therefore they are to be translated into the common language[s] of every nation into which they come,^d so that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they:

- May worship Him in an acceptable manner^e
- May have hope through patience and the comfort of the Scriptures^f

^aMatthew 5:18; ^bIsaiah 8:20; Acts 15:15; John 5:39, 46 ^cJohn 5:39; ^d1 Corinthians 14:6, 9, 11–12, 24, 27–28; ^eColossians 3:16; ^fRomans 15:4

9. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself. Therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not many, but one),¹⁶ it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

2 Peter 1:20–21; Acts 15:15–16¹⁷

¹³ “Good and necessary consequence” means not only that the conclusion may be deduced from the premises but that, given the premises of the argument, the conclusion cannot possibly be false.

¹⁴ Schaff has 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10, 12.

¹⁵ propounded: in this context, put forth for acceptance or adoption

¹⁶ This statement does not preclude the Scriptures from using literary devices that purposefully convey multiple or double meanings, such as Isaiah 28:13, whose sound in the Hebrew is of babbling. In this example, the one and only true and full sense includes both the written meaning and the audio effect.

¹⁷ Schaff has Acts 15:15.

10. The supreme judge by whom all controversies of religion are to be determined; and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits are to be examined; can be none other than the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture, whose sentence [judgment] we are to accept.

Matthew 22:29, 31; Ephesians 2:20; Acts 28:25

Chapter 2: Of God and of the Holy Trinity

1. There is just one only,^a living, and true God:^b who is infinite in being and perfection;^c a most pure spirit;^d invisible^e without body, parts,^f or passions;^{18, g} unchangeable,^h immense,ⁱ eternal,^j without limits,^k almighty,^l most wise,^m most holy,ⁿ most free,^o most absolute;^p working all things according to His own unchangeable and most righteous will^q for His own glory;^r most loving,^s gracious, merciful, long-suffering,¹⁹ abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity,²⁰ transgression,²¹ and sin;^{22, t} the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him;^u and nevertheless most just and terrible in His judgments,^v hating all sin,^w and who will by no means clear the guilty.^x

^aDeuteronomy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 8:4, 6; ^b1 Thessalonians 1:9; Jeremiah 10:10; ^cJob 11:7–9; Job 26:14; ^dJohn 4:24; ^e1 Timothy 1:17; ^fDeuteronomy 4:15–16; John 4:24; Luke 24:39; ^gActs 14:11, 15; ^hJames 1:17; Malachi 3:6; ⁱ1 Kings 8:27; Jeremiah 23:23–24; ^jPsalms 90:2; 1 Timothy 1:17; ^kPsalms 145:3; ^lGenesis 17:1; Revelation 4:8; ^mRomans 16:27; ⁿIsaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8; ^oPsalms 115:3; ^pExodus 3:14; ^qEphesians 1:11; ^rProverbs 16:4; Romans 11:36; ^s1 John 4:8, 16; ^tExodus 34:6–7; ^uHebrews 11:6; ^vNehemiah 9:32–33; ^wPsalms 5:5–6; ^xNahum 1:2–3; Exodus 34:7

2. God has all life,^a glory,^b goodness,^c and blessedness^d in and of Himself. He is alone, in and by Himself, all self-sufficient. He does not stand in need of any creatures²³ that He has made,^e nor does He derive any glory from them,^f but only displays His own glory in, by, to, and upon them. He is the only source²⁴ of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things.^g He has most sovereign dominion over all things, to do by them,

¹⁸ passion: as used here, an emotion outside of one's own voluntary control. As God is immutable and brings all things to pass, He is also *impassible*—not subject to external forces, pain, suffering or involuntary emotions. Far from being cold or unemotional, His most holy and genuine emotions are perfectly governed by His infinite wisdom, knowledge, holiness, perfection and steadfast, unchanging character. Since God is eternally all-knowing, our sin offends Him eternally and Christ's perfect obedience pleases Him eternally. Scriptural references to God's "repentance" are anthropomorphic descriptions by which God condescends to speak to our level of understanding. Such anthropomorphic usages are common in Scripture.

¹⁹ long-suffering: in this context, patiently enduring continual sin against Him

²⁰ iniquity: gross injustice, wickedness

²¹ transgression: disobedience of law, command, or duty

²² Sin refers to an offense against God by disobeying Him, even deep in one's heart. Any harm to man is secondary in seriousness.

²³ Any created thing, not limited to an animal or human.

²⁴ Various versions have *fountain* or *foundation*. The Latin translation (Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*) has *fons*, meaning source, fountain or principal cause. As the use of *fountain* in the sense of *source* is uncommon today, the editor translates *source*. Note: The WCF original was in English; the Latin translation was made in 1656.

for them, or upon them whatever He pleases.^h In His sight all things are open, clear, and obvious.ⁱ His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent of any creature;^j thus nothing is to Him contingent²⁵ or uncertain.^k He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands.^l To Him is due from angels and men and every other creature whatever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them.^m

^aJohn 5:26; ^bActs 7:2; ^cPsalm 119:68; ^d1 Timothy 6:15; Romans 9:5; ^eActs 17:24–25; ^fJob 22:2–3; ^gRomans 11:36; ^hRevelation 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:15; Daniel 4:25, 35; ⁱHebrews 4:13; ^jRomans 11:33–34; Psalm 147:5; ^kActs 15:18; Ezekiel 11:5; ^lPsalm 145:17; Romans 7:12; ^mRevelation 5:12–14

3. In the unity of the Godhead²⁶ there are three persons,²⁷ of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.^a The Father is from none, neither begotten nor proceeding. The Son is eternally begotten by the Father.^b The Holy Spirit is eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.^c

^a1 John 5:7; Matthew 3:16–17; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; ^bJohn 1:14, 18; ^cJohn 15:26; Galatians 4:6

Chapter 3: Of God's Eternal Decree

1. God, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordained²⁸ all things and events that happen;^a yet in such manner that neither is God the author [originator] of sin,^b nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures. Nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes²⁹ taken away, but rather established.^c

^aEphesians 1:11; Romans 11:33; Hebrews 6:17; Romans 9:15, 18; ^bJames 1:13, 17; 1 John 1:5; ^cActs 2:23; Matthew 17:12; Acts 4:27–28; John 19:11; Proverbs 16:33

2. God knows all things and events that may or can happen upon all supposed conditions.^a Yet, He has not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future or as that which would happen under such conditions.^b

^aActs 15:18; 1 Samuel 23:11–12; Matthew 11:21, 23; ^bRomans 9:11, 13, 16, 18

3. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels^a are predestinated [predetermined] to everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.^b

²⁵ contingent: depending upon something uncertain or unknown

²⁶ Godhead: divine nature or essence of God

²⁷ The Trinity is an unfathomable mystery that defies earthly analogies; *persons* refers to different, distinct, divine modes of being, against whom the concept of the individual human person is a very limited analogy.

²⁸ ordain: to decree and establish, to cause to happen

²⁹ If something is dropped, it will fall due to gravity. This is an example of a *second cause*. Natural laws are laws because God executes His providence in nature in a consistent and orderly manner in keeping with His holy, wise, faithful, and logical character. Miracles are merely when He does something different for a special purpose.

^a1 Timothy 5:21; Matthew 25:41; ^bRomans 9:22–23; Ephesians 1:5–6; Proverbs 16:4

4. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably so marked out. Their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

2 Timothy 2:19; John 13:18

5. Those of mankind who are predestinated to life, God has chosen in Christ to everlasting glory:

- Before the foundation of the world was laid³⁰
- According to His eternal and unchangeable purpose
- According to the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will^a
- Out of His mere free grace³¹ and love
- Without being moved by any foresight, as a condition or cause, with respect to:
 - Faith or good works, or perseverance in them
 - Any other thing in the creature^b
- All to the praise of His glorious grace^c

^aEphesians 1:4, 9, 11; Romans 8:30; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; ^bRomans 9:11, 13, 16; Ephesians 1:4, 9; ^cEphesians 1:6, 12

6. God has appointed the elect³² to glory. Therefore, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, He has foreordained all of the means [progressing] to glorification.^a For which cause, those who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are

- Redeemed by Christ^b
- Effectually called to faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due time
- Justified,³³ adopted, and sanctified^{34, c}
- Kept through His power, through faith, to salvation^d

Neither are any others redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved,³⁵ but the elect only.^{36, e}

^a1 Peter 1:2; Ephesians 1:4–5; Ephesians 2:10; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; ^b1 Thessalonians 5:9–10; Titus 2:14; ^cRomans 8:30; Ephesians 1:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; ^d1 Peter 1:5; ^eJohn 17:9; Romans 8:28–39; John 6:64–65; John 8:47; John 10:26; 1 John 2:19.

7. God was pleased to pass by the rest of mankind and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin:

³⁰ *foundation of the world was laid*: the first step in creating the earth (Genesis 1:1) in formless and void condition

³¹ *grace*: the freely given and unmerited favor of God

³² *elect*: all those who are expressly chosen by God for eternal life

³³ *justify*: to declare guiltless

³⁴ *sanctify*: to make holy, set apart for God. In the Christian life, to progressively die more and more to sin and live more and more for Christ.

³⁵ Salvation and justification are not the same thing. Justification is a one-time act in which the believer is declared free of the guilt of sin. Salvation is a whole package of gifts, including justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification, and so on.

³⁶ The ordering of items in these lists refers to the time-order in which God brings them to pass.

- To the praise of His glorious justice
- According to the unsearchable³⁷ counsel of His own will, by which He extends or withholds mercy as He pleases
- For the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures

Matthew 11:25–26; Romans 9:17–18, 21–22; 2 Timothy 2:19–20; Jude 4; 1 Peter 2:8

8. The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, in such manner that:^a

Men who attend to the will of God revealed in His Word and yield obedience to it, may:

From the certainty of their effectual calling, be assured of their eternal election.^b

Thus, this doctrine will afford reasons for praise, reverence, and admiration of God,^c and reasons for humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all who sincerely obey the Gospel.^d

^aRomans 9:20; Romans 11:33; Deuteronomy 29:29; ^b2 Peter 1:10; ^cEphesians 1:6; Romans 11:33; ^dRomans 11:5–6, 20; 2 Peter 1:10; Romans 8:33; Luke 10:20

Chapter 4: Of Creation

1. It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit^a to create the world and all things in it, whether visible or invisible:

- Out of nothing
- To clearly show and display the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness^b
- In the beginning³⁸
- In the space³⁹ of six days⁴⁰
- All very good^c

^aHebrews 1:2; John 1:2–3; Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13; Job 33:4; ^bRomans 1:20; Jeremiah 10:12; Psalm 104:24; Psalm 33:5–6; ^cGenesis 1; Hebrews 11:3; Colossians 1:16; Acts 17:24

2. After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female,^a with immortal souls endowed with the ability to reason,^b and with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. He made them after His own image,^c with the law of God written in their hearts,^d and with power to fulfill it.^e Yet, He left them to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change; thus with a possibility of their transgressing this law.^f

³⁷ unsearchable: knowable by humans only to a limited extent, if at all

³⁸ beginning: the beginning of created time. The time we experience is part of the created universe. As such, God is no more governed or affected by our time than by any other part of His Creation. The eternity that God knows—for want of a better term—is not the same kind of thing as the time we experience, nor is it simply an infinite amount of our time.

³⁹ span of time

⁴⁰ These were roughly twenty-four-hour days. There is nothing in the Hebrew text to indicate another possibility. The creation narrative is simple and straightforward and not poetic in any way.

Besides this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. While they kept this command they were happy in their communion with God^g and had dominion over the creatures.^h

^aGenesis 1:27; ^bGenesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 23:43; Matthew 10:28; ^cGenesis 1:26; Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24; ^dRomans 2:14–15; ^eEcclesiastes 7:29; ^fGenesis 3:6; Ecclesiastes 7:29; ^gGenesis 2:17; Genesis 3:8–11, 23; ^hGenesis 1:26, 28

Chapter 5: Of Providence

1. God, the great Creator of all things, upholds,^a directs, arranges, and governs all creatures, actions, and things,^b from the greatest even to the least:^c

- By His most wise and holy providence^d
- According to His infallible foreknowledge^e
- According to the free and unchangeable counsel of His own will^f
- To the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy^g

^aHebrews 1:3; ^bDaniel 4:34–35; Psalm 135:6; Acts 17:25–26, 28; Job 38–41; ^cMatthew 10:29–31; ^dProverbs 15:3; Psalm 104:24; Psalm 145:17; ^eActs 15:18; Psalm 94:8–11; ^fEphesians 1:11; Psalm 33:10–11; ^gIsaiah 63:14; Ephesians 3:10; Romans 9:17; Genesis 45:7; Psalm 145:7

2. In relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass unchangeably and infallibly.^a However, by the same providence, He orders them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, whether necessarily, freely, or contingently.^b

^aActs 2:23; ^bGenesis 8:22; Jeremiah 31:35; Exodus 21:13; Deuteronomy 19:5; 1 Kings 22:28, 34; Isaiah 10:6–7

3. In His ordinary providence, God makes use of means,^a yet is free to work without,^b above,^c and against them at His pleasure.^d

^aActs 27:31, 44; Isaiah 55:10–11; Hosea 2:21–22; ^bHosea 1:7; Matthew 4:4; Job 34:20; ^cRomans 4:19–21; ^d2 Kings 6:6; Daniel 3:27

4. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so clearly display themselves in His providence that His providence extends itself even to the first fall⁴¹ and all other sins of angels and men.^a This is not by a bare permission,^b but such as has joined with it both a most wise and powerful confinement^c and by God otherwise ordering and governing sins, in a diverse dispensation,⁴² all for His own holy purposes.^d However, the providence of God is such that the sinfulness of sins proceeds only from the creature and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author [originator] or approver of sin.^e

⁴¹ fall: in this context, the sin of Adam in eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the sin's consequences

⁴² dispensation: administration, divine ordering of the affairs of the world

^aRomans 11:32–34; 2 Samuel 24:1; 1 Chronicles 21:1; 1 Kings 22:22–23; 1 Chronicles 10:4, 13–14; 2 Samuel 16:10; Acts 2:23; Acts 4:27–28; ^bActs 14:16; ^cPsalm 76:10; 2 Kings 19:28; ^dGenesis 50:20; Isaiah 10:6–7, 12; ^eJames 1:13–14, 17; 1 John 2:16; Psalm 50:21

5. The most wise, righteous, and gracious God oftentimes leaves, for a season, His own children to various temptations and to the corruption of their own hearts:

- To chastise them for their former sins or to reveal to them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts
- That they may be humbled^a
- To raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself
- To make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin
- For various other just and holy purposes^b

^a2 Chronicles 32:25–26, 31; 2 Samuel 24:1; ^b2 Corinthians 12:7–9; Psalm 73; Psalm 77:1–12; Mark 14:66–72; John 21:15–17

6. Sometimes God, as a righteous judge, blinds and hardens wicked and ungodly men as punishment for former sins.^a He withholds His grace from them, by which they might have been enlightened in their understandings and worked upon in their hearts.^b What is more, sometimes He also withdraws the gifts that they had^c and exposes them to such objects that their corruption makes occasions of sin.^d Besides all this, He gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan.^e Thus it happens that they harden themselves, even under those means that God uses for the softening of others.^f

^aRomans 1:24, 26, 28; Romans 11:7–8; ^bDeuteronomy 29:4; ^cMatthew 13:12; Matthew 25:29; ^dDeuteronomy 2:30; 2 Kings 8:12–13; ^ePsalm 81:11–12; 2 Thessalonians 2:10–12; ^fExodus 7:3; Exodus 8:15, 32; 2 Corinthians 2:15–16; Isaiah 8:14; 1 Peter 2:7–8; Isaiah 6:9–10; Acts 28:26–27

7. As the providence of God reaches to all creatures in general, so after a most special manner it takes care of His Church and arranges all things to Her good.

1 Timothy 4:10; Amos 9:8–9; Romans 8:28; Isaiah 43:3–5, 14

Chapter 6: Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment of Sin

1. Our first parents,⁴³ being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit.^a This, their sin, God was pleased to permit, according to His wise and holy counsel, having resolved to order it to His own glory.^b

^aGenesis 3:13; 2 Corinthians 11:3; ^bRomans 11:32

⁴³ Adam and Eve

2. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God,^a and thus became dead in sin^b and completely defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.^c

^aGenesis 3:6–8; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Romans 3:23; ^bGenesis 2:17; Ephesians 2:1; ^cTitus 1:15; Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10–19

3. Because they were the root of all mankind,^a the guilt of this sin was imputed⁴⁴ to all their posterity. Likewise the same death in sin and corrupted nature were also conveyed to all their posterity. These descend from them by ordinary generation.^{45, b}

^aGenesis 1:27–28; Genesis 2:16–17 and Acts 17:26; Romans 5:12, 15–19; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45, 49;⁴⁶
^bPsalms 51:5; Genesis 5:3; Job 14:4; Job 15:14

4. As a result of this original corruption, we are utterly averse, disabled, and made opposite to all good,^a and are entirely inclined to all evil.^b Thus all actual transgressions proceed from this original corruption.^c

^aRomans 5:6; Romans 8:7; Romans 7:18; Colossians 1:21; ^bGenesis 6:5; Genesis 8:21; Romans 3:10–12; ^cJames 1:14–15; Ephesians 2:2–3; Matthew 15:19

5. During this life, this corruption of nature remains in those who are regenerated.^{47, a} And although this corruption is pardoned and mortified⁴⁸ [put to death] through Christ, both the corruption itself and all the motions⁴⁹ from it are truly and properly sin.^b

^a1 John 1:8, 10; Romans 7:14, 17–18, 23; James 3:2; Proverbs 20:9; Ecclesiastes 7:20; ^bRomans 7:5, 7–8, 25; Galatians 5:17

6. Every sin, both original⁵⁰ and actual, is a transgression of the righteous law of God and contrary to it.^a Thus, in its own nature, sin brings guilt upon the sinner,^b by which he is bound over to the wrath of God^c and curse of the law,^d and thus made subject to death,^e with all miseries spiritual,^f temporal,^g and eternal.^h

^a1 John 3:4; ^bRomans 2:15; Romans 3:9, 19; ^cEphesians 2:3; ^dGalatians 3:10; ^eRomans 6:23; ^fEphesians 4:18; ^gRomans 8:20; Lamentations 3:39; ^hMatthew 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:9

⁴⁴ impute to: charge to, reckon to, or account to. In this important theological term, the frequent modern connotation of falseness is entirely absent; God cannot lie.

⁴⁵ Adam's corruption and sin is passed from father to son and father to daughter by spiritual means, not biological, genetic, or epigenetic means.

⁴⁶ The RPCNA *Constitution* omits 1 Corinthians 15:45.

⁴⁷ Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit by which the sinner is graciously given a heart to believe the Gospel.

⁴⁸ The discipline of progressive mortification (putting to death) of sin by self-examination, prayer, confession, and repentance from particular sins is a vital part of sanctification and growth in Christ.

⁴⁹ motions: in this context, actual sins that we commit. We are not sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners (corrupt).

⁵⁰ original sin: that sin and corruption inherited from Adam

Chapter 7: Of God's Covenant with Man

1. Reasoning⁵¹ creatures owe obedience to God as their Creator. However, the distance between God and any creature is so great that they could never have any enjoyment of Him as their blessedness and reward, except by some voluntary condescension on God's part. This condescension He has been pleased to express by way of covenant.

Isaiah 40:13–17; Job 9:32–33; 1 Samuel 2:25; Psalm 113:5–6; Psalm 100:2–3; Job 22:2–3; Job 35:7–8; Luke 17:10; Acts 17:24–25

2. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works,^a in which life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity,^b upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.^c

^aGalatians 3:12; ^bRomans 10:5; Romans 5:12–20; ^cGenesis 2:17; Galatians 3:10

3. Man, by his fall, made himself incapable of life by that covenant. Thus the Lord was pleased to make a second,^a commonly called the covenant of grace. In it, He freely offers to sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him that they may be saved.^b He further promises to all those who are ordained to life that He will give His Holy Spirit to make them willing and able to believe.^c

^aGalatians 3:21; Romans 8:3; Romans 3:20–21; Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 42:6; ^bMark 16:15–16; John 3:16; Romans 10:6, 9; Galatians 3:11; ^cEzekiel 36:26–27; John 6:44–45

4. This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a Testament [will], in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator [maker of a will], and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it that are bequeathed [granted] by the will.

Hebrews 9:15–17; Hebrews 7:22; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25

5. This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law than in the time of the Gospel.^a Under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types⁵² and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews. All these pointed forward to Christ to come.^b And they were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious through the operation of the Spirit to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah,^c by whom they had full remission of sins and eternal salvation. The covenant under this administration is called the Old Testament.^d

^a2 Corinthians 3:6–9; ^bHebrews 8–10; Romans 4:11; Colossians 2:11–12; 1 Corinthians 5:7; ^c1 Corinthians 10:1–4; Hebrews 11:13; John 8:56; ^dGalatians 3:7–9, 14

⁵¹ reasoning: in this context, endowed with the ability to reason

⁵² type: a person or thing that foreshadows a greater person or thing to come in fulfillment of a divine promise

6. Under the Gospel, when Christ, the substance,^{53, a} was exhibited,⁵⁴ the ordinances in which this covenant is administered are the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments⁵⁵ of baptism and the Lord's Supper.^b The ordinances are fewer in number and administered with more simplicity and less outward glory; yet in them, the covenant is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy^c to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles.^d The covenant under this administration is called the New Testament.^e There are not therefore two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same covenant under different dispensations.^f

^aColossians 2:17; ^bMatthew 28:19–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–25; ^cHebrews 12:22–28; Jeremiah 31:33–34; ^dMatthew 28:19; Ephesians 2:15–19; ^eLuke 22:20; ^fGalatians 3:14, 16; Romans 3:21–23, 30; Psalm 32:1; Romans 4:3, 6, 16–17, 23–24; Hebrews 13:8; Acts 15:11

Chapter 8: Of Christ the Mediator

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^a—the Prophet,^b Priest,^c and King;^d the Head and Savior of His Church;^e the Heir of all things;^f and Judge of the world.^g From all eternity, God gave Christ a people to be His seed^{56, h} and to be by Him—in time⁵⁷—redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.ⁱ

^aIsaiah 42:1; 1 Peter 1:19–20; John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:5; ^bActs 3:22; ^cHebrews 5:5–6; ^dPsalm 2:6; Luke 1:33; ^eEphesians 5:23; ^fHebrews 1:2; ^gActs 17:31; ^hJohn 17:6; Psalm 22:30; Isaiah 53:10; ⁱ1 Timothy 2:6; Isaiah 55:4–5; 1 Corinthians 1:30

2. When the fullness of time was come, the Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, took upon Himself man's nature,^a with all the essential properties and common infirmities of human nature. Yet He was without sin,^b being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, and made of her substance.^c Thus, two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion,⁵⁸ composition,⁵⁹ or confusion.^d This person is very God and very man; yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.^e

^aJohn 1:1, 14; 1 John 5:20; Philippians 2:6; Galatians 4:4 ^bHebrews 2:14, 16–17; Hebrews 4:15; ^cLuke 1:27, 31, 35; Galatians 4:4; ^dLuke 1:35; Colossians 2:9; Romans 9:5; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 Timothy 3:16; ^eRomans 1:3–4; 1 Timothy 2:5

3. The Lord Jesus, in His human nature (united to the divine), was sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure.^a In the Holy Spirit, Christ had all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,^b as it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell in Christ.^c

⁵³ substance: the target or reality foreshadowed by the earlier types

⁵⁴ exhibited: shown forth to the world

⁵⁵ sacrament: baptism and the Lord's Supper. See Ch. 27.

⁵⁶ seed: in this context, offspring, in particular, those granted the grace of adoption as sons by the Father

⁵⁷ in time: in due season or in physical (created) time

⁵⁸ In Christ no part or attribute was converted from human to divine or vice versa.

⁵⁹ composition: assembling of different parts together

So that, being holy, innocent, undefiled, and full of grace and truth,^d the Lord Jesus might be thoroughly furnished to execute⁶⁰ the office of a Mediator and surety.^e This office He did not take to Himself, but was called to it by His Father,^f who put all power and judgment into His hand and gave Him commandment to execute the same.^g

^aPsalm 45:7; John 3:34; ^bColossians 2:3; ^cColossians 1:19; ^dHebrews 7:26; John 1:14; ^eActs 10:38; Hebrews 12:24; Hebrews 7:22; ^fHebrews 5:4–5; ^gJohn 5:22, 27; Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:36

4. This office the Lord Jesus most willingly undertook.^a So that He might execute it, He:
- Was made under the law,^b and perfectly fulfilled it^c
 - Endured most grievous torments directly in His soul,^d and most painful sufferings in His body^e
 - Was crucified and died^f
 - Was buried and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption [decay]^g

On the third day He arose from the dead,^h with the same body in which He suffered,ⁱ with which also He ascended into heaven. There He sits at the right hand of His Father,^j making intercession,^k and will return to judge men and angels at the end of the world.^l

^aPsalm 40:7–8; Hebrews 10:5–10; John 10:18; Philippians 2:8; ^bGalatians 4:4; ^cMatthew 3:15; Matthew 5:17; ^dMatthew 26:37–38; Luke 22:44; Matthew 27:46; ^eMatthew 26–27; ^fPhilippians 2:8; ^gActs 2:23–24, 27; Acts 13:37; Romans 6:9; ^h1 Corinthians 15:3–4; ⁱJohn 20:25, 27; ^jMark 16:19; ^kRomans 8:34; Hebrews 9:24; Hebrews 7:25; ^lRomans 14:9–10; Acts 1:11; Acts 10:42; Matthew 13:40–42; Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4

5. The Lord Jesus, through the eternal Spirit, offered up to God, just once, His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself. By these He has fully satisfied the justice of His Father^a and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father has given to Him.^b

^aRomans 5:19; Hebrews 9:14, 16; Hebrews 10:14; Ephesians 5:2; Romans 3:25–26; ^bDaniel 9:24, 26; Colossians 1:19–20; Ephesians 1:11, 14; John 17:2; Hebrews 9:12, 15

6. The work of redemption was not actually accomplished by Christ until after His incarnation.⁶¹ Yet, in all ages, successively from the beginning of the world, the virtue, efficacy, and benefits of the work of redemption were communicated [imparted, transferred] to the elect. This was done in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices in which He was revealed and signified to be:

- The seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head
- The Lamb slain from the beginning of the world.

Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Galatians 4:4–5; Genesis 3:15; Revelation 13:8; Hebrews 13:8

7. Christ, in the work of mediation, acts according to both natures,⁶² with each nature doing what is distinctive to itself.^a Yet, by reason of the unity of the person [of Christ],

⁶⁰ execute: carry out fully and completely all that is required

⁶¹ incarnation: becoming man

⁶² nature: in this context, Christ's human nature or His divine nature

that which is distinctive to one nature is sometimes, in Scripture, attributed to the person denominated⁶³ by the other nature.^b

^aHebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 3:18; ^bActs 20:28; John 3:13; 1 John 3:16

8. To all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption, He certainly and effectually applies and communicates [imparts, transfers] that redemption.^a He makes intercession for them^b and reveals to them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation.^c He effectually persuades them by His Spirit to believe and obey, and governs their hearts by His Word and Spirit.^d He overcomes all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom, in such manner and ways as are most in harmony with His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.^e

^aJohn 6:37, 39; John 10:15–16; ^b1 John 2:1–2; Romans 8:34; ^cJohn 15:13, 15; Ephesians 1:7–9; John 17:6; ^dJohn 14:26; Hebrews 12:2; 2 Corinthians 4:13; Romans 8:9, 14; Romans 15:18–19; John 17:17; ^ePsalms 110:1; 1 Corinthians 15:25–26; Malachi 4:2–3; Colossians 2:15

Chapter 9: Of Free Will

1. God has endowed the will of man with that natural liberty that is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good or evil.

Matthew 17:12; James 1:14; Deuteronomy 30:19

2. In his state [condition] of innocence,⁶⁴ man had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good and well-pleasing to God; but changeably, so that he could possibly fall from it.

Ecclesiastes 7:29; Genesis 1:26; Genesis 2:16–17; Genesis 3:6

3. By his fall into a state of sin, man has entirely lost all ability of his will toward any spiritual good accompanying salvation.^a Therefore, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good,^b and being dead in sin,^c is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself or to prepare himself for conversion.^d

^aRomans 5:6; Romans 8:7; John 15:5; ^bRomans 3:10, 12; ^cEphesians 2:1, 5; Colossians 2:13; ^dJohn 6:44, 65; Ephesians 2:2–5; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Titus 3:3–5

4. When God converts a sinner, and transfers him into the state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage under sin.^a And by His grace alone, God enables him to freely will and to freely do that which is spiritually good.^b Yet, because of his remaining corruption, he does not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but also wills that which is evil.^c

⁶³ denominated: indicated, typically by implication

⁶⁴ state of innocence: the state of man prior to the fall of Adam into sin

^aColossians 1:13; John 8:34, 36; ^bPhilippians 2:13; Romans 6:18, 22; ^cGalatians 5:17; Romans 7:15, 18–19, 21, 23

5. Only in the state of glory is the will of man made perfectly and unchangeably free to good alone.

Ephesians 4:13; Hebrews 12:23; 1 John 3:2; Jude 24

Chapter 10: Of Effectual Calling

1. All of those whom God has predestined to life, and those only, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time to call effectually:^{65, a}

- By His Word and Spirit^b
- Out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature
- Into grace and salvation by Jesus Christ.^c

He:

- Enlightens their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God^d
- Takes away their hearts of stone,⁶⁶ and gives to them hearts of flesh^{67, e}
- Renews their wills
- Determines [foreordains] them to that which is good by His almighty power^f
- Effectually draws them to Jesus Christ,^g yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.^h

^aRomans 8:30; Romans 11:7; Ephesians 1:10–11; ^b2 Thessalonians 2:13–14; 2 Corinthians 3:3, 6; ^cRomans 8:2; Ephesians 2:1–5; 2 Timothy 1:9–10; ^dActs 26:18; 1 Corinthians 2:10, 12; Ephesians 1:17–18; ^eEzekiel 36:26; ^fEzekiel 11:19; Philippians 2:13; Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36:27; ^gEphesians 1:19; John 6:44–45; ^hSong of Solomon 1:4; Psalm 110:3; John 6:37; Romans 6:16–18

2. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man,^a who is altogether a passive recipient. But once made spiritually alive and renewed by the Holy Spirit,^b a man is, by this transformation, enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.^c

^a2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:4–5; Ephesians 2:4–5, 8–9; Romans 9:11; ^b1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 8:7; Ephesians 2:5; ^cJohn 6:37; Ezekiel 36:27; John 5:25

3. Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit,^a who works when, and where, and how He pleases.^b Likewise also, Christ saves all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.^c

^aLuke 18:15–16 and Acts 2:38–39 and John 3:3, 5 and 1 John 5:12 and Romans 8:9 compared;

^bJohn 3:8; ^c1 John 5:12; Acts 4:12

4. Others, not elected, never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved.^a This is true even though they may be called by the ministry of the Word^b and may have some

⁶⁵ effectually: effective—God's call will be heeded and effective for all of His intended purposes

⁶⁶ heart of stone: a heart hardened, set against God

⁶⁷ heart of flesh: a healthy heart that is as it should be, sensitive to God

common operations of the Spirit.^c Much less can men who do not profess⁶⁸ the Christian religion be saved in any other way at all, no matter how diligently they frame their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess.^d And to assert and maintain that they may is very pernicious⁶⁹ and to be detested.^e

^bMatthew 22:14; ^cMatthew 7:22; Matthew 13:20–21; Hebrews 6:4–6;⁷⁰ ^aJohn 6:64–66; John 8:24; ^dActs 4:12; John 14:6; Ephesians 2:12; John 4:22; John 17:3; ^e2 John 9–11; 1 Corinthians 16:22; Galatians 1:6–8

Chapter 11: Of Justification

1. Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies^a by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous. He does this:

- Not by infusing righteousness into them
- Not for anything done [by God] in them or done by them
- For Christ's sake alone
- Not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical⁷¹ obedience to them as their righteousness
- Only by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ to them.^b

The called receive Christ and rely on Him and His righteousness by faith. This faith does not come from themselves; it is the gift of God.^c

^aRomans 8:30; Romans 3:24; ^bRomans 4:5–8; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21; Romans 3:22, 24–25, 27–28; Titus 3:5, 7; Ephesians 1:7; Jeremiah 23:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30–31; Romans 5:17–19; ^cActs 10:43; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:9; Acts 13:38–39; Ephesians 2:7–8

2. When the called receive and rely on Christ and His righteousness, faith is the only instrument of justification;^a yet faith is not alone in the person justified, but is always accompanied with all other saving graces. It is no dead faith, but works by love.^b

^aJohn 1:12; Romans 3:28; Romans 5:1; ^bJames 2:17, 22, 26; Galatians 5:6

3. Christ, by His obedience and death, fully paid the debt of all those who are thus justified, and made a proper, real, and full satisfaction to His Father's justice in their behalf.^a Their justification is only of free grace,^d so that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.^e This may be seen because Christ was given by the Father for sinners,^b and Christ's obedience and satisfaction were accepted in their stead;^c and both freely, not for anything in the sinner.^d

^aRomans 5:8–10, 19; 1 Timothy 2:5–6; Hebrews 10:10, 14; Daniel 9:24, 26; Isaiah 53:4–6, 10–12; ^bRomans 8:32; ^c2 Corinthians 5:21; Matthew 3:17; Ephesians 5:2; ^dRomans 3:24; Ephesians 1:7; ^eRomans 3:26; Ephesians 2:7

⁶⁸ profess: openly acknowledge

⁶⁹ pernicious: highly injurious, destructive, deadly

⁷⁰ The original ends in verse 5, strangely truncating the passage. It is assumed to be a typographical error.

⁷¹ evangelical: pertaining to the Gospel, the Good News about eternal life and forgiveness of sins in Christ for those who believe in Him

4. God, from all eternity, decreed to justify all the elect,^a and Christ, in the fullness of time, died for their sins and rose again for their justification.^b Nevertheless, they are not justified until the Holy Spirit, in due time, actually applies Christ to them.^c

^aGalatians 3:8; 1 Peter 1:2, 19–20; Romans 8:30; ^bGalatians 4:4; 1 Timothy 2:6; Romans 4:25; ^cColossians 1:21–22; Galatians 2:16; Titus 3:3–7⁷²

5. God continues to forgive the sins of those who are justified,^a and they can never fall from the state of justification.^b However they may, by their sins, fall under God’s fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of His countenance⁷³ restored to them until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.^c

^aMatthew 6:12; 1 John 1:7, 9; 1 John 2:1–2; ^bLuke 22:32; John 10:28; Hebrews 10:14; ^cPsalms 89:31–33; Psalm 51:7–12; Psalm 32:5; Matthew 26:75; 1 Corinthians 11:30, 32; Luke 1:20

6. The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.

Galatians 3:9, 13–14; Romans 4:22–24; Hebrews 13:8

Chapter 12: Of Adoption

1. God graciously condescends to grant—in and for His only Son, Jesus Christ—that all those who are justified will be made partakers of the grace of adoption,^a by which they:

- Are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges, of the children of God^b
- Have His name put upon them^c
- Receive the spirit of adoption^d
- Have access to the throne of grace with boldness^e
- Are enabled to cry *Abba*,⁷⁴ Father^f
- Are pitied,^g protected,^h provided forⁱ
- Are chastened by Him as by a father,^j yet never cast off^k
- Are sealed⁷⁵ to the day of redemption^l
- Inherit the promises,^m as heirs of everlasting salvation.ⁿ

^aEphesians 1:5; Galatians 4:4–5; ^bRomans 8:17; John 1:12; ^cJeremiah 14:9; 2 Corinthians 6:18; Revelation 3:12; ^dRomans 8:15; ^eEphesians 3:12; Romans 5:2; ^fGalatians 4:6; ^gPsalms 103:13; ^hProverbs 14:26; ⁱMatthew 6:30, 32; 1 Peter 5:7; ^jHebrews 12:6; ^kLamentations 3:31; ^lEphesians 4:30; ^mHebrews 6:12; ⁿ1 Peter 1:3–4; Hebrews 1:14

⁷² Schaff omits verse 3.

⁷³ countenance: face, in this context: especially as connoting approval and pleasure

⁷⁴ *Abba*: Syriac, Chaldee for “father,” connotes affection and close personal relationship rather than formal respect

⁷⁵ seal: (verb) to confirm, ratify, guarantee, make secure; (noun) something that represents such a guarantee or provides the security; in Scripture, *seal* often has a close association in meaning with a *sign*

Chapter 13: Of Sanctification

1. Those who are effectually called and regenerated have a new heart and a new spirit created in them. They are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue [merit] of Christ's death and resurrection,^a by [means of] His Word and Spirit dwelling in them.^b The dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed,^c and the various individual lusts of the body of sin are more and more weakened and mortified.^d Moreover, the regenerated are more and more made alive and strengthened in all saving graces,^e to the practice of true holiness, without which no man will see the Lord.^f

^a1 Corinthians 6:11; Acts 20:32; Philippians 3:10; Romans 6:5–6; ^bJohn 17:17; Ephesians 5:26; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; ^cRomans 6:6, 14; ^dGalatians 5:24; Romans 8:13; ^eColossians 1:11; Ephesians 3:16–19; ^f2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 12:14

2. This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man;^a yet it is imperfect in this life, since there still abide some remnants of corruption in every part [of man].^b Thus there arises a continual and irreconcilable war: the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.^c

^a1 Thessalonians 5:23; ^b1 John 1:10; Romans 7:18, 23; Philippians 3:12; ^cGalatians 5:17; 1 Peter 2:11

3. In this war, the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail.^a However, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part does overcome.^b And thus the saints⁷⁶ grow in grace,^c progressing in holiness in the fear of God.^d

^aRomans 7:23; ^bRomans 6:14; 1 John 5:4; Ephesians 4:15–16; ^c2 Peter 3:18; 2 Corinthians 3:18; ^d2 Corinthians 7:1

Chapter 14: Of Saving Faith

1. The grace of faith, by which the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls,^a is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts.^b Faith is ordinarily given through the ministry of the Word.^c Faith is increased and strengthened by the ministry of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and prayer.^d

^aHebrews 10:39; ^b2 Corinthians 4:13; Ephesians 1:17–19; Ephesians 2:8; ^cRomans 10:14, 17; ^d1 Peter 2:2; Acts 20:32; Romans 4:11; Luke 17:5; Romans 1:16–17

2. By this faith, a Christian⁷⁷ believes to be true whatever is revealed in the Word due to the authority of God Himself speaking in it.^a He acts in an appropriate manner to what each particular passage in the Word contains: yielding obedience to the commands,^b

⁷⁶ saint: one of the elect. The practice of some denominations of specifically designating only certain individuals as saints (above “ordinary Christians”) is contrary to Scripture.

⁷⁷ Christian: an elect, regenerate disciple of Jesus Christ. The contemporary, broader use of “Christian” to refer to any person or denomination that professes some level of acceptance of Christ's teachings is foreign to Scripture.

trembling at the threatenings,^c and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come.^d But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and trusting in Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.^e

^aJohn 4:42; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 5:10; Acts 24:14; ^bRomans 16:26; ^cIsaiah 66:2; ^dHebrews 11:13; 1 Timothy 4:8; ^eJohn 1:12; Acts 16:31; Galatians 2:20; Acts 15:11

3. This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong.^a Often, and in many ways, it may be assailed and weakened. But it gets the victory,^b growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ,^c who is both the author and finisher of our faith.^d

^aHebrews 5:13–14; Romans 4:19–20; Matthew 6:30; Matthew 8:10; ^bLuke 22:31–32; Ephesians 6:16; 1 John 5:4–5; ^cHebrews 6:11–12; Hebrews 10:22; Colossians 2:2; ^dHebrews 12:2

Chapter 15: Of Repentance to Life

1. Repentance to life is an evangelical grace,^a the doctrine of which is to be preached by every minister⁷⁸ of the Gospel, to the same degree as the doctrine of faith in Christ.^b

^aZechariah 12:10; Acts 11:18; ^bLuke 24:47; Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21

2. By repentance to life a sinner has the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, which are contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God. Also, the sinner comprehends God's mercy in Christ to those who are penitent. He therefore grieves for and hates his sins, so as to turn from all of them to God,^a purposing and endeavoring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments.^b

^aEzekiel 18:30–31; Ezekiel 36:31; Isaiah 30:22; Psalm 51:4; Jeremiah 31:18–19; Joel 2:12–13; Amos 5:15; Psalm 119:128; 2 Corinthians 7:11; ^bPsalm 119:6, 59, 106; Luke 1:6; 2 Kings 23:25

3. Repentance is not to be trusted in as any satisfaction for sin, or as any cause of the pardon of sin;^a this pardon is the act of God's free grace in Christ.^b Yet, repentance is of such necessity to all sinners that none may expect pardon without it.^c

^aEzekiel 36:31–32; Ezekiel 16:61–63; ^bHosea 14:2, 4; Romans 3:24; Ephesians 1:7; ^cLuke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30–31

4. Every sin, no matter how small, deserves damnation.^{79, a} But there is no sin so great that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent.^b

^aRomans 6:23; Romans 5:12; Matthew 12:36; ^bIsaiah 55:7; Romans 8:1; Isaiah 1:16, 18

⁷⁸ minister: in this context, an ordained clergyman who preaches the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Some denominations that are faithful to the true Gospel use other terms such as *priest*, *preacher*, *pastor*, and so forth.

⁷⁹ damnation: divine judgment into eternal hellfire

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

Psalm 19:13; Luke 19:8; 1 Timothy 1:13, 15

6. Every man is bound to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for the pardon of them;^a upon which, and the forsaking of them, he will find mercy.^b Similarly, he that sinfully offends against⁸⁰ his brother or the Church of Christ ought to be willing, by a private or public confession and sorrow for his sin, to declare his repentance to those who are offended.^c The offended are then to be reconciled to him, and in love to receive him.^d

^aPsalm 51:4–5, 7, 9, 14; Psalm 32:5–6; ^bProverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9; ^cJames 5:16; Luke 17:3–4; Joshua 7:19; Psalm 51; ^d2 Corinthians 2:8

Chapter 16: Of Good Works

1. Good works are only those that God has commanded in His holy Word,^a and not those that, without scriptural warrant, are devised by men out of blind zeal or upon any pretense of good intention.^{81, b}

^aMicah 6:8; Romans 12:2; Hebrews 13:21; ^bMatthew 15:9; Isaiah 29:13; 1 Peter 1:18; Romans 10:2; John 16:2; 1 Samuel 15:21–23

2. These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith.^a By them believers show their thankfulness,^b strengthen their assurance,^c edify their brethren,^d adorn the profession of the Gospel,^e stop the mouths of the adversaries,^f and glorify God.^g Believers are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.^h Thus having their fruit to holiness, they may have the outcome, eternal life.ⁱ

^aJames 2:18, 22; ^bPsalm 116:12–13; 1 Peter 2:9; ^c1 John 2:3, 5; 2 Peter 1:5–10; ^d2 Corinthians 9:2; Matthew 5:16; ^eTitus 2:5, 9–12; 1 Timothy 6:1; ^f1 Peter 2:15; ^g1 Peter 2:12; Philippians 1:11; John 15:8; ^hEphesians 2:10; ⁱRomans 6:22

3. The ability of believers to do good works is not at all from themselves, but solely from the Spirit of Christ.^a Besides the graces they have already received, there is required an actual influence by the same Holy Spirit—to work in them to will and to do of His good pleasure—so that they may be enabled to do good works.^b Yet they are not to grow negligent in good works as though they were not bound to perform any duty unless upon

⁸⁰ Here, the editor translates *scandalize* as “sinfully offends against.” This older use of *scandalize* does not imply that the sin must be major or widely public; it does imply that the sin is at least known to the one offended. Editorial opinion: The editor also wishes to note that this teaching must surely also apply in cases in which the one offended is unaware of the offense, e.g., secret theft.

⁸¹ A cursory reading might suggest that specific and exact biblical warrant must be found for all human actions. However, only a very small portion of Scripture consists of specific do's and don'ts. Rather, Scripture typically teaches by narrative, principle, or example, e.g., the Golden Rule or Parable of the Good Samaritan. It is in this light that WCF 16:1 must be understood.

a special motion of the Spirit; but rather they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them.^c

^aJohn 15:4–6;⁸² Ezekiel 36:26–27; ^bPhilippians 2:13; Philippians 4:13; 2 Corinthians 3:5; ^cPhilippians 2:12; Hebrews 6:11–12; 2 Peter 1:3, 5, 10–11; Isaiah 64:7; 2 Timothy 1:6; Acts 26:6–7; Jude 20–21

4. Those who in their obedience attain to the greatest height that is possible in this life are so far from being able to supererogate⁸³ and to do more than God requires, that they actually fall short of much that they are in duty bound to do.

Luke 17:10; Nehemiah 13:22; Job 9:2–3; Galatians 5:17

5. We cannot, by our best works, merit pardon of sin or eternal life at the hand of God, because:

- There is a great disproportion⁸⁴ that is between our best works and the glory to come;
- There is infinite distance between us and God;
- God cannot profit by our best works;
- Nor can our best works satisfy for the debt of our former sins;^a
- When we have done all we can, we have done only our duty, and are unprofitable⁸⁵ servants;^b
- As they are good, they proceed from His Spirit;^c but as they are done by us, they are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment.^d

^aRomans 3:20; Romans 4:2, 4, 6; Ephesians 2:8–9; Titus 3:5–7; Romans 8:18; Psalm 16:2; Job 22:2–3; Job 35:7–8; ^bLuke 17:10; ^cGalatians 5:22–23; ^dIsaiah 64:6; Galatians 5:17; Romans 7:15, 18; Psalm 143:2; Psalm 130:3

6. Yet nevertheless, because the persons of believers are accepted through Christ, their good works are also accepted in Him.^a This acceptance is not as though they were in this life completely blameless and above reproof in God's sight;^b but that He, looking upon them in His Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.^c

^aEphesians 1:6; 1 Peter 2:5; Exodus 28:38; Genesis 4:4 *with* Hebrews 11:4; ^bJob 9:20; Psalm 143:2; ^cHebrews 13:20–21; 2 Corinthians 8:12; Hebrews 6:10; Matthew 25:21, 23

7. Works done by unregenerate men are sinful and cannot please God or make a man suitable to receive grace from God.^c This is because they:

- Do not proceed from a heart purified by faith^b
- Are not done in a right manner according to the Word^c
- Are not done for a right reason: the glory of God.^d

⁸² RPCNA *Constitution* omits verse 6.

⁸³ supererogate: to (supposedly) do greater, more, or better works than God requires. This concept is a blasphemous smear on God's perfect and unchangeable holiness.

⁸⁴ disproportion: disparity, mismatch, e.g., as between a gnat and an elephant

⁸⁵ unprofitable: not useless, but more must be input than comes out, c.f., an unprofitable business

This is true, even though, for the matter of them, they may be things that God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others.^a And yet, their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing to God.^f

^a2 Kings 10:30–31; 1 Kings 21:27, 29; Philippians 1:15–16, 18; ^bGenesis 4:3–5 *with* Hebrews 11:4, 6; ^c1 Corinthians 13:3; Isaiah 1:12; ^dMatthew 6:2, 5, 16; ^eHaggai 2:14; Titus 1:15; Amos 5:21–22; Hosea 1:4; Romans 9:16; Titus 3:5; ^fPsalm 14:4; Psalm 36:3; Job 21:14–15; Matthew 25:41–43, 45; Matthew 23:23

Chapter 17: Of the Perseverance of the Saints

1. God has accepted His saints in His Beloved,⁸⁶ effectually called them, and sanctified them by His Spirit. Hence, His saints can neither totally, nor finally, fall away from the state of grace, but will certainly persevere in it to the end, and be eternally saved.

Philippians 1:6; 2 Peter 1:10; John 10:28–29; 1 John 3:9; 1 Peter 1:5, 9

2. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon:
- The unchangeableness of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father^a
 - The efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ^b
 - The abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed⁸⁷ of God within them^c
 - The nature of the covenant of grace.^d

From all of these arise also the certainty and infallibility of the perseverance of the saints.^e

^a2 Timothy 2:18–19; Jeremiah 31:3; ^bHebrews 10:10, 14; Hebrews 13:20–21; Hebrews 9:12–15; Romans 8:33–39; John 17:11, 24; Luke 22:32; Hebrews 7:25; ^cJohn 14:16–17; 1 John 2:27; 1 John 3:9; ^dJeremiah 32:40; ^eJohn 10:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 John 2:19

3. Nevertheless, saints may fall into grievous sins through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalence of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation.^a And, for a time, they may continue in sin.^b Thus they:

- Incur God's displeasure^c and grieve His Holy Spirit^d
- Come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts^e
- Have their hearts hardened^f and their consciences wounded^g
- Hurt and scandalize others^h
- Bring temporal judgments upon themselves.ⁱ

^aMatthew 26:70, 72, 74; ^bPsalm 51:1 title; Psalm 51:14; ^cIsaiah 64:5, 7, 9; 2 Samuel 11:27; ^dEphesians 4:30; ^ePsalm 51:8, 10, 12; Revelation 2:4; Song of Solomon 5:2–4, 6; ^fIsaiah 63:17; Mark 6:52; Mark 16:14; ^gPsalm 32:3–4; Psalm 51:8; ^h2 Samuel 12:14; ⁱPsalm 89:31–32; 1 Corinthians 11:32

⁸⁶ His Beloved: Jesus Christ

⁸⁷ seed of God: The meaning is uncertain. The phrase is used in 1 Peter 1:23 and 1 John 3:9. Probably this refers to being born again, not from natural seed, but from spiritual seed. Matthew Henry (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1 Peter 1:23) suggests that the seed likely refers to the Word of God. This latter interpretation is consistent with the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:11). The analogy may be made from the seed (sperm) of natural generation and birth to being born again of the Word and Holy Spirit.

Chapter 18: Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation

1. Hypocrites⁸⁸ and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal⁸⁹ presumptions of being in the favor of God and a state of salvation;^a this hope of theirs will perish.^b But those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus, love Him in sincerity, and endeavor to walk in all good conscience before Him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace.^c Further, they may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, a hope that will never make them ashamed.^d

^aJob 8:13–14; Micah 3:11; Deuteronomy 29:19; John 8:41; ^bMatthew 7:22–23; ^c1 John 2:3; 1 John 3:14, 18–19, 21, 24; 1 John 5:13; ^dRomans 5:2, 5

2. This certainty is not a bare conjectural⁹⁰ and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope.^a Rather, it is an infallible assurance of [saving] faith, founded upon:

- The divine truth of the promises of salvation^b
- The inward evidence of those graces [character qualities, virtues] to which Scripture attaches promises^c
- The testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God.^d The Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, by which we are sealed to the day of redemption.^e

^aHebrews 6:11, 19; ^bHebrews 6:17–18; ^c2 Peter 1:4–5, 10–11; 1 John 2:3; 1 John 3:14; 2 Corinthians 1:12; ^dRomans 8:15–16; ^eEphesians 1:13–14; Ephesians 4:30; 2 Corinthians 1:21–22

3. This infallible assurance does not belong to the essence of faith. Therefore a true believer may wait long and contend with many difficulties before he becomes a partaker of it.^a However, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things that are freely given to him by God, he may attain assurance, without extraordinary revelation, through the right use of ordinary means.^b Therefore it is the duty of everyone to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure.^c Thus his heart may be enlarged⁹¹ in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience. These are the proper fruits of this assurance;^d in a true believer, assurance does not at all incline him to looseness.^e

^a1 John 5:13; Isaiah 50:10; Mark 9:24; Psalm 88; Psalm 77:1–12; ^b1 Corinthians 2:12; 1 John 4:13; Hebrews 6:11–12; Ephesians 3:17–19; ^c2 Peter 1:10; ^dRomans 5:1–2, 5; Romans 14:17; Romans 15:13;

⁸⁸ hypocrite: New Testament Greek word for *stage actor*. By extension, it also meant a pretender or one who hides under a false appearance. The word has thus come to have a primary meaning of someone who is pretending in religion. The hypocrite may be self-deceived. A secondary meaning is of one who acts in a manner contrary to his or her stated beliefs.

⁸⁹ carnal: of the flesh, worldly, not from God, as opposed to spiritual

⁹⁰ conjecture: a guess founded upon insufficient evidence

⁹¹ enlarged hearts: This phrase eludes exact definition. As generally used in the seventeenth century, it refers to swelling or filling up the heart with gratitude and affection or making room in the heart for them. In the present context, it refers to having one's heart open, obedient, and receptive to God, with praise and thankfulness, and ready to receive grace from God. It implies close communion with God. Elsewhere and more narrowly, it may mean being receptive to God's wisdom. See: in AV or NKJV, 1 Kings 4:29, in AV, 2 Corinthians 6:11, or in most translations including AV, NKJV, ESV, NASB, Psalm 119:32.

Ephesians 1:3–4; Psalm 4:6–7; Psalm 119:32; ^e1 John 2:1–2; Romans 6:1–2; Titus 2:11–12, 14; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Romans 8:1, 12; 1 John 3:2–3; Psalm 130:4; 1 John 1:6–7

4. In different ways, true believers may have the assurance of their salvation shaken, diminished, and intermitted,⁹² by things like:

- Negligence in preserving it
- By falling into some special sin, which wounds the conscience and grieves the Spirit
- By some sudden or vehement temptation
- By God's withdrawing the light of His countenance and allowing even those who fear Him to walk in darkness and to have no light.^a

Yet are they never utterly destitute of that:

- seed of God, and life of faith
- love of Christ and the brethren
- sincerity of heart, and conscience of duty

out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may be revived in due time.^b And by which also, in the mean time, they are supported from utter despair.^c

^aSong of Solomon 5:2–3, 6; Psalm 51:8, 12, 14; Ephesians 4:30–31; Psalm 77:1–10; Matthew 26:69–72; Psalm 31:22; Psalm 88; Isaiah 50:10; ^b1 John 3:9; Luke 22:32; Job 13:15; Psalm 73:15; Psalm 51:8, 12; Isaiah 50:10; ^cMicah 7:7–9; Jeremiah 32:40; Isaiah 54:7–10; Psalm 22:1 Psalm 88

Chapter 19: Of the Law of God

1. God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience. God promised life upon the fulfilling of the law, and threatened death upon the breach of the law. God also endowed him with power and ability to keep it.

Genesis 1:26–27 *with* Genesis 2:17; Romans 2:14–15; Romans 10:5; Romans 5:12, 19; Galatians 3:10, 12; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Job 28:28

2. After Adam's fall, this law continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness. As such, it was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in Ten Commandments, and written in two tables.^a The first four Commandments contain our duty toward God, and the other six our duty to man.^b

^aJames 1:25; James 2:8, 10–12; Romans 13:8–9; Deuteronomy 5:32; Deuteronomy 10:4; Exodus 34:1;
^bMatthew 22:37–40

3. Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age,⁹³ ceremonial laws. These contained different typical [symbolic]⁹⁴ ordinances. Some concerned worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces,

⁹² intermit: to cause to cease for a time or at various intervals

⁹³ under age: not yet having attained to adulthood

⁹⁴ typical: having the nature of a *type*, a person or thing that foreshadows a greater person or thing to come in fulfillment of a divine promise. [*Symbolic*] is put here to clearly denote this use in contrast to the usual

actions, sufferings, and benefits.^a Others set forth diverse instructions of ethical duties.^{95, b} All of these ceremonial laws are now abrogated [annulled] under the New Testament.^c

^aHebrews 9; Hebrews 10:1; Galatians 4:1–3; Colossians 2:17; ^b1 Corinthians 5:7; 2 Corinthians 6:17; Jude 23; ^cColossians 2:14, 16–17; Daniel 9:27; Ephesians 2:15–16

4. To them also, as a body politic, He gave various judicial laws, which expired together with the nation-state of that people.⁹⁶ These do not oblige anyone now, further than the general equity of them may require.

Exodus 21; Exodus 22:1–29; Genesis 49:10 *with* 1 Peter 2:13–14; Matthew 5:17 *with* Matthew 5:38–39; 1 Corinthians 9:8–10

5. The moral law forever binds all to the obedience of it, justified persons as much as others.^a This is true not only in regard to the matter contained in the law, but also in regard to the authority of God the Creator, who gave it.^b In the Gospel, Christ does not in any way dissolve, but rather much strengthens this obligation.^c

^aRomans 13:8–10; Ephesians 6:2; 1 John 2:3–4, 7–8; ^bJames 2:10–11; ^cMatthew 5:17–19; James 2:8; Romans 3:31

6. True believers are not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be justified by it or condemned.^a But, it is of great use to them, as well as to others:

- As a rule of life informing them of the will of God and their duty; it directs, and binds them to walk accordingly.^b
- It uncovers the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives,^c so that, examining themselves by the law:
 - They may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin.^d
 - They may come to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ and the perfection of His obedience.^e

It is likewise of use to the regenerate to restrain their corruptions, because:

- It forbids sin.^f
- The threatenings of it serve to show:
 - What even their sins deserve
 - What afflictions in this life they may expect from their sins, although freed from the curse regarding sins [eternal hellfire] threatened in the law.^g
- The promises of it, in like manner, show them:

contemporary meaning of “typical.”

⁹⁵ The WCF has “diverse instructions of moral duties.” These cannot pertain to the moral law as these “moral duties” are in a group twice described as being “ceremonial laws.” To make the distinction, the editor thus substitutes *ethical duties* as meaning conforming to accepted standards of moral conduct. From the context it is clear that dietary laws, laws pertaining to clean or unclean, standards of dress, and so on, fall into this category. Such laws are ceremonial, but do not pertain directly to worship, the first category. These laws had true moral content since they were, for a time, commanded by God and it is immoral to disobey God.

⁹⁶ The ancient nation-state of Israel, by God’s revealed decree (Luke 21:20–24) and executed providence, terminated with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Later nation-states in the same geographic region, regardless of the ethnicity of their people, are new and different nation-states than ancient Israel.

- God’s approbation of obedience
- What blessings they may expect upon the performance of the law,^h although not as though blessings were due to them by the law as a covenant of works.ⁱ

When a man does good and refrains from evil because the law encourages the one and deters the other, it is no evidence of his being under the law and not under grace.^j

^aRomans 6:14; Galatians 2:16; Galatians 3:13; Galatians 4:4–5; Acts 13:39; Romans 8:1; ^bRomans 7:12, 22, 25; Psalm 119:4–6; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:14, 16, 18–23; ^cRomans 7:7; Romans 3:20; ^dJames 1:23–25; Romans 7:9, 14, 24; ^eGalatians 3:24; Romans 7:24–25; Romans 8:3–4; ^fJames 2:11; Psalm 119:101, 104, 128; ^gEzra 9:13–14; Psalm 89:30–34; ^hLeviticus 26:1–14 *with* 2 Corinthians 6:16;⁹⁷ Ephesians 6:2–3; Psalm 37:11 *with* Matthew 5:5; Psalm 19:11; ⁱGalatians 2:16; Luke 17:10; ^jRomans 6:12, 14; 1 Peter 3:8–12 *with* Psalm 34:12–16; Hebrews 12:28–29

7. The previously mentioned uses of the law are not at all contrary to the grace of the Gospel. Rather, they sweetly work alongside it^a—the Spirit of Christ subdues and enables the will of man to freely and cheerfully do that which the will of God requires to be done, as revealed in the law.^b

^aGalatians 3:21; ^bEzekiel 36:27; Hebrews 8:10 *with* Jeremiah 31:33

Chapter 20: Of Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience

1. The liberty⁹⁸ that Christ has purchased for believers under the Gospel consists in their:

- Freedom from:
 - The guilt of sin
 - The condemning wrath of God
 - The curse of the moral law^a
- Being delivered from:
 - This present evil world
 - Bondage to Satan
 - The dominion of sin^b
 - The evil of afflictions
 - The sting of death
 - The victory of the grave
 - Everlasting damnation^c
- Free access to God^d
- Yielding obedience to Him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love and willing mind.^e

All of these were common also to believers under the law.^f But under the New Testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in:

- Their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law to which the Jewish Church was subjected^g

⁹⁷ Schaff has Leviticus 26:1, 10, 14

⁹⁸ liberty: in this context, freedom or release from various forms of bondage. The concept of liberty as license to do as one pleases without restraint is entirely absent from the concept of Christian liberty.

- Greater boldness of access to the throne of grace^h
- Fuller communications of the free Spirit of God than believers under the law ordinarily partook of.ⁱ

^aTitus 2:14; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Galatians 3:13; ^bGalatians 1:4; Colossians 1:13; Acts 26:18; Romans 6:14; ^cRomans 8:28; Psalm 119:71; 1 Corinthians 15:54–57; Romans 8:1; ^dRomans 5:1–2; ^eRomans 8:14–15; 1 John 4:18; ^fGalatians 3:9, 14; ^gGalatians 4:1–3, 6–7; Galatians 5:1; Acts 15:10–11; ^hHebrews 4:14, 16; Hebrews 10:19–22; ⁱJohn 7:38–39; 2 Corinthians 3:13, 17–18

2. God alone is Lord of the conscience,^{99, a} and has left it free from any doctrines and commandments of men that are in any way contrary to His Word. Also, in matters of faith or worship, it is free from any addition to His Word.^b Therefore, to believe such doctrines or to obey such commands out of conscience is to betray true liberty of conscience.^c Also, to require an implicit faith and an absolute and blind obedience is to destroy both liberty of conscience and reason.^d

^aJames 4:12; Romans 14:4; ^bActs 4:19; Acts 5:29; 1 Corinthians 7:23; Matthew 23:8–10; 2 Corinthians 1:24; Matthew 15:9; ^cColossians 2:20–23;¹⁰⁰ Galatians 1:10; Galatians 2:4–5; Galatians 5:1; ^dRomans 10:17; Romans 14:23; Isaiah 8:20; Acts 17:11; John 4:22; Hosea 5:11; Revelation 13:12, 16–17; Jeremiah 8:9

3. Those who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, practice any sin or cherish any lust, destroy the purpose of Christian liberty by doing so. This purpose 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.

Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16; 2 Peter 2:19; John 8:34; Luke 1:74–75

4. The powers God has ordained, and the liberty Christ has purchased, are not intended by God to destroy one another, but to mutually uphold and preserve one another. For this reason, those who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, oppose¹⁰¹ any lawful¹⁰² power or the lawful exercise of it, whether civil or ecclesiastical,¹⁰³ resist the ordinance of God.^a Those who publish opinions or maintain practices that are:

- contrary to the light of nature;

⁹⁹ Conscience is that natural human sense of moral right and wrong which is designed by God to produce satisfaction when doing that which is morally right and warning or mental distress on evil-doing. It is necessary to distinguish the operations of the conscience from fear of punishment or expectation of reward, especially from temporal sources. The conscience is naturally corrupt and can give many “bad readings” due to internal sin, inadequate knowledge of God, false teachings, and depraved cultural norms. The conscience can also be desensitized or made non-functional to a significant degree by willful and continual sin. Thus it must be continually calibrated by Scripture and the indwelling Holy Spirit in order for it to more reliably inform us regarding moral decisions and actions. Modern theories that treat a guilty conscience as an aberration or mental health issue are contrary to Scripture since the conscience is given by God to guide us only according to His law and teachings.

¹⁰⁰ RPCNA *Constitution* omits Colossians 2:21.

¹⁰¹ In this context, in light of Romans 13:2, opposition refers to unlawful opposition, not lawful participation in public affairs or church affairs, even though such participation may be contrary to the wishes of certain officials.

¹⁰² lawful: in the WCF: according to civil law, the Law of God, or both, depending on the context

¹⁰³ ecclesiastical: pertaining to church affairs

- contrary to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or manner of living;
- contrary to the power of godliness;
- such erroneous opinions or practices, either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, that are destructive to the external peace and order that Christ has established in the Church;

may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the Church^b and by the power of the civil magistrate.^{104, 105, c}

^aMatthew 12:25; 1 Peter 2:13–14, 16; Romans 13:1–8; Hebrews 13:17; ^bRomans 1:32 *with* 1 Corinthians 5:1, 5, 11, 13; 2 John 10–11 *and* 2 Thessalonians 3:14 *and* 1 Timothy 6:3–5 *and* Titus 1:10–11, 13 *and* Titus 3:10; *with* Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Timothy 1:19–20; Revelation 2:2, 14–15, 20; Revelation 3:9; ^cDeuteronomy 13:6–12; Romans 13:3–4 *with* 2 John 10–11; Ezra 7:23–28;¹⁰⁶ Revelation 17:12, 16–17; Nehemiah 13:15, 17, 21–22, 25, 30; 2 Kings 23:5–6, 9, 20–21; 2 Chronicles 34:33; 2 Chronicles 15:12–13, 16; Daniel 3:29; 1 Timothy 2:2; Isaiah 49:23; Zechariah 13:2–3

Chapter 21: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day

1. The light of nature shows that there is a God who has lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and does good to all. He is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served—with all the heart and with all the soul and with all the might.^a But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by Himself, and is thus limited by His own revealed will. Therefore, He may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.^b

^aRomans 1:20; Acts 17:24; Psalm 119:68; Jeremiah 10:7; Psalm 31:23; Psalm 18:3; Romans 10:12; Psalm 62:8; Joshua 24:14; Mark 12:33; ^bDeuteronomy 12:32; Matthew 15:9; Acts 17:25; Matthew 4:9–10; Deuteronomy 4:15–20; Exodus 20:4–6; Colossians 2:23

2. Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to Him alone;^a not to angels, saints, or any other creature.^b Also, since the fall, worship is not to be without a Mediator, nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone.^c

^aMatthew 4:10 *with* John 5:23 *and* 2 Corinthians 13:14; ^bColossians 2:18; Revelation 19:10; Romans 1:25; ^cJohn 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5; Ephesians 2:18; Colossians 3:17

3. Prayer with thanksgiving is one special part of religious worship,^a and God requires prayer of all men.^b In order for prayer to be accepted, it is to be made:

- In the name of the Son^c
- By the help of His Spirit^d
- According to His will^e
- With understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance.^f

¹⁰⁴ civil magistrate: civil official or government body, whether elected or appointed

¹⁰⁵ Editorial opinion: Civil magistrates have no authority in doctrinal, theological, or ecclesiastical matters. Yet, as ministers of God, they are to rule according to Scripture, under God. See Appendix A.

¹⁰⁶ RPCNA *Constitution* omits Ezra 7:24.

If prayer is spoken aloud, it is to be in a known tongue.^g

^aPhilippians 4:6; ^bPsalm 65:2; ^cJohn 14:13–14; 1 Peter 2:5; ^dRomans 8:26; ^e1 John 5:14; ^fPsalm 47:7; Ecclesiastes 5:1–2; Hebrews 12:28; Genesis 18:27; James 5:16; James 1:6–7; Mark 11:24; Matthew 6:12, 14–15; Colossians 4:2; Ephesians 6:18; ^g1 Corinthians 14:14

4. Prayer is to be made for things lawful,^a and for all sorts of men, living or that will live hereafter.^b Prayer is not to be made for the dead,^c nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin to death.^{107, d}

^a1 John 5:14; ^b1 Timothy 2:1–2; John 17:20; 2 Samuel 7:29; Ruth 4:12; ^c2 Samuel 12:21–23 *with* Luke 16:25–26; Revelation 14:13; ^d1 John 5:16

5. The parts of the ordinary religious worship of God [in addition to prayer] are:^a

- The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear^b
- The sound preaching^c and conscientious hearing of the Word, in obedience to God, with understanding, faith, and reverence^d
- Singing of psalms with grace in the heart^e
- The due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ.^a

There are other parts of religious worship that, upon various occasions in their different times and seasons, are to be used in a holy and religious manner:^j

- Religious oaths^f and vows^g
- Solemn fasting^h
- Thanksgivings on various¹⁰⁸ occasionsⁱ

^bActs 15:21; Revelation 1:3; ^c2 Timothy 4:2; ^dJames 1:22; Acts 10:33; Matthew 13:19; Hebrews 4:2; Isaiah 66:2; ^eColossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19; James 5:13; ^aMatthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23–29; Acts 2:42; ^fDeuteronomy 6:13 *with* Nehemiah 10:29; ^gIsaiah 19:21 *with* Ecclesiastes 5:4–5; ^hJoel 2:12; Esther 4:16; Matthew 9:15; 1 Corinthians 7:5; ⁱPsalm 107; Esther 9:22; ^jHebrews 12:28

6. Now, under the Gospel,¹⁰⁹ neither prayer nor any other part of religious worship is either tied to, or is made more acceptable by, any place in which it is performed or toward which it is directed.^a Rather, God is to be worshiped everywhere,^b in spirit and truth:^c

- In private families^d daily^e
- In secret each one by himself^f

¹⁰⁷ Regarding “nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin to death”: This most probably refers to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Luke 12:10), which indicates extreme hardness of heart, leading to the impossibility of repentance and faith. This WCF text is derived from 1 John 5:16, and is a grave and dire warning to all against hardening their hearts. At the same time, in practical terms, as shown by God’s mercy to the Apostle Paul, it must be seen as extremely difficult for us to accurately determine who fits into this category.

¹⁰⁸ Most editions have *special* instead of *several*. As *several*, in this context means “different” or “various,” the change in meaning is small. The editor has not been able to trace out the reason for the difference. The editor has chosen to translate “various” since the Latin translation, made in 1656, close in time to the original, has *varietate*, meaning “variety or diversity.”

¹⁰⁹ under the Gospel: since Christ’s resurrection

- More solemnly, in the public assemblies, which are not to be carelessly or willfully neglected or forsaken when God calls us to them by His Word or providence.^g

^aJohn 4:21; ^bMalachi 1:11; 1 Timothy 2:8; ^cJohn 4:23–24; ^dJeremiah 10:25; Deuteronomy 6:6–7; Job 1:5; 2 Samuel 6:18, 20; 1 Peter 3:7; Acts 10:2; ^eMatthew 6:11; ^fMatthew 6:6; Ephesians 6:18; ^gIsaiah 56:6–7;¹¹⁰ Hebrews 10:25; Proverbs 1:20–21, 24; Proverbs 8:34; Acts 13:42; Luke 4:16; Acts 2:42

7. It is the law of nature that, in general, a due proportion of time is to be set apart for the worship of God. Likewise, in His Word, God has particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy to Him. This is a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, which binds all men in all ages. ^a From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, the Sabbath was the last day of the week. At the resurrection of Christ, the Sabbath was changed to the first day of the week,^b which is called *the Lord's Day* in the Scripture.^c The Lord's Day is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath.^d

^aExodus 20:8, 10–11; Isaiah 56:2, 4, 6–7; ^bGenesis 2:2–3; 1 Corinthians 16:1–2; Acts 20:7; ^cRevelation 1:10; ^dExodus 20:8, 10 *with* Matthew 5:17–18

8. This Sabbath is then kept holy to the Lord, when men:

- Prior to the Sabbath:
 - Prepare their hearts
 - Order their common affairs beforehand
- Observe a holy rest all day long from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations^a
- Take up the whole time in the public and private exercises of His worship and in the duties of necessity and mercy.^b

^aExodus 20:8; Exodus 16:23, 25–26, 29–30; Exodus 31:15–17; Isaiah 58:13; Nehemiah 13:15–22;¹¹¹ ^bIsaiah 58:13; Matthew 12:1–13

¹¹⁰ Schaff omits Isaiah 56:6.

¹¹¹ RPCNA *Constitution* omits Nehemiah 13:20.

Chapter 22: Of Lawful Oaths and Vows

1. A lawful oath¹¹² is a part of religious worship^a in which, upon just occasion, the person swearing¹¹³ solemnly calls God to witness what he asserts or promises; and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he swears.^b

^aDeuteronomy 10:20; ^bExodus 20:7; Leviticus 19:12; 2 Corinthians 1:23; 2 Chronicles 6:22–23

2. Men ought to swear only by the name of God, which is to be used with all holy fear and reverence.^a Therefore, to swear vainly or rashly by that glorious and dreadful Name, or to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful and to be abhorred.^b Yet, under the New Testament as well as under the Old, in matters of weight and moment an oath is warranted by the Word of God.^c In such matters therefore, a lawful oath imposed by lawful authority ought to be taken.^d

^aDeuteronomy 6:13; ^bExodus 20:7; Jeremiah 5:7; Matthew 5:34, 37; James 5:12; ^cHebrews 6:16; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Isaiah 65:16; ^d1 Kings 8:31; Nehemiah 13:25; Ezra 10:5

3. Whoever takes an oath ought to consider duly the weightiness of so solemn an act and to declare in the oath only what he is fully persuaded is the truth.^a Neither may any man bind himself by oath to anything except what is good and just, what he believes so to be, and what he is able and resolved to perform.^b Yet it is a sin to refuse an oath touching anything that is good and just, when imposed by lawful authority.^c

^aExodus 20:7; Jeremiah 4:2; ^bGenesis 24:2–3, 5–6, 8–9; ^cNumbers 5:19, 21; Nehemiah 5:12; Exodus 22:7–11

4. An oath is to be taken in the plain and common meaning of the words, without equivocation,¹¹⁴ or mental reservation.^a It cannot oblige to sin. In anything not sinful, once taken, it binds to performance, even though to a man's own hurt.^b Nor is it to be violated although made to heretics¹¹⁵ or non-Christians.^c

^aJeremiah 4:2; Psalm 24:4; ^b1 Samuel 25:22, 32–34; Psalm 15:4; ^cEzekiel 17:16, 18–19; Joshua 9:18–19 with 2 Samuel 21:1

5. A vow is of a nature similar to a promissory oath, and ought to be made with similar religious care, and be performed with similar faithfulness.

Isaiah 19:21; Ecclesiastes 5:4–6; Psalm 61:8; Psalm 66:13–14

¹¹² As used in the language of the WCF and AV (King James Bible), an oath may be voluntary or imposed. It is given to man and witnessed by God, the supreme Judge. A vow is voluntary and is given directly to God, although it may be a vow of benefit to humans, and in their presence. The distinction between an oath and a vow (see Ch. 22:5–7 below) is not always clear-cut, and contemporary usage often fails to make a distinction between the two words at all.

¹¹³ swear: in this context, to speak, sign, or write an oath so as to bind oneself to it

¹¹⁴ equivocation: in this context, language intentionally meant to mislead, confuse, or deceive

¹¹⁵ heretic: in this context, one who professes religious teachings that the maker of the oath believes to be false

6. A vow is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone.^a That it may be accepted, it is to be made:

- Voluntarily
- Out of faith
- Out of consciousness of duty
- In way of thankfulness for mercy received, or to obtain what we want
- In such manner that we more strictly bind ourselves to necessary duties, or to other things so far and so long as they may fitly assist necessary duties.^b

^aPsalm 76:11; Jeremiah 44:25–26; ^bDeuteronomy 23:21–23; Psalm 50:14; Genesis 28:20–22; 1 Samuel 1:11; Psalm 66:13–14; Psalm 132:2–5

7. No man may vow to do anything:

- Forbidden in the Word of God
- That would hinder any duty commanded in the Word of God
- That is not in his own power
- That he has no promise of ability from God to perform.^a

In light of this, Popish¹¹⁶ monastic vows of perpetual single life, professed poverty, and obedience to rigid rules are so far from being degrees of higher perfection that they are superstitious and sinful snares in which no Christian may entangle himself.^b

^aActs 23:12, 14; Mark 6:26; Numbers 30:5, 8, 12–13; ^bMatthew 19:11–12; 1 Corinthians 7:2, 9; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Peter 4:2; 1 Corinthians 7:23

Chapter 23: Of the Civil Magistrate

1. God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has ordained civil magistrates¹¹⁷ to be, under Him, over the people for His own glory and the public good. For this purpose, God has armed them with the power of the sword¹¹⁸ for the defense and encouragement of those who are good, and for the punishment of evildoers.

Romans 13:1–4; 1 Peter 2:13–14

2. It is biblical for Christians to accept and execute the office of magistrate when called to it.^a In conducting their office, they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth.^{119, b} Thus, for that purpose they may biblically—now under the New Testament—wage war upon just and necessary occasion.^c

¹¹⁶ Popish: refers to the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, whose monastic orders are here used as an example

¹¹⁷ civil magistrate: civil official or government body, whether elected or appointed

¹¹⁸ power of the sword: a biblical expression which indicates that the civil magistrate has authority from God to use force to deter and punish evildoers, even to capital punishment

¹¹⁹ commonwealth: a body politic, usually a republic or one that has a representative system of constitutional government. Recall that the WCF was written in a constitutional monarchy with a parliament.

^aProverbs 8:15–16; Romans 13:1–2, 4; ^bPsalm 2:10–12; 1 Timothy 2:2; Psalm 82:3–4; 2 Samuel 23:3; 1 Peter 2:13; ^cLuke 3:14; Romans 13:4; Matthew 8:9–10; Acts 10:1–2; Revelation 17:14, 16

3. The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments or the power of the keys¹²⁰ of the kingdom of heaven.^a Yet he has authority, and it is his duty, to make provision that:

- Unity and peace be preserved in the Church
- The truth of God be kept pure and entire
- All blasphemies and heresies be suppressed
- All corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline are prevented or reformed
- All the ordinances of God are duly settled, administered, and observed.^b

For the better effecting of these, he has power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.^{121, c}

^a2 Chronicles 26:18 *with* Matthew 18:17 *and* Matthew 16:19; 1 Corinthians 12:28–29; Ephesians 4:11–12; 1 Corinthians 4:1–2; Romans 10:15; Hebrews 5:4; ^bIsaiah 49:23; Psalm 122:9; Ezra 7:23–28;¹²² Leviticus 24:16; Deuteronomy 13:5–6, 12; 2 Kings 18:4; 1 Chronicles 13:1–9; 2 Kings 23:1–26; 2 Chronicles 34:33; 2 Chronicles 15:12–13; ^c2 Chronicles 19:8–11; 2 Chronicles 29–30; Matthew 2:4–5

4. It is the duty of people to:

- Pray for magistrates^a
- Honor their persons^b
- Pay them taxes and other dues^c
- Obey their lawful commands
- Be subject to their authority for conscience' sake.^d

Infidelity or difference in religion does not make void the magistrates' just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to them.^e Ecclesiastical persons are not exempted from this due obedience.^f Much less has the Pope any power or jurisdiction over magistrates in their own countries or over any of their people. Least of all does the Pope have any power to deprive them of their offices or lives if he should judge them to be heretics, or upon any other pretense whatever.^g

^a1 Timothy 2:1–2; ^b1 Peter 2:17; ^cRomans 13:6–7; ^dRomans 13:5; Titus 3:1; ^e1 Peter 2:13–14, 16; ^fRomans 13:1; 1 Kings 2:35; Acts 25:9–11; 2 Peter 2:1, 10–11; Jude 8–11; ^g2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13:15–17

¹²⁰ keys: Church discipline, including excommunication and readmission. In a manner similar to sacraments, this is not an absolute power, but a declaration of what has already been decreed in heaven to the best of human knowledge. The reference is to Matthew 18:18: “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” (NASB most accurately reflects the Greek in this verse.)

¹²¹ Editorial opinion: The civil magistrate has no authority whatsoever in doctrinal, theological, or ecclesiastical affairs. See Appendix A.

¹²² RPCNA *Constitution* omits Ezra 7:24.

Chapter 24: Of Marriage and Divorce

1. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman. Neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband—at the same time.

Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5–6; Proverbs 2:17

2. Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife,^{123, a} for the increase of mankind with legitimate offspring, for the increase of the Church with holy offspring,^b and for preventing sexual immorality.^c

^aGenesis 2:18; ^bMalachi 2:15; ^c1 Corinthians 7:2, 9

3. It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry who are able with judgment to give their consent.^a Yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord.^b Therefore those who profess the true reformed religion should not marry infidels,¹²⁴ Papists,¹²⁵ or other idolaters. Neither should those who are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying those who are notoriously wicked in their life or maintain damnable heresies.^{126, c}

^aHebrews 13:4; 1 Timothy 4:3; 1 Corinthians 7:36–38; Genesis 24:57–58; ^b1 Corinthians 7:39; ^cGenesis 34:14; Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3–4; 1 Kings 11:4; Nehemiah 13:25–27; Malachi 2:11–12; 2 Corinthians 6:14

4. Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of nearness of kin or affinity forbidden in the Word.^a Nor can such incestuous marriages ever be made lawful by any law of man or consent of parties so that those persons may live together as man and wife.^b The man may not marry any of his wife's kindred nearer in blood than he may of his own; nor the woman of her husband's kindred nearer in blood than of her own.^{127, 128, c}

^aLeviticus 18; 1 Corinthians 5:1; Amos 2:7; ^bMark 6:18; Leviticus 18:24–28; ^cLeviticus 20:19–21

¹²³ Mutual help includes companionship (Genesis 2:18).

¹²⁴ infidel: in this context, an unbeliever, one without a credible profession of saving faith in Jesus Christ

¹²⁵ Papist: member of the Roman Catholic Church

¹²⁶ heresy: in this context, belief or profession of any teaching clearly contrary to Scripture

¹²⁷ As the WCF has already rightly condemned polygamy, this last sentence must be, and historically has been, taken to refer to marriage to a relative of a deceased spouse.

¹²⁸ Editorial opinion: Scriptural justification for this sentence has revolved around the meaning of the Hebrew *shaer*, translated as “near of kin” in the NKJV in Leviticus 18:6. *Shaer* may be translated as “flesh” or even “food.” The word clearly connotes a blood relationship. The argument in favor of the sentence assumes that marriage creates such a blood relationship with the spouse's relatives. However, not only is Scriptural justification for this assumption lacking, but the assumption clearly contradicts Leviticus 18:18 which ends with “... while the other is alive.” It also contradicts the (now annulled) levirate marriage law of Deuteronomy 25:5–6.

5. Adultery¹²⁹ or fornication¹³⁰ committed after a contract,¹³¹ if detected before marriage, gives just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract.^a In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue for a divorce;^b and after the divorce, to marry another just as if the offending party were dead.^c

^aMatthew 1:18–20; ^bMatthew 5:31–32; ^cMatthew 19:9; Romans 7:2–3

6. Although the corruption of man is such that he is apt to study unduly arguments to put asunder those whom God has joined together in marriage, the only valid reasons for dissolving the bond of marriage are:

- Adultery
- Willful desertion that cannot be remedied by the Church or civil magistrate.^a

In a divorce case:

- A public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed;
- The persons concerned in it are not to be left to their own wills and discretion in their own case.^b

^aMatthew 19:8–9; 1 Corinthians 7:15; Matthew 19:6; ^bDeuteronomy 24:1–4

Chapter 25: Of the Church

1. The catholic¹³² (or universal) Church consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or will be gathered into one, under Christ the Head of His Church.¹³³ The Church is the spouse, the body, and the fullness of Jesus Christ, who fills all in all. This universal Church is invisible.

Ephesians 1:10, 22–23; Ephesians 5:23, 27, 32; Colossians 1:18

2. [Like the invisible Church,] the visible Church is also catholic (or universal) under the Gospel since it is not confined to one nation as before under the law. The visible Church consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion,^a including their children.^b It is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ,^c the house and family of God,^d outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.^e

^a1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 12:12–13; Psalm 2:8; Revelation 7:9; Romans 15:9–12; ^b1 Corinthians 7:14; Acts 2:39; Ezekiel 16:20–21; Romans 11:16; Genesis 3:15; Genesis 17:7; ^cMatthew 13:47; Isaiah 9:7; ^dEphesians 2:19; Ephesians 3:15; ^eActs 2:47

¹²⁹ adultery: sexual relations with anyone or anything when at least one of the two is married

¹³⁰ fornication: sexual relations by an unmarried person with anyone not married or with anything else

¹³¹ A contract is the most binding of legal instruments. Thus, by extension, this teaching will refer to an engagement or other agreement.

¹³² catholic: universal or comprehensive. The Roman Catholic Church is not at all catholic and it does not deserve that word in its name.

¹³³ Theologians often call this the *invisible church*, in contrast to the *visible church* described below in Ch. 25:2.

3. Until the end of the world, Christ has given the ministry, oracles,¹³⁴ and ordinances of God to this catholic visible Church for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life. Christ, by His own presence and Spirit, makes these gifts effectual in the Church according to His promise.

1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11–13; Matthew 28:19–20; Isaiah 59:21

4. This [visible] catholic Church has been sometimes more, sometimes less, visible.^a And particular churches,¹³⁵ which are members this visible Church, are more or less pure, according to how the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.^b

^aRomans 11:3–4; Revelation 12:6, 14; ^bRevelation 2–3; 1 Corinthians 5:6–7

5. The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error.^a And some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan.^{136, b} Nevertheless, there will be always a Church on earth to worship God according to His will.^c

^a1 Corinthians 13:12; Revelation 2–3; Matthew 13:24–30, 47; ^bRevelation 18:2; Romans 11:18–22; ^cMatthew 16:18; Psalm 72:17; Psalm 102:28; Matthew 28:19–20

6. There is no other head of the Church, but the Lord Jesus Christ.^a The Pope of Rome cannot in any sense be the head of the Church; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, who exalts himself in the Church against Christ and all that is called God.^{137, 138, b}

^aColossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22; ^bMatthew 23:8–10; 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, 8–9; Revelation 13:6

Chapter 26: Of the Communion of Saints

1. All saints who¹³⁹ 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.^a And, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces,^b and

¹³⁴ oracle: generally, one who speaks for a deity; in this context, the Holy Scriptures proclaimed to the world

¹³⁵ churches (uncapitalized): in this context, branches (congregations, denominations, and so on) of the universal Church.

¹³⁶ synagogue of Satan: a place of worship whose people profess to worship God, but, being unregenerate and depraved, actually worship Satan. The phrase comes from Revelation 2:9 and Revelation 3:9 where the worshippers were Jews. Thus, the present context does not concern Jews or Jewish synagogues, but false Christians of any ethnicity.

¹³⁷ This description of the Pope comes from 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12.

¹³⁸ Editorial opinion: Scriptural evidence does not support the notion that any Pope to date is that particular, single “man of sin” of 2 Thessalonians 2:3–5.

¹³⁹ In one sense, the *who* should be omitted as he who is not united to Christ cannot be a saint. The presence of the *who* thus reminds us of this truth.

are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as promote their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.^c

^a1 John 1:3; Ephesians 3:16–19; John 1:16; Ephesians 2:5–6; Philippians 3:10; Romans 6:5–6; 2 Timothy 2:12; ^bEphesians 4:15–16; 1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Corinthians 3:21–23; Colossians 2:19; ^c1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14; Romans 1:11–12, 14; 1 John 3:16–18; Galatians 6:10

2. Saints by profession are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God. Saints are to perform such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification^a and to relieve each other in outward things, according to their different abilities and necessities. This communion, as God offers opportunity, is to be extended to all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.^b

^aHebrews 10:24–25; Acts 2:42, 46; Isaiah 2:3; 1 Corinthians 11:20; ^bActs 2:44–45; 1 John 3:17; 2 Corinthians 8–9; Acts 11:29–30

3. This communion, which the saints have with Christ, does not make them partakers of the substance of His Godhead in any way, or equal with Christ in any respect. To affirm either of these is impious and blasphemous.^a Nor does their communion with one another as saints take away or infringe the title or property that each man has in his own goods and possessions.^b

^aColossians 1:18–19; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Isaiah 42:8; 1 Timothy 6:15–16; Psalm 45:7 *with* Hebrews 1:8–9; ^bExodus 20:15; Ephesians 4:28; Acts 5:4

Chapter 27: Of the Sacraments

1. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace,^a directly instituted by God^b to:

- Represent Christ and His benefits
- Confirm our participation in, and claim upon,¹⁴⁰ Him^c
- Put a visible difference between those who belong to the Church and the rest of the world^d
- Solemnly engage the recipients to the service of God in Christ, according to His Word.^e

^aRomans 4:11; Genesis 17:7, 10; ^bMatthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23; ^c1 Corinthians 10:16; 1 Corinthians 11:25–26; Galatians 3:27;¹⁴¹ ^dRomans 15:8; Exodus 12:48; Genesis 34:14; ^eRomans 6:3–4; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 21

2. There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified. Because of this, the names and effects of the one are often attributed to the other.

¹⁴⁰ The original has “interest in” in the sense of ownership, share, or participation in something, implying rightful claim or ownership in some sense.

¹⁴¹ The RPCNA *Constitution* references Galatians 3:17; Schaff references Galatians 3:27. Both are applicable, but Galatians 3:27 seems much more to the point, as it appears as a footnote in Schaff, just after “Confirm our interest in Him.”

Genesis 17:10; Matthew 26:27–28; Titus 3:5

3. The grace that is exhibited in or by the sacraments (rightly used), is not conferred by any power in them. Neither does the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him who administers it.^a Rather, a sacrament's efficacy depends upon:

- The work of the Spirit^b
- The word of institution, which contains, together:
 - A precept authorizing the use of the sacrament
 - A promise of benefit to worthy receivers.^c

^aRomans 2:28–29; 1 Peter 3:21; ^bMatthew 3:11; 1 Corinthians 12:13; ^cMatthew 26:27–28; Matthew 28:19–20

4. There are only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel: baptism and the Supper of the Lord.¹⁴² Neither sacrament may be dispensed by any but a minister of the Word lawfully ordained.

Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:20, 23; 1 Corinthians 4:1; Hebrews 5:4

5. The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard to the spiritual things signified and exhibited by them, were, for substance, the same as those of the New.

1 Corinthians 10:1–4

Chapter 28: Of Baptism

1. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ.^a It is not only for the solemn admission of the one baptized into the visible Church,^b but is also to be to him a sign and seal of:

- The covenant of grace^c
- His engraftment¹⁴³ into Christ^d
- Regeneration^e
- Remission of sins^f
- His giving up [of himself] to God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life.^g

Baptism is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world.^h

¹⁴² Supper of the Lord: the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, Holy Eucharist

¹⁴³ engraftment: the process of grafting a *scion* onto a *stock*, both being woody plants. The stock is an already rooted plant. The scion may be of a same or (usually) different species and may be a branch or whole plant above the roots. The grafting process involves making a special cut on the trunk or a branch of both the stock and scion so that the two may be joined and bound. Done right, the scion and stock become as one plant, the stock providing water and nutrients and the scion, products of photosynthesis. Both remain their own original species. The reference to engraftment is to call to mind the teaching of Christ that He is the vine and believers are the branches (John 15:1–5; Romans 11:17–24).

^aMatthew 28:19; ^b1 Corinthians 12:13; ^cRomans 4:11 *with* Colossians 2:11–12; ^dGalatians 3:27; Romans 6:5; ^eTitus 3:5; ^fMark 1:4; ^gRomans 6:3–4; ^hMatthew 28:19–20

2. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, with which the person is to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, by a minister of the Gospel, lawfully called to the ministry.

Matthew 3:11; John 1:33; Matthew 28:19–20

3. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary, but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person.

Hebrews 9:10, 19–22; Acts 2:41; Acts 16:33; Mark 7:4

4. Not only those who actually profess faith in Christ and obedience to Him are to be baptized,^a but also the infants of one or both believing parents.^b

^aMark 16:15–16; Acts 8:37–38; ^bGenesis 17:7, 9–10 *with* Galatians 3:9, 14 *and* Colossians 2:11–12 *and* Acts 2:38–39 *and* Romans 4:11–12;¹⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:14; Matthew 28:19; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15

5. It is a great sin to despise or neglect this ordinance.^a But grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed to it that no person can be regenerated or saved without it,^b or that all who are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.^c

^aLuke 7:30 *with* Exodus 4:24–26; ^bRomans 4:11; Acts 10:2, 4, 22, 31, 45, 47; ^cActs 8:13, 23

6. The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment in time in which it is administered.^a However, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Spirit to those to whom that grace belongs, according to the counsel of God's own will in His appointed time. This is true whether the one baptized is of age or an infant.^b

^aJohn 3:5, 8; ^bGalatians 3:27; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 5:25–26; Acts 2:38, 41

7. The sacrament of baptism is to be administered to any person just once.

Titus 3:5

Chapter 29: Of the Lord's Supper

1. Our Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, called the Lord's Supper. It is to be observed in His Church to the end of the world:

- For the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death
- For true believers, for:
 - The sealing all of the benefits of His death to them

¹⁴⁴ Instead of Genesis 17:7, 9–10, Schaff has Genesis 17:7, 9.

- Their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him
- Their further engagement in and to all duties that they owe to Him
- A bond and pledge of their communion with Him and with each other, as members of His mystical¹⁴⁵ body [the Church].

1 Corinthians 11:23–26; 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, 21; 1 Corinthians 12:13

2. In this sacrament, Christ is not offered up to His Father, nor is any real sacrifice made at all for remission of the sins of the living or dead.^a Rather, [with respect to sacrifices,] the Lord’s Supper is only a commemoration of that single offering up of Himself, by Himself, upon the cross, once for all, and also a spiritual oblation¹⁴⁶ of all possible praise to God for the same.^b Therefore, the Popish sacrifice of the mass (as they call it) is most abominably insulting to Christ’s one only sacrifice, the sole propitiation¹⁴⁷ for all the sins of His elect.^c

^aHebrews 9:22, 25–26, 28; ^b1 Corinthians 11:24–26; Matthew 26:26–27; ^cHebrews 7:23–24, 27; Hebrews 10:11–12, 14, 18

3. The Lord Jesus, in this ordinance, has appointed His ministers to:

- Declare His word of institution to the people
- Pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thus set them apart from a common to a holy use
- Take and break the bread, to take the cup, and
 - To give both to the communicants
 - Communicate¹⁴⁸ themselves^a
 - Give to none who are not the present in the congregation^b

^aMatthew 26:26–28 and Mark 14:22–24 and Luke 22:19–20 with 1 Corinthians 11:23–27;¹⁴⁹ ^bActs 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20

4. The following are all contrary to the nature of this sacrament, and to the institution of Christ:

- Private masses, or the receiving of this sacrament by a priest¹⁵⁰ or any other alone [by himself]^a
- The denial of the cup to the people^b
- Worshiping the elements
- Lifting the elements up for adoration
- Carrying them about for adoration

¹⁴⁵ mystical body: all believers in Christ as the body of Christ. The nature of this union is a holy mystery; hence the name.

¹⁴⁶ oblation: a religious offering that is not a blood sacrifice

¹⁴⁷ propitiation: to obtain or regain the favor of someone. Use of this word teaches us that the forgiveness a believer obtains in Christ does not merely make God neutral to the believer. Rather, the forgiveness and benefits obtained through Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross favorably dispose God to the believer, leading to the adoption of sons, eternal glory, and so on.

¹⁴⁸ communicate: in this context, partake of the Lord’s Supper

¹⁴⁹ RPNA *Constitution* omits 1 Corinthians 11:27.

¹⁵⁰ priest: in this context, a priest or prelate of the Roman Catholic Church. (A few branches of the true Church call their ordained ministers “priests,” which ministers are not the topic of this sentence.)

- The reserving of the elements for any pretended religious use [after the administration of the Lord’s Supper is finished].^c

^a1 Corinthians 10:16; ^bMark 14:23; 1 Corinthians 11:25–29; ^cMatthew 15:9

5. When duly set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, the outward elements in this sacrament are related in such a manner to Him crucified that truly, yet sacramentally¹⁵¹ only, they are sometimes called by the names of the things they represent, to wit, the body and blood of Christ.^a However, in substance and nature they still remain truly and only bread and wine, as they were before.^b

^aMatthew 26:26–28; ^b1 Corinthians 11:26–28; Matthew 26:29

6. The doctrine commonly called transubstantiation, which teaches a change of the substance of bread and wine into the substance of Christ’s body and blood by consecration of a priest, or by any other way, is repugnant, not only to Scripture, but even to common sense and reason. It overthrows the nature of the sacrament, and has been, and is, the cause of many superstitions—indeed, of gross idolatries.

Acts 3:21 *with* 1 Corinthians 11:24–26; Luke 24:6, 39

7. Also,¹⁵² worthy receivers outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament^a receive and feed upon Christ crucified and all the benefits of His death:

- Inwardly by faith
- Really, and indeed
- Spiritually
- Not carnally and corporally.

The body and blood of Christ are not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine.¹⁵³ However, in the ordinance, the body and blood are really, but spiritually, just as present to the faith of believers as the elements are to their outward senses.^b

^a1 Corinthians 11:28; ^b1 Corinthians 10:16

8. Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament, they do not receive the thing signified by the elements. Rather, by their unworthy coming to the Lord’s Supper, they are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation. Therefore, because they are unfit to enjoy communion with Him, all ignorant and ungodly persons are unworthy of the Lord’s table and cannot, without great sin against Christ while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries^a or be admitted to them.^b

^a1 Corinthians 11:27–29; 2 Corinthians 6:14–16; ^b1 Corinthians 5:6–7, 13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14–15; Matthew 7:6

¹⁵¹ sacramentally: a reference to the sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified (Ch. 27: 2).

¹⁵² also: in addition to the benefits and memorial aspects stated in paragraphs 29:1 and 29:2 above

¹⁵³ This concept is known as *consubstantiation*.

Chapter 30: Of Church Censures

1. The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His Church, has appointed a government in His Church, in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.

Isaiah 9:6–7; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; Acts 20:17, 28; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Matthew 28:18–20

2. To these Church officers, the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed. By virtue of these keys, they have power:

- To retain and remit sins¹⁵⁴
- To shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word and censures
- To open it to penitent sinners by the ministry of the Gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion might require.

Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:17–18; John 20:21–23; 2 Corinthians 2:6–8

3. Church censures are necessary for:

- The reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren
- Deterring others from like offenses
- Purging out that leaven that might infect the whole lump¹⁵⁵
- Vindicating¹⁵⁶ the honor of Christ and the holy profession of the Gospel
- Preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the Church if they should allow His covenant and its seals to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.

1 Corinthians 5; 1 Timothy 5:20; Matthew 7:6; 1 Timothy 1:20; 1 Corinthians 11:27–34 *with* Jude 23

4. For the better attaining of these ends, the officers of the Church are to proceed by admonition, suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a season, and by excommunication from the Church, according to the nature of the crime and the demerit of the person.

1 Thessalonians 5:12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14–15; 1 Corinthians 5:4–5, 13; Matthew 18:17; Titus 3:10

¹⁵⁴ As the WCF makes abundantly clear, forgiveness of sins in an absolute, eternal sense is the sole prerogative of God, who has ordained forgiveness of sins by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. But even individual believers are commanded, as the occasion demands, to forgive those who sin against them in this life (Matthew 18:22). If all believers have power to forgive sins temporally, how much more the overseers of Christ's Church.

¹⁵⁵ This is a reference to 1 Corinthians 5:6–7. A little bad leaven (baker's yeast), like any microorganism, can multiply and spoil a whole batch of dough.

¹⁵⁶ vindicate: in this context, to confirm or to free from the reproach of an accusation

Chapter 31: Of Synods and Councils

1. For the better government and further edification of the Church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils.

Acts 15:2, 4, 6

2. Magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers and other fit persons to consult and advise with, about matters of religion.^a However, if magistrates are open enemies to the Church, the ministers of Christ by themselves by virtue of their office, or they with other fit persons, upon delegation from their churches, may meet together in such assemblies.^{157, b}

^aIsaiah 49:23; 1 Timothy 2:1–2; 2 Chronicles 19:8–11; 2 Chronicles 29–30; Matthew 2:4–5; Proverbs 11:14; ^bActs 15:2, 4, 22–23, 25

3. It belongs 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 of the government of His Church
- To receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same.

These decrees and determinations, if consistent with 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 by which they are made. This is because this power is an ordinance of God appointed in His Word.

Acts 15:15, 19, 24, 27–31; Acts 16:4; Matthew 18:17–20

4. 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.

Ephesians 2:20; Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 2:5; 2 Corinthians 1:24

5. Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical.

¹⁵⁷ Editorial opinion: Civil magistrates have no authority in doctrinal, theological, or ecclesiastical matters. Yet, as ministers of God, they are to rule according to Scripture, under God. Thus, magistrates may have good cause to request (but not require) the assistance of a synod or council regarding the theology of civil government, justice, and so forth. See Appendix A.

They are not to meddle with civil affairs that concern the commonwealth¹⁵⁸ unless by way of humble petition in extraordinary cases; or by way of advice if they are so required¹⁵⁹ by the civil magistrate, for satisfaction of conscience.

Luke 12:13–14; John 18:36

Chapter 32: Of the State of Men After Death, And the Resurrection of the Dead

1. After death, the bodies of men return to dust and see corruption.^a But their souls immediately return to God who gave them, because they neither die nor sleep and have an immortal existence.^b The souls of the righteous are made perfect in holiness, and thus 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.^c 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.^d Besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledges none.

^aGenesis 3:19; Acts 13:36; ^bLuke 23:43; Ecclesiastes 12:7; ^cHebrews 12:23; 2 Corinthians 5:1, 6, 8; Philippians 1:23 *with* Acts 3:21 *and* Ephesians 4:10; ^dLuke 16:23–24; Acts 1:25; Jude 6–7; 1 Peter 3:19

2. At the last day, those who are found alive will not die, but be changed.^a And all the dead will be raised up with their own bodies, and none other. Their bodies will have different qualities and will be united again to their souls forever.^b

^a1 Thessalonians 4:17; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52; ^bJob 19:26–27; 1 Corinthians 15:42–44

3. The bodies of the unjust will, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonor. The bodies of the just, by His Spirit, will be raised to honor and be made similar to His own glorious body.

Acts 24:15; John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 15:42–43;¹⁶⁰ Philippians 3:21

Chapter 33: Of the Last Judgment

1. God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by¹⁶¹ Jesus Christ,^a to whom all power and judgment is given by the Father.^b In that day, not only the apostate angels will be judged,^c but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth. They

¹⁵⁸ This is not meant to preclude ministers or laymen from preaching or teaching on any subject, including on civil government, or from participating in civic duties normal to all citizens.

¹⁵⁹ Editorial opinion: The civil magistrate may request, but not require, a synod or council to give advice. The permission or request of the civil magistrate is not required in order for a synod or council to give unsolicited advice, preaching, teaching, public rebuke or any other normal Gospel ministry to magistrates or any other. See Appendix A.

¹⁶⁰ Schaff has 1 Corinthians 15:42. RPCNA *Constitution* has 1 Corinthians 15:43. Both speak to the point.

¹⁶¹ by: Jesus Christ will be the Judge on God's behalf

will 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.^d

^aActs 17:31; ^bJohn 5:22, 27; ^c1 Corinthians 6:3; Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4; ^d2 Corinthians 5:10; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Romans 2:16; Romans 14:10, 12; Matthew 12:36–37

2. The purpose of God in appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of:

- His mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect^a
- His justice, in the damnation of the reprobate who are wicked and disobedient.^b

For then the righteous will go into everlasting life and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing that will come from the presence of the Lord.^c But the wicked, who do not know God, and do not obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ, will be cast into eternal torments and be punished with everlasting destruction, cast out from the presence¹⁶² of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.^d

^aRomans 9:23; Matthew 25:21; ^bRomans 2:5–6; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–8;¹⁶³ Romans 9:22; ^cMatthew 25:31–40;¹⁶⁴ Acts 3:19; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; ^dMatthew 25:41–46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9–10

3. Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there will be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity.^a Thus, He will have that day unknown to men, that:

- They may shake off all carnal security and always be watchful, because they do not know at what hour the Lord will come
- They may be ever prepared to say, “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly,^b Amen.”

^a2 Peter 3:11, 14; 2 Corinthians 5:10–11; 2 Thessalonians 1:5–7; Luke 21:27–28; Romans 8:23–25; ^bMatthew 24:36, 42–44; Mark 13:35–37; Luke 12:35–36; Revelation 22:20

¹⁶² God is omnipresent, including in hell. But God’s gracious and beneficial presence will be absent.

¹⁶³ Schaff omits 2 Thessalonians 1:10.

¹⁶⁴ Schaff omits Matthew 25:35–40, 42–45.

Appendix A: Does the State Have Authority Over the Church?

Introduction

As a whole, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is both a classic and a masterpiece. Still, the WCF is a human work that is a product of its place in turbulent times and geography. God has continued to raise up able theologians in the intervening 370 years, and we now know that there do exist a very few theological errors in the WCF. The editor is conscience-bound to point out these errors for fear of propagating that which is not in accordance with Scripture. Let the reader be as the Bereans, searching the Scriptures, guided by the Holy Spirit.

In defense of the Westminster Divines, before addressing the relationship between Church and state, the editor wishes to comment on the two other errors already addressed and refuted in the footnotes:¹⁶⁵ In Ch. 25:6, the Roman Catholic pontiff is designated as “the man of sin.” This error is quite understandable given the deep and vile corruption of an institution that billed itself as the only true Church but that bitterly persecuted Protestants. Also, Christians through the centuries have had a tendency to mistakenly apply eschatological passages to events of their own time. In Ch. 24:4, the biblical set of forbidden marriage unions is extended to include the relatives of a deceased spouse. Although the prohibition was controversial in the Assembly,¹⁶⁶ it came out of a long history of medieval superstition, speculative theology,¹⁶⁷ and scientific ignorance. Progress does not come all at once, and while we respect those who went before us, we must not be bound by their errors.

That the Westminster Divines were a product of their era¹⁶⁸ brings us directly to the third point of disagreement, and the focus of this appendix: Does the state have any authority over the Church? The editor insists that the answer is no. The teaching that the state has authority over Christ’s Church is an error. Four areas will be examined in the refutation of these errors:

1. The historical background showing that the error was commonly accepted at the time of the writing of the WCF, and that it had a long history
2. The false assumption that a nation could have only one denomination
3. The incorrect exegesis of Scripture behind the error
4. An examination of Scripture, which refutes the error.

¹⁶⁵ Other points of disagreement are merely matters of emphasis, wording, or manner of expression.

¹⁶⁶ Alex F. Mitchell, John Struthers, *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874), 415.

¹⁶⁷ Philippe Aries, Georges Duby, General Editors, Paul Veyne, Editor, *A History of Private Life*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 470–1, 536–7.

¹⁶⁸ Edward D. Morris, DD, LLD, *Theology of the Westminster Symbols: A Commentary Historical, Doctrinal, Practical, on the Confession of Faith and Catechisms and the Related Formularies of the Presbyterian Churches* (Columbus, OH: Unknown Original Publisher, 1900, Reprinted Still Waters Revival Books on Puritan Hard Drive, www.puritandownloads.com), 563–8.

Historical Background

It is not possible to study European post-apostolic history and miss the numerous conflicts between Church and state. From the time of Constantine's conversion, both Church and state meddled in one another's affairs. The Westminster Divines could look back on a long history of Church versus state conflicts, each trying to dominate the other. Also, sometimes Protestant princes¹⁶⁹ protected the Reformation, while in other regions, Roman Catholic princes persecuted Protestants. This religious conflict also spawned military conflicts and wars. It was thus natural for Protestants to seek military protection from their prince.

It is not a very large step to go from expecting physical protection from the prince to expecting the prince to also protect Protestant doctrine, worship, and practice. This would be the more so in cases where there was diplomatic or military tension or war between a Protestant prince and a Roman Catholic prince due (at least partly) to religion. Indeed, for centuries, the Church of Rome had insisted that civil magistrates punish or execute those whom Roman Catholic prelates had condemned for heresy or other religious reasons. Civil rulers routinely installed and removed Church officials, established the boundaries of parishes (congregations), and meddled in various other ways. The reverse was also true: the Pope arrogated to himself the authority to raise up and depose kings and princes and to set national boundaries with more or less success at different times. It cannot be at all doubted that sinful ambition and failure to rely on the Holy Spirit to change the hearts of sinners were also factors. So, in a sense, "everybody did it," and the Assembly was not able to entirely disentangle the truth from cultural norms.

False Assumptions

It is a modern commonplace that multiple religions and multiple Christian denominations can coexist in the same place. Yet, this was not always the case. It will be recalled that Christ has one Church, the invisible Church as discussed in the WCF (Ch. 25). Various true branches of the visible Church will contain some members of the invisible Church and some hypocrites, but there is one Church, one Body of Christ, with one Head. But even today, certain denominations assume and teach that His one body must be one human organization or a group of organizations meeting narrow, unscriptural criteria. A similar notion is the assumption that any nation must have just one national church. The assumed logical conclusion from this is that dissenting groups must thus be suppressed by the national civil government as sinful, divisive, and injurious to the people of the nation.

None of these assumptions has any scriptural support; Christ's one body has many members as individuals, and these individuals may organize themselves in many kinds of groups, be they weekly Bible studies or multinational denominations. Such diversity of

¹⁶⁹ prince: as used here, a generic term for the highest-ranking civil magistrate over a particular area in a feudal society or monarchy

organization does not need to imply disunity, as is unfortunately often the case. Still, these assumptions did not come out of an exegetical vacuum.

Faulty Exegesis of Scripture

The state of the theology of the relationship between Church and state also suffered from some serious exegetical errors. These errors arose fairly naturally as the Roman Catholic Church presumed to temporally rule the entire world; they needed scriptural justification for their practices. Kings, likewise, needed justification for their claimed “divine right of kings.” Thus, such errors continued even as the Reformers and the Westminster Divines sought to disentangle the truth from centuries of error. The present appendix cannot hope to exhaustively treat the subject, so only the relevant Scripture passages referenced in Ch. 20:4, 23:3 will be examined here. Prior to doing so, however, the matter of the relationship of Old Testament Israel to modern states and the Church demands a brief examination.

Old Testament Israel was a body politic with different forms of civil government at different times. Israel was also the primitive visible Church (Ch. 7:5). Because of this, Israel has been called a *theocracy*. However, this term is not entirely correct in light of such passages as Exodus 18:17–24 and Deuteronomy 17:14–20. God intended Israel to be a republic. God’s Law and His Covenant were its constitution, and civil magistrates were to rule according to that constitution. Instead of a Supreme Court (USA), Israel had the Urim and Thummim and the prophets by which to directly appeal to God. God also assigned to Israel and its tribes specific boundaries. Thus, during this unique period of history, the visible Church and the nation-state of Israel were the same people group within the same geographic boundaries. As a direct result of this constitution, God’s Law, civil magistrates were to punish and suppress not only “normal” civil crimes such as theft and murder, but religious crimes such as false worship, enticement of citizens away from God, or even true worship in unauthorized places. Another result was that the civil rulers could also serve as religious administrators. The actual sacrifices, rituals, and teaching of Scripture were the job of the priests and Levites. However, kings, with God’s approval, set up and deposed priests, sent out priests and Levites on teaching missions, built the Temple, provided for its maintenance, called religious assemblies, and provided for various religious feasts. They even, under the prophets, arranged some of the auxiliary features of the temple worship (2 Chronicles 29:25–27). In spite of this, however, there were normally distinct and separate judicial systems for religious affairs and for civil affairs (2 Chronicles 19:8–11). With the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD, the ancient nation-church-state of Israel was permanently dissolved. (The believing Gentiles have been permanently grafted into the Church.) No other nation can have, or will ever have, the same constitution. It is for this reason that making applications from Old Testament passages regarding civil rulers in ancient Israel must be done with great care. This is the more so because much Bible history is given without comment as to the morality of actions depicted.

We will begin the exegetical analysis with the first relevant reference given in Ch. 23:3, Isaiah 49:23: “Kings shall be your foster fathers, And their queens your nursing

mothers; They shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, And lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord, For they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me.” The WCF uses this passage as support for the idea that the civil ruler should provide administrative and civil support to preserve unity and peace in the Church, suppress heresies, and so forth. Now certainly the Church and its members are entitled to the same protection under the law as all citizens. But chapter 49 of Isaiah is a messianic prophecy. Christ will be given not only to Israel, but to the Gentiles. All kinds of people, even kings and princes, will worship and serve the King of kings and Lord of lords. Israel, the Church, will be greatly blessed and will expand greatly after the coming of the Messiah. To make verse 23 teach that kings will have authority to call synods, set the manner of worship (“correct abuses”), and preserve Church doctrine is to take the verse out of its broader context.

Some of the other passages are quickly dismissed. Psalm 122:9 speaks of seeking the good of Jerusalem. Other than the psalm’s title, “A Psalm of David,” there is nothing that could even hint that this psalm is particular to the civil magistrate instead of all of God’s people. Ezra 7:23, 25–26 is a quote from a decree by the pagan king Artaxerxes providing for the rebuilding of the Temple. The idolatrous king was merely hedging all of his bets. Although God providentially moved the king to it, this was not any kind of prophecy concerning Church and state generally; far less was it a continuing command from God.

Leviticus 24:16 prescribes the death penalty for blasphemy. Deuteronomy 13:5–13 (cited by Ch. 20:4, Ch. 23:3) speaks of two different crimes: blasphemy and enticing a believer away from God. “Heresy” is absent. Ch. 23:3 states that “The civil magistrate ... has authority, and it is his duty ... that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed ...” Thus, we have three offenses here:

1. Only the WCF mentions heresy.
2. The WCF and Scripture both mention blasphemy.
3. Only the Scripture mentions enticing a believer away from God. It is arguable that this could take the form of either blasphemy or heresy, but since the WCF does not mention it directly, we will exclude this as outside the scope of this appendix.

Nowhere in Scripture is heresy a crime actionable by the civil magistrate. This is consistent with the rest of Scripture, for heresy is an expression of unbelief of such a nature as to render a person an unbeliever; he who knowingly disagrees with a clear Scripture teaching does not believe God. To punish unbelief is to hideously insult the Holy Spirit and to invite rank hypocrisy. Strangers were to be accepted and protected in ancient Israel (Exodus 12:49; Exodus 22:21; and others) and it is unrealistic to expect that they were all converted to the worship of the true God immediately. Interestingly, in the time of Christ’s earthly ministry, *sinners* were Jews who openly did not practice the Jewish religion. Though held in contempt, there seems to be no indication that they were punished by the authorities.

Blasphemy is a different issue. Jesus Christ Himself stated that slander or insult against a human is actionable in court (Matthew 5:22). In Romans 3:8, the Greek word

that is translated “slanderosly” is *blasphemeo*. And, yes, the same word is also translated “blaspheme” in James 2:7 in reference to the name of Christ. So the idea that slander against God would be actionable by the civil magistrate seems to be not at all unreasonable. The question of whether and how civil governments should legislate in this area has been variously interpreted by good and faithful adherents to the WCF. But the question of whether magistrates should punish blasphemers generally is outside the scope of this appendix. Rather, we must examine the matter of collusion or force between Church and state in the punishment of blasphemers. (Heresy has already been shown to not be a civil crime.) This collusion or force is a topic of WCF Ch. 23:3,¹⁷⁰ and the focus of the present discussion.

History records many sordid instances of the punishment of “heretics” and “blasphemers.” The words are in quotes in recognition of the fact that, depending upon one’s doctrinal views, the definitions may vary widely. In some cases the victims were true heretics or blasphemers, and in other cases the victims were faithful Christians. In many cases, the persecutor was the Roman Catholic Church, but in other cases, even faithful Christians were the persecutors. Common to nearly all of these events was a joint effort, possibly forced, of Church and state together. In some cases, the Church forced the state to punish a “heretic” or “blasphemer.” The WCF explicitly forbids synods or councils from meddling with state affairs in Ch. 31:5. Ch. 23:3 does not seem at all to imply that the Church should attempt to force a civil magistrate to punish either blasphemers or heretics. Thus, the remaining question is whether the state can force the Church to participate in the punishment of a “blasphemer.” This unholy practice becomes obviously unbiblical as soon as the doctrine that the civil magistrate has any authority at all over the Church is refuted. This refutation will be given below.

Other verses cited by Ch. 20:4 or Ch. 23:3 are narratives of civil magistrates in the Old Testament acting against religious crimes. These actions were sometimes consistent with a magistrate in the nation-church-state of ancient Israel, but not necessarily today.

While on the topic of bad exegesis, the WCF did not directly endorse tax-funded support for churches, but the practice has been common and persists today in some cases. Since control of funds is control over the recipient of those funds, this related topic is worth investigating. There is a single verse used to justify this practice. The editor has seen no other supposed scriptural justification in numerous documents. The verse is Isaiah 60:16: “You shall drink the milk of the Gentiles, And milk the breast of kings; You shall know that I, the Lord, am your Savior And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.” This verse is also out of context; Isaiah 60 speaks partly of the return to exile, but much more of the bringing in of the Gentiles into the Church, resulting in great blessing to the Church, both Jews and Gentiles. To make verse 16 say that kings must use tax funds to support an established church is quite the stretch. Perhaps a better verse on this subject would be Exodus 23:8: “And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous.”

¹⁷⁰ Morris, 564–7.

What Does Scripture Say?

Having shown that none of the WCF cited Scriptures support the doctrine that the civil magistrate has any authority over Christ's bride, the Church, we must now examine Scripture to see what is the proper relationship. With respect to the general topic of humans having authority over other humans, there is both a prohibition given to humans and a positive assertion by God of His own authority. We begin with the prohibition. There is a general human right to be left in peace without undue outside interference.¹⁷¹ This right comes from the many negative commands regarding other people, such as the commandments against murder, adultery, theft, lying, and so on. More generally, Scripture condemns busybodies (meddlers in other's affairs) in 2 Thessalonians 3:11; 1 Timothy 5:13; and strongly in 1 Peter 4:5: "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters." It would be unreasonable if this did not extend to the activities and duties of those in authority, including civil and ecclesiastical officials. Recall also that the matter under discussion is authority; voluntary relationships have great leeway. An unjust or meddling law is an obvious assertion of invalid authority. But also, in a real sense, any violation of the general human right to be left in peace without undue outside interference is an assertion of invalid authority. For example, the thief asserts invalid authority over another person's goods.

Positively, the Lord Jesus declared that *all* authority is given to Him (Matthew 28:18). As Christ self-identifies with His Word (John 1:1), this declaration is supported by Exodus 20:2: "I am the Lord your God," and 41 other places in Scripture where God asserts His authority with this very phrase. Also, all humans are, to put it bluntly, God's personal property. Thus, as the Lord Jesus reserves all authority to Himself, He reserves all authority over all humans and human institutions to Himself alone. It is thus clear that God has both prohibited invalid assertions of authority of one human over another and has also positively reserved all authority to Himself alone. Therefore the only way any human can exercise valid authority over another human is if God delegates that authority in His holy Scriptures. The extent of such authority is also only that which is granted by Scripture.

It is beyond the scope of this appendix to show in detail how God has, indeed, granted limited, delegated authority in different, limited, particular, and distinct spheres to the Individual, the Family, the State, and the Church.^{172, 173} Fortunately, in the present case, detailed analysis is not required. It is completely unnecessary to find a proof text stating that the civil magistrate does not have authority over the Church. Rather, we need merely note that nowhere¹⁷⁴ does Scripture grant civil governments authority over the Church. This is because, without a grant of delegated authority from Him who has all

¹⁷¹ Jeremiah Bezael, *Jesus Christ: Rock of Human Rights and Freedom* (www.jeremiahbezael.org, accessed May 8, 2011), 50–3. A copy of this work is available at BeForgiven.INFO (<http://www.beforgiven.info/JCRoHRaF.pdf>) as it seems to no longer be available elsewhere.

¹⁷² Bezael, 55–105.

¹⁷³ William Symington, *Messiah the Prince* (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1990). This is a most excellent book, with the single exception of Symington's approval of tax-funded support for the Church. (A couple of other editions are also available at <http://www.crownandcovenant.com/SearchResults.asp?Search=messiah+the+prince>, accessed July 13, 2015)

authority, there is no authority. Period. The case is thus closed. However, it seems useful to add two buttressing arguments. The first is Bezalel's summary on limited civil government:

It would be helpful to recapitulate in compressed fashion how it is that the Holy Bible gives us the human and civil rights to limited civil government and limited taxation, both of which are limited by the job description given in the Holy Bible:

Your boss is King Jesus. You work for Him and under Him. You are His servant with special duties. Your job is to praise those who are righteous. King Jesus defines righteousness for you. Your job is also to punish those who do wickedly. King Jesus tells you what is wicked, and what kinds of punishments to use. You will be paid enough to do this job.

We must all submit graciously to civil governments. This is especially true because God established civil governments. Those legitimate civil governments that exist are established by God. They are God's servants. To rebel against them is to rebel against God.

We pay taxes because civil authorities deserve their wages and the civil government needs funds to function. Civil rulers also deserve respect because of their position as God's ministers. At the same time, while submission implies obedience, obedience is not required when to obey humans is to disobey God.

"You shall not murder." Under this commandment is a command against manstealing. For a busybody to butt into another's affairs is a lesser form of manstealing as the effect is to steal a person's liberty. The Holy Bible condemns busybodies. This creates a general human right to be left in peace by others. God has ordained civil governments to defend our right to be left in peace. Where we violate the rights of others, civil government has specific authority, against our general rights, to bring us to justice and punish us. God tells us what crimes are to be punished by civil authorities and the type of punishment to use.

Since all authority comes from God, civil authorities have only limited authority where specifically granted by God. All other exertion of spurious authority is a violation of our general human right to be left in peace. Thus, valid civil government is necessarily limited. Since the

¹⁷⁴ This was true in the ancient nation-church-state of Israel as well. Where kings validly acted as religious administrators, it was at the direct command of God, either directly to them or via prophets. Such commands are sometimes mentioned in Scripture, but the commands themselves are not recorded and there is not a continuing grant of authority to the king or other magistrate. See for example 2 Chronicles 29:25–30, where God specified certain musical instruments to be used in His worship, but the nature of these instruments and their use are not recorded. More to the point: there is no grant of authority to any king following David to specify or change these instruments.

functions of valid civil government are limited, so are the taxes needed to pay for it.¹⁷⁵

Although this quote speaks of individual human rights, the same principles must certainly apply to groups of people and other spheres of authority, including the Church.

The second buttressing argument is positive evidence in favor of the independence of Christ's Church from civil and other authorities. Ephesians 1:22–23: "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." Since Christ is head over all things, including civil governments, and since He is specifically given to the Church, it would seem quite unreasonable for a civil government to have authority over the Church.

Resources

The reader desiring to learn more of the history mentioned in this appendix may wish to consult the following resources:

- William M. Hetherington's *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*¹⁷⁶ is, as the title indicates, specific to the WCF.
- George Park Fisher's *History of the Christian Church*¹⁷⁷ is a one-volume work that will give a brief overview of the history of the Church from the time of the birth of Christ up to the nineteenth century.
- Phillip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*¹⁷⁸ is an eight-volume history beginning with the apostolic age and ending with the Reformation. Schaff's *History* is perhaps the gold standard of Church history.
- Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work*.¹⁷⁹
- John Foxe's *History of the Christian Martyrs (Foxe's Book of Martyrs)*¹⁸⁰ is a valuable and edifying classic. The edition by M.G. King is one of many that has appended to it accounts of martyrs after Foxe's death.

All of these works are available free on the Internet in electronic form.

¹⁷⁵ Bezalel, 105.

¹⁷⁶ William Maxwell, DD, Hetherington, LLD, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edmonton, AB: Still Waters Revival Books), 1991.

¹⁷⁷ George Park Fisher, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 1904.

¹⁷⁸ Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1991.

¹⁷⁹ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Edmonton, AB Canada: Still Waters Revival Books), 1991.

¹⁸⁰ John Foxe (Marie Gentert King, Editor) *History of the Christian Martyrs (Foxe's Book of Martyrs)* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revel Company), 1970.

Appendix B: Background and Editorial Philosophy

As related in the Introduction, accurate translation of the meaning of the original text of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is a vital and important goal. Nonetheless, however accurate the translation may be, if it is not accessible to the reader all is lost. Thus, readability is a paramount and overriding consideration. For this purpose, the following changes have been made during translation:

- Spelling and punctuation are modernized.
- Obsolete words are replaced with contemporary synonyms.
- Words that may not be obsolete, but whose common or contemporary meaning is often unknown or differs from that of the text, are likewise replaced with contemporary synonyms or defined.
- Similarly, words with a precise theological meaning are explained in footnotes.
- Overly long and run-on sentences (by contemporary standards) are broken up into multiple sentences.
- Embedded lists are sometimes bulleted, particularly where the structure is complex, the list long, or the list items are complex phrases, clauses, or sentences.
- In some cases the order of phrases is altered for clarification or ease of reading.
- Other small changes are often made that make the text easier to read, such as substituting the antecedent for a pronoun.
- Occasionally, footnotes give longer explanations of terms or concepts so that the reader may more fully understand the WCF text.
- The contemporary text generally follows American usage per the *Chicago Manual of Style*.¹⁸¹
- The Westminster Divines thoroughly and equally included women with men as human beings made in the image of God. They understood references to “men,” “mankind,” and so on, as completely including both sexes. This understanding and usage is also that of the Holy Scriptures. The editor therefore sees no reason to do violence to the text for the sake of “gender inclusiveness,” particularly when standards of English usage on this matter are currently in flux, to say nothing of frequently resulting in awkward constructions.

The original WCF has a certain majestic terseness and style which is, as is common in translations, greatly diminished by the editor’s current work. This is regrettable, but not so nearly regrettable as when a person is denied access to these eternal truths due to difficulties in reading comprehension. In particular, the frequent use of bulleted lists may surprise or irritate some readers. But quoting from Grammar-Quizzes.com:

Block text visually runs text together. It is wordy but saves space. Using more than three or four lines on a web page causes the reader to skip over

¹⁸¹ Chicago University Press, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 2010.

the last few lines. Did you actually read this last line?

A bulleted or numbered list:

- Visually emphasizes information
- Capsulizes a concept
- Facilitates reading comprehension.¹⁸²

The quoted block text, particularly the last line, may shock the highly educated, but the editor wishes to serve as many readers as possible.

The editor used the *Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*¹⁸³ as the source text, and *The Creeds of Christendom*¹⁸⁴ as a check text for proofreading and precise alignment of proof texts. Reference was also made to other published WCF texts, as well as primary and secondary historical sources where necessary to ascertain the meaning of a word or phrase.

The editor welcomes constructive feedback and corrections at the email address given below. (The address is a graphic to foil harvesting by spammers.) The editor will particularly appreciate notice of errors that cause the translation to fail to faithfully convey the original meaning of the text of the WCF.

info@BeForgiven.INFO

¹⁸² Grammar-Quizzes.com, <http://www.grammar-quizzes.com/punc-lists.html> (accessed November 29, 2014).

¹⁸³ *Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, A-5, <http://reformedpresbyterian.org/downloads/constitution2010.pdf> (accessed September 30, 2014).

¹⁸⁴ Schaff, Philip, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, vol. 3, Revised by David Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), 598.