

## Plain English Westminster

A version of the Westminster Confession of Faith written in English that we in the pew can understand. Written on and off between 2009 and 2013.

### Introduction: Why a PEW?

I started writing the Plain English Westminster (PEW) because I was teaching the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) to 14-year-old catechism students, and trying to work through a 360-year-old document written in archaic and somewhat academic prose is tough going!

Translating the WCF – if you can call it translation – also helped me get my head around what it teaches. I found that using the PEW alongside the original helped me and my students understand the confession better.

The fact is that 1646 is a long time ago, and English has changed a lot since then, both our vocabulary and the way we structure our sentences. We acknowledge this when we use NIV and ESV Bibles rather than the King James Version. So why not do the same with our confessions, which were written in the same era? If we're going to be a confessional church, then our confessions need to be kept alive.

The exact wording of the original confession isn't sacred. Whatever I might think about translating the Bible, I believe that a thought-for-thought translation is much more likely to keep the WCF alive than a word-for-word translation.

The OPC's Modern English Study Version (MESV) is a great start, and I often used it when I got stuck with something in the original. It's a good modernisation, but they've definitely taken more of a word-for-word approach than I have. If their version is the NASB, think of this as the NIV.

Of course, the MESV seems to be a very careful update, whereas the PEW is a one-man job that I don't intend to be used for more than personal study or as a teaching tool. I have tried to be faithful to the original even when I don't like what it says.

Note that in many places I've changed words like "men" and "true believers" to personal pronouns like "we" and "us". I'm writing this as a Christian myself, and talking about *us* makes it more personal.

My publishing this is not intended either to defend or to disagree with the teachings in the confession. But where there are disagreements, at least we'll now be able to understand what we're disagreeing with!

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## **Chapter 1: The Holy Bible**

1. God's creation and His care for everything tell us a lot about Him: that He's good, wise, and powerful. They tell us enough so we have no excuses – God will judge us. But His creation and care for everything aren't enough for us to know Him or His will in the deep way that saves us.

Because of this, God decided to reveal Himself and His will more clearly to us with His Word. He did this at many times and in various ways, and He made sure the whole work was written down to keep it safe – to preserve and pass down the truth, and to establish the Church and protect it against sin, Satan and the world.

The Bible is especially important now that God has stopped revealing His will in the ways that He used to.

2. The Holy Bible, also known as the written Word of God or the Scriptures, contains all the books of the Old and New Testaments. All of these books are inspired by God, and are intended to show us what to believe and how to live.

The books of the Old Testament are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

And the books of the New Testament are Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.

3. The books in the Apocrypha aren't part of the Bible, because they're not inspired by God. This means they don't have authority for the Church. Instead, we should treat the books in the Apocrypha just like other human writings.

4. The authority of the Bible comes completely from God, not from man or from the Church. God is Truth, and because He's the Bible's author, it should be believed, obeyed, and accepted as the Word of God.

5. The Church's teaching can help us reverence the Bible and regard it highly. And the book itself contains a lot of evidence that it's the Word of God:

- Its heavenly subject matter
- The effectiveness of its teaching
- Its majestic style
- The harmony of all the different parts
- Its scope – to give all glory to God
- How it completely reveals the only way to be saved
- How the whole work is perfect
- Many other excellent qualities

Still, to be fully persuaded that the Bible is true and error-free and speaks with God's authority, we need to have the Holy Spirit working inside us. The Spirit assures our hearts of these truths.

6. God has put in the Bible everything we need to know about His glory as well as our salvation, faith, and life. He's either written these things in the Bible directly, or allowed us to deduce them using our reasoning. Nothing should ever be added to it, whether it's a "revelation from the Spirit" or simply a man-made tradition.

That said, the Holy Spirit does need to light up our hearts so we can understand the Bible's teaching in a way that saves us. There are also issues we should determine using Christian wisdom, nature, and general human practice – for example, the external aspects of worship, or the details of how church government should work. Even these should be done according to the general rules of the Bible, which we should always follow.

7. Not everything in the Bible is equally obvious, and not all teachings are equally clear to everyone. But what we need to know, and believe, and do to be saved – these things are so clearly taught in different parts of the Bible, that both the theologian and the "man in the pew" can understand them using readily-available means.

8. The Church should settle any religious controversies using the text of Scripture in the original languages. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the native language of God's people in olden times. The New Testament was written in Greek, which was the most widespread language at the time of writing. The two testaments in these original languages are authoritative because they were directly inspired by God and have been kept pure down through the ages.

However, most of God's people today don't know these original languages, but it's still very important that we can read the Bible – in fact, we have a right to. We're commanded to read and study it with a proper fear of God, so it must be translated into the native language of every nation we go to. Then the Word of God will live fully in all of us, and we'll be able to worship Him as we should. The Scriptures will give us patience and comfort, and lead us to hope.

9. We should interpret the Bible using the Bible itself. When we have questions about the exact meaning of a part of Scripture (and there's one meaning, not many), we should study the whole Bible to find passages that speak more clearly.

10. The highest judge that can settle any religious controversy is none other than the Holy Spirit speaking through the Bible. We're to trust His judgment fully. Statements by church councils, opinions of ancient writers, human teachings, and private revelations – all these should be judged by this Highest Judge.

## **Chapter 2: God and the Trinity**

1. There is only one living and true God. He's infinite and perfect. He's pure and invisible spirit. He doesn't have a body, multiple parts, or human passions. He doesn't change. He's immense, eternal, and unable to be fully understood. He's all-powerful, very wise, very holy, totally free, and absolute over everything. He works out everything from His unchanging and righteous will, and for His own glory.

God is very loving, gracious, full of mercy and patience, overflowing with goodness and truth. He forgives our wrong-doing and sin. He rewards everyone who diligently seeks Him. But He's also very just – His judgments can be terrifying, because He hates all sin and certainly won't let the guilty off the hook.

2. God has all life, glory, goodness, and blessing in Himself. All these things come from Him. Only He is fully self-sufficient – He doesn't need any of the creatures He's made. And He doesn't get His glory from them, but instead reveals His glory in and through them.

God is the source, the fountain, of all existence. Everything exists for Him and because of Him. He has absolute power over everything. He can do what He wants to anything, using anything, and for anything.

His eyes see everything clearly. His knowledge is infinite and never fails, and it doesn't depend on His creatures – nothing is uncertain or conditional in His mind. He is completely holy in all His decisions, actions, and commands.

He deserves worship and obedience. People, angels, and all other creatures must worship and obey Him as He commands.

3. God is one God but three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three are one in their core being. They're one in power. They're one through all time.

The Father comes from no one – He was not fathered by the Son or the Spirit, nor does He originate from them. The Son is fathered eternally by God the Father. The Holy Spirit originates eternally from both the Father and the Son.

### **Chapter 3: God's eternal decisions**

1. From before the beginning of time, God has decided and put into place everything that happens. He makes these decisions freely by His wise and holy will. Nothing He's put into place can change.

Still, He orders everything in such a way that He's not the author of sin. And He doesn't force us to do things against our will. He is the root cause of everything, but this doesn't mean secondary causes are not involved – in fact, God is the reason other causes exist.

2. God knows everything that can happen based on any conditions, but He doesn't decide things or put them in place by looking into the future and seeing what's going to happen.

3. To show His glory, God has ordered events so that some people and some angels are destined to eternal life, and others to eternal death.

4. He has counted and chosen a certain number of people and angels for each destiny. This number can't be increased or decreased.

5. God selected people for eternal life, and He's chosen them in Christ for everlasting glory. He did this before the beginning of time, in line with His eternal and unchanging purpose, and His secret design.

He chose us with free grace and love, not because He saw ahead of time our faith or our good works, or how well we'd stick to them. In fact, nothing in us caused Him to choose us – it was all down to His praise-worthy, amazing grace.

6. In the same way that God – by His eternal and free will – chose us for glory, He also planned the way that we'd be brought to Him. We all fell when Adam fell. But as God's chosen people, we have been redeemed by Christ, and at the right time were called by the Holy Spirit to have faith in Christ.

We're declared innocent, adopted as God's children, and made clean. Through faith, we are kept for salvation by God's power.

Only those God has chosen are called and saved in this way. Only they have been redeemed by Christ.

7. God chose to overlook the rest of mankind, choosing to dishonor them and judge them for their sin. God can show or withhold mercy as He wants – difficult to understand, but this is His will. In doing this, He shows His glorious justice and His kingly power over His creatures.

8. The truth that God determines our destinies is a great mystery, a teaching that should be used wisely and handled with care. We should pay attention to God's word and obey it. By hearing and obeying, we can be assured that we're called and chosen to eternal life.

This teaching gives us many reasons to praise, reverence, and admire God. It helps us to be humble and diligent, and it's a real comfort to everyone who truly obeys the gospel.

#### **Chapter 4: Creation**

1. To show His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, God decided to create the whole world and everything in it. Everything we see and everything we can't see He made out of nothing in six days. All of it was very good.

2. After God had made all the other creatures, He created mankind – He made us male and female. He gave us the ability to think and reason. He gave us souls that will live forever. He made us in His image, gifting us with knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

He wrote His own law on our hearts. He gave us power to obey it, but also the possibility to disobey. He gave us freedom of will, and our will can change.

Aside from writing His law on our hearts, He commanded us not to eat the fruit from one tree – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. While we kept this command we were happy to be friends of God, and to rule over the other creatures.

#### **Chapter 5: Providence**

1. God, our great Creator, holds up all things, directs them, and tears them down. From the biggest to the smallest, He governs everything. This wise and holy care is called God's "providence".

God governs according to His perfect knowledge of everything in the future, and in line with His free and unchanging will. His providence deserves our praise – for His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

2. God plans and knows everything before it happens. He's the "first cause", so everything goes according to His plan, without fail or change. However, by this same providence He makes events happen using secondary causes. These are "cause and effect" causes – events depend on them, or happen freely despite them, or seem to be forced by them.

3. God usually uses secondary causes or "means" to govern events. But if He wants to, He's free to work without these ordinary means, or above them, or against them.

4. God's providence shows us His great power, His hard-to-understand wisdom, and His infinite goodness. This in turn shows us everything His providence covers – even the first fall of mankind, and all other sins of people and angels.

He doesn't just give these things permission to happen however they want. No, it's a wise, limited permission. He governs even these events in various ways for His own holy reasons. However, the sinfulness of these things comes only from the creatures that do them, not from God Himself. God is holy and righteous, and never originates or approves of sin – in fact, He can't.

5. Our wise, righteous, and gracious God often lets us experience different temptations and feel the effects of our dirty hearts. But He only lets this happen for a time, in order to punish us for our sins, and to reveal how rotten and deceitful our hearts really are.

These trials humble us, and lift us up to help us lean on God more consistently. They make us more careful to guard against sin in the future, not to mention help us in many other ways.

6. God is a righteous judge, and He blinds and hardens wicked people for their sins. He keeps His grace from them – grace that would normally give them spiritual wisdom and changed hearts.

Sometimes He even takes away gifts they'd previously had, and exposes them to things their wicked hearts can turn into sin. He lets them fall into temptation and run with their evil desires, even letting Satan overpower them. Soon enough, they harden themselves using the same things God uses to soften others.

7. God's providence governs all creatures in a general way, but in a very special way it cares for His Church. In fact, God works all things for the good of the Church.

## **Chapter 6: The Fall, sin, and punishment**

1. Adam and Eve, our first parents, were seduced to eat the forbidden fruit by Satan's subtle tempting. God allowed them to sin like this because His purpose was to glorify Himself, in line with His wise and holy design.

2. Adam and Eve were originally perfect, and able to talk to God directly, but because of this sin they fell. They were then spiritually dirty, and dead in sin. Every part of their body and soul was now polluted.

3. Because they were the first parents, they passed down the guilt and death and pollution to all their children. And since then, it's been passed down from parent to child, right through all the generations.

4. All actual sins come from this original sin, a pollution which makes us totally unable and unwilling to do good. In fact, we oppose all good, and lean completely towards evil.

5. This polluted nature of ours remains in us during this life, even after we're born again. Even though it's forgiven and put to death through Christ, our pollution and all the effects of it are truly sin.

6. Every sin breaks God's righteous law and is contrary to it – both the original sin Adam and Eve passed down to us, and all the actual sins done after that. Every sin makes the sinner guilty, and as a result he comes under God's great anger and the curse of the law. He is then ruled by death and spiritual misery – misery both now and eternally.

### **Chapter 7: God's covenant with us**

1. God is our Creator; we are His creatures. He's very high above us, and it's our duty to obey Him. But He doesn't reward us because we've worked so hard at obeying Him. Instead, He voluntarily stoops down to our level and blesses us with promises, or covenants.

2. God's first covenant was with Adam. It is often called a "covenant of works": God promised life to Adam and his children – as long as they obeyed Him perfectly.

3. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and fell, they simply could not keep that first covenant anymore. Life by the first covenant was over.

So God made a second covenant. This one is often called a "covenant of grace": God freely offers to give life to us sinners, and to save us by Jesus Christ. In this covenant, God requires us to have faith in Him to be saved. He also promises to give us His Holy Spirit so that we want to believe and can believe.

4. In the Bible, this second covenant is often called a testament or will (or simply "covenant" in modern Bibles). This refers to the death of Jesus, the will-maker, who promises us an inheritance that will last forever.

5. God carried out this covenant differently in the time of the law and in the time of the gospel.

In the time of the law – the Old Testament – it was carried out by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the Passover lamb, and the other symbols and ceremonies that God gave to the Jewish people. All of these were enough at that time. They all pointed forward to Christ. In fact, the Holy Spirit used all these ceremonies to give the people faith in the promised Messiah, Jesus. God's people during that time were still forgiven through Jesus. They were still saved for eternal life only through Him.

6. Now we're living in the New Testament – the time of the gospel, after Christ has come down to us as a man. God now carries out His covenant by the Bible being preached, and by giving us the sacraments – baptism and the Lord's Supper. It seems much simpler now, and it's less of an outward show, and there are only a few ceremonies instead of a lot of them. But in spite of that, God uses these



few “simple” things to show His covenant to both Jews and Gentiles more fully, more clearly, and more effectively.

In other words, there are not two different “covenants of grace”. There’s only one, but it’s carried out in two different ways.

## **Chapter 8: Christ the mediator**

1. God chose His one and only Son, Jesus, to be the mediator between Him and us. And God has always had this plan – that Jesus would be our prophet, our priest, and our king. God chose Jesus to be the head of the Church, and to save it. Jesus will inherit everything, and judge the whole world.

God also gave us to Jesus. We are to be Jesus’ own people – His children. In due time we’ll each be called by Him, and saved from sin, and made right with God. Jesus will make us cleaner and holier, and in the end He’ll make us complete and perfect.

2. Jesus is the Son of God, sometimes called the “second person of the Trinity”. He is and has always been truly God. He’s one and the same being as God the Father, and equal with the Father.

When the time was right, Jesus became one of us. He took on the nature of mankind, complete with all of our characteristics and weaknesses – except sin. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit’s power, and was in the womb of Mary, who was still a virgin. Jesus had the same kind of body as her.

In other words, Jesus has two distinct natures – divine and human. Both natures are complete and perfect. The divine and human were joined together into one person, but they stayed divine and human. Jesus isn’t a mixture of God and man. He is truly God and truly man, but one Christ. He is the only mediator between God and man.

3. When Jesus became both human and divine, He was set apart and sacred, and was filled with the Holy Spirit to overflowing. He’s been given all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom. God the Father wanted Him filled with total abundance, so that He’d be holy, innocent, pure, and full of grace and truth. As a result, He was completely equipped to carry out His role as mediator.

Jesus did not make Himself our mediator, but was called to this role by God the Father. The Father gave Him all power and complete ability to judge, and commanded Him to use it.

4. Jesus was called by God to be our mediator, but He carries out the role willingly. To carry it out, He had to obey the law of God, which He did perfectly. He had to endure terrible suffering in both body and soul. He was nailed to a cross, He died, and was buried. Death held Him down for three days, but His body didn’t decay.

On the third day, He rose from the dead with the same body He had suffered in. In this body He went up into heaven, where He sits at the right hand of God the Father. There He mediates and pleads with God for us. And He’ll return from there to judge us and the angels at the end of the world.

5. Jesus obeyed God perfectly, and sacrificed Himself for us. That goes for all God’s people – all of us who have been given to Jesus by God the Father. Jesus offered His sacrifice to God through the Holy Spirit, and it fully satisfied God’s justice, and brought us back into a close relationship with God.

With His sacrifice, Jesus paid our debt, but He also bought us an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven which will last forever.

6. It was only after Jesus Christ became a man that we were actually saved – that we could say “the payment’s gone through”. But even before that, since the beginning of the world, God’s people have been able to experience the goodness and power of being saved. This is because God revealed His salvation to His people through the Old Testament promises, symbols, and sacrifices.

These signs showed that Jesus is the descendant of Eve that would “crush the serpent’s head.” They showed that He is the “Lamb that was slain” since the beginning of the world. That He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

7. As our mediator, some of Christ’s actions are in line with His divine nature, and some are in line with His human nature, as appropriate. But because He’s one person, sometimes in the Bible things Jesus does as a man are said to be done by God, and vice versa.

8. Christ always gives and applies salvation to everyone He’s bought it for – us, His people. He mediates between us and God, and He shows us the mysteries of salvation in and through His Word. He persuades us by His Holy Spirit to believe and obey, and He governs our hearts by His Word and by His Spirit. He defeats all our enemies by His almighty power and wisdom, in ways that fit right in with His amazing plan.

## **Chapter 9: Free will**

1. God gave us freedom of will in the sense that we’re not forced to do good or evil. Nature has not already determined whether we’ll do good or evil.

2. When mankind was still innocent, before Adam and Eve’s fall into sin, we were free and able to do good things that pleased God. But this had the potential to change. We were allowed to fall from innocence.

3. And we did fall – from innocence into sin. By the fall we lost the ability to choose any spiritual good that would help save us. So as fallen humans, we really don’t like doing good. We’re dead in sin, and by our own strength we’re not able to convert ourselves, or even prepare ourselves to be converted.

4. When God converts us and gives us His grace, He frees us from being slaves of sin. By God’s grace alone we’re enabled to want to do spiritual good and to freely do it. But we still have some rottenness remaining in us, so we don’t always want to do good. We sometimes want to do evil. And even when we want to do good, we don’t do it perfectly.

5. We’ll only have a truly free will when we’re “raised in glory” at the resurrection. Our wills will then be perfect and free to only do good – they won’t even have the potential to turn bad again.

## **Chapter 10: Effective calling**

1. God calls to Himself all the people (and only those people) that He has destined to eternal life. It's an effective call in God's appointed time, by His Word and Spirit. It's a call out of our natural sin and death, and into grace and salvation by Jesus Christ.

When God calls us, He lights up our minds spiritually, so that we can be saved and so we can understand the things of God. He takes out our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh. He renews our will, and makes us want to do good. He draws us powerfully to Jesus, but also makes us willing to come so that we come freely.

2. This effective call comes only from God's free grace, not anything God foresees in us. We're completely passive in this process, until God makes us alive and renews us by His Holy Spirit. Then we're enabled to answer God's call, and to embrace the grace He gives us.

3. Babies who are chosen by God but die young are made new and saved by Christ. They're saved through the Holy Spirit, who works in them when and where and how He pleases. The Spirit works in this same way in mentally handicapped people who have been chosen by God, and others who are unable to be called by the preaching of God's word.

4. Some people who are not chosen might be outwardly called by the preaching of God's word, and might experience the general working of the Holy Spirit, but they never truly come to Christ, so they can't be saved. And people who don't profess to be Christians can't be saved in any other way, even if they try very hard to live a "good life" according to nature or their own religion. It's a very harmful heresy to believe that people can be saved in other ways.

## **Chapter 11: Justification**

1. All of us God has called He also freely justifies. He does this not by filling us with righteousness, but by forgiving our sins, and by considering and accepting us as righteous.

God doesn't justify us because of anything done in us or done by us, but only for Christ's sake. Neither does He justify us by declaring that our faith or belief or obedience count as our righteousness. Instead, God justifies us by declaring that Christ's obedience and payment for sin are now ours.

We need to respond by accepting and trusting in Christ and His righteousness by faith, remembering that even our faith is not from ourselves, but is a gift from God.

2. We are justified only by faith, that is, by accepting and trusting in Christ and His righteousness. So it's faith alone, but not a faith that is alone – our faith must go along with all the other graces that save us. It's not a dead faith, but it works itself out in love.

3. By His obedience and death, Christ fully paid the debt of all of us who are justified. He really and fully satisfied God the Father's justice on our behalf.

We are justified only by free grace, not based on anything in us. This is because our Father gave Christ for us freely, because Christ obeyed freely, and because Christ's payment for sin was accepted freely. As God justifies us sinners, He wants to show both His strict justice and His rich grace.

4. It has been God's will since eternity past to justify us who are chosen. When the time was right, Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification. However, we're not justified till later when the Holy Spirit actually applies Christ's work to us.

5. Even though we're justified, God continues to forgive the sins we do. We can't fall back out of justification, but we might fall under God's fatherly disapproval for a time because of our sins. Yet when we humble ourselves, confess our sins, plead for forgiveness, renew our faith, and repent – then the light of God's face will shine on us again.

6. In all these respects, believers in the Old Testament were justified in exactly the same way as we who believe in New Testament times.

## **Chapter 12: Adoption**

1. God guarantees to adopt all of us He has justified, in and for His Son Jesus Christ. Adoption is a gift in which God gives us the freedom and privilege of being His very own children. He gives us His own name. He gives us the Spirit of adoption, and lets us confidently access His throne of grace. He enables us to cry "Abba, Father".

As a father, God also has compassion on us, protects us, provides for us, and disciplines us. But He will never cast us off. Instead, He puts His seal on us for the day of redemption, when we will inherit what He's promised and be heirs of everlasting life.

## **Chapter 13: Sanctification**

1. After God has called us and given us new hearts and spirits, He sanctifies us. He does this in a real and personal way, through Christ's death and resurrection, and by His Word and Holy Spirit living in us.

Sanctification means that God is destroying the rule of sin in our lives. He weakens our sinful lusts more and more, and puts them to death. He makes us more and more alive, and makes us strong in the graces that save us and lead to true holiness – for "without holiness no one will see the Lord".

2. Although God sanctifies each part of our being, in this life we'll never be perfect. There will always be some remnants of rottenness in every part of us. This leads to an ongoing war between two sides that will never make peace: our flesh fighting against the Spirit, and the Spirit fighting against our flesh.

3. In this war, our remaining rottenness might get the better of us for a time. But, by the strength of the Spirit that sanctifies, our born-again nature will win in the end. And so we grow in grace, perfecting our holiness as we fear God.

## **Chapter 14: Saving faith**

1. Faith is a gift God gives His chosen people so they can believe and be saved. It is a grace – a gift we don't deserve. The Holy Spirit works it in our hearts, usually by God's word being preached. Our faith then grows and is strengthened by that same Word, as well as through prayer, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

2. It's by faith that we believe everything written in God's word is true, because in His Word God's authority speaks for itself. We respond differently according to what each passage contains – we obey the commands, tremble when it threatens, and embrace God's promises for this life and for eternal life.

But the main way we act out our faith is by accepting, receiving, and relying on Jesus Christ. It's through Jesus alone that God can call us innocent, make us holy, and give us eternal life – all through the covenant of grace.

3. Faith varies in degrees. Some people have strong faith, some have weak faith. Often our faith is attacked and weakened, but it always wins the fight. Many people's faith grows enough so they can be fully assured about Christ. It's He who gives us faith in the first place as well as makes our faith perfect.

### **Chapter 15: Repentance**

1. Repentance is a grace of the gospel that leads to life. Just like faith, repentance must be preached by every minister of the gospel.

2. By repentance we sense the danger of our sins, and see how filthy and horrible they are. We see how contrary our sins are to God's holy nature and law. By repentance, realizing God promises us mercy in Christ, we grieve for and hate our sins, and we turn from them to God, resolving to walk with Him and keep His commands.

3. We must not rely on our repentance, thinking that it will help pay for our sin or cause God to forgive it. Our sin is only covered by God's free grace in Christ. Still, repentance is very necessary for each of us, and we shouldn't expect forgiveness without it.

4. There is no sin so small that it does not deserve to be condemned to hell. But there's no sin so large that it will condemn those who truly repent.

5. We shouldn't be content with just repenting of our sins generally. We must aim to repent of all our individual sins.

6. Each of us must privately confess our sins to God, and pray for forgiveness. God shows mercy to us when we ask for forgiveness and run from our sins.

When we sin against and dishonor a brother or the Church, we must also willingly confess our sins to the person or people we've offended – in private or publicly. We must be sorry for our sin and tell those involved we've repented, so they will then be reunited with us and receive us in love.

### **Chapter 16: Good works**

1. Works are only "good works" if they're things God commands us to do in His word. They're not works people make up without grounding in Scripture, even if they do so out of blind zeal or with outwardly good intentions.

2. Good works are the fruit of a lively and true faith. We do them to obey God's commands, and by them we show our thankfulness to God. Our good works assure us that we're saved, build up our brothers, make our profession of the gospel beautiful, shut the mouths of our enemies, and glorify God.

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works." These works bear fruit that lead to holiness, so that in the end we may have eternal life.

3. Our ability to do good works definitely doesn't come from ourselves, but only from the Holy Spirit. To enable us to do good works, as well as the grace we've already been given, we need the Spirit to influence us to desire and do what pleases God. But we must not get lazy, as if we don't have to do anything unless the Spirit specially tells us to. No, we need to be diligent to stir up the grace of God that is already in us.

4. Even people who obey God really well in this life are never able to go above and beyond the call of God's duty. In fact, such people still fall short of many things God requires them to do.

5. Even our best works won't earn us forgiveness of sin or eternal life with God – even our best works are completely disproportionate to the glory to come. The distance between us and God is infinite. We can't benefit God by our works or satisfy the debt of our sins.

When we've done all we can, we've simply done our duty and we're unprofitable servants. To the extent that our works are good, they come from the Holy Spirit. And because they're done by us they're unclean, weak, and imperfect, so they can't withstand God's severe judgment.

6. But despite all this, God accepts us who believe through Christ, along with our works. He accepts us not because He sees our good works as pure and perfect, but because He looks at us through His Son. He wants to accept and reward what we do that's sincere, even if it is weak and imperfect.

7. Works done by unsaved people are sinful, even if they're things that God commands and useful to them or to others. This is because they don't come from a heart that has been cleaned by faith. They aren't done with right motives according to God's word, and they're not done with the right goal – to glorify God. So these works don't please God, or make someone suitable to receive God's grace. However, not doing them is even more sinful and displeasing to God.

## **Chapter 17: The saints will persevere**

1. God has accepted us through His beloved Son, has called us effectively, and is making us holy by His Spirit – all of us that He chooses in this way will persevere in grace to the end. We can never fall away from grace completely. We'll be saved eternally.

2. We as saints persevere not because of our own free will, but because God chose our destiny, and He doesn't change His mind. This unchangeableness flows from the Father's unchangeable love, from Jesus' worthiness and intercession for us, and from the Spirit constantly living in us. It flows from God's seed planted in us, and from the nature of the covenant of grace. All of these things make us unmistakably certain that we'll persevere.

3. However, because of the rottenness that remains in us, and because we neglect God's ways of preserving us, we may be tempted by Satan or the world and fall into serious sin. We may even continue in that sin for a time.

God is displeased with us when we do this, and it grieves the Holy Spirit. We may find that our blessings and comforts are taken away, that our hearts are made hard and our consciences seared. Falling into sin like this will hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporary judgment on ourselves.

### **Chapter 18: Being sure we're saved**

1. Hypocrites and others with unsaved hearts might lie to themselves, convincing themselves with false hope or presuming in a worldly way that they have God's favor, or that they've been saved. But this hope of theirs will be destroyed.

However, we – who really believe in the Lord Jesus, who truly love Him, and who try to live for God with a clear conscience – we can be sure and certain that we've been given the gift of grace. We can rejoice as we hope for the glory of God. With a hope like that, we'll never be ashamed.

2. Our certainty is not just a likely belief or an educated guess, neither is it founded on a hope that could fail. No, we have an assurance that will never fail, because it's founded on these things:

- The divine truth of God's promise to save us
- The evidence in our hearts that we have the blessings God promises us
- And the Spirit of adoption that gives proof to our spirits that we're children of God

This Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance. He puts His seal on us for the day of redemption.

3. The certainty we have isn't so intimately tied to our faith that it's always immediate – even believers might wait a long time and struggle on a difficult road before they're assured like this. But the Spirit enables us to know what God freely gives, so we can have this certainty without any "special revelation", just using the ordinary resources God gives us.

It's the duty of all of us to diligently "make our calling and election sure". By doing so, our hearts will grow – we'll have more peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, give more love and thanks to God, and be stronger and more cheerful as we obey His commands. These things are the outworking of our certainty, a certainty that should never make us careless.

4. Even believers who are sure they're saved might have their certainty shaken up. At times they might be less sure or temporarily lose this certainty. This might happen for a number of reasons:

- If they're careless about keeping up their certainty
- If they fall into a specific sin which wounds their conscience and grieves the Holy Spirit
- If they're tempted suddenly or intensely
- Or if God removes the light of His face so that even someone who fears Him walks in darkness

However, as believers, we'll always have things that help us recover from doubt: God's life in us, our life of faith, the love of Christ and His people, a sincere heart, and our conscience telling us to do

our duty. The Holy Spirit uses these things to keep us away from complete despair, and in the end, to make us sure once again.

### **Chapter 19: The law of God**

1. God gave Adam a “covenant of works”, a law that he and all his descendants had to personally obey. They were required to obey it forever – completely and exactly. Adam was promised life if he obeyed it, but threatened with death if he disobeyed. God gave Him the power and ability to keep this law.

2. After Adam’s fall, this law was still a perfect rule of righteousness. As such, it was given by God on Mount Sinai as the ten commandments, written on two slabs of stone. The first four commandments contain our duty toward God, and the other six contain our duty to mankind.

3. This law is usually called the “moral law”, and along with it, God gave the people of Israel ceremonial laws. The Israelites were an “under-age church”, and these laws contained symbols that pointed to something greater.

The ceremonial laws were partly for worship, pointing to Christ – His graces, actions, suffering, and benefits. And partly they simply taught the people their moral duties. In the New Testament, all these ceremonial laws have been done away with.

4. God also gave Israel as a nation various judicial laws. These were done away with when the nation-state came to an end, and people today don’t have to follow them, except in terms of the general justice they contain.

5. Everyone must obey the moral law forever, both people God has justified and people He hasn’t. All of us must obey it not just because of its content, but also because of who gave it to us – God the creator. In the gospel, Christ does not do away with the moral law, in fact, He makes our duty to obey it even stronger.

6. We who are believers are not under the law in the sense that we’re justified or condemned by it. We’re no longer under the “covenant of works”.

However, the law is very valuable for us (and for others) as a rule of life that informs us of God’s will. It tells us our duty. It guides us, and requires us to live by it. It shows us the sinful pollution in our hearts and lives.

When we examine ourselves in light of the law, we’re convicted of sin. We see the need to be humble. The need to hate our sin. We get to see more clearly our need for Christ, how His obedience was perfect.

To us who are born again, the law restrains our rottenness. The law says we must not sin, and when it threatens it shows us what our sins really deserve. Even though we’re free from the curse of the law, it reminds us what suffering we should expect when we sin, even in this life.

Similarly, God shows us how He approves of obedience in the promises of the law. He shows us how we can expect blessings when we obey it (though they aren’t our right as they were with the covenant



of works). The fact that someone does good (which the law encourages) instead of evil (which the law discourages) does not mean the person is under law instead of grace.

7. The fact that the law is useful like this isn't contrary to the grace of the gospel. No, it fits very nicely with the gospel. The spirit of Christ humbles our will to obey God's will freely and cheerfully. And God's will is revealed in the requirements of the law.

## **Chapter 20: Christian freedom**

1. With the gospel, Christ bought believers their freedom. He freed us from sin's guilt, from God's condemning anger, from the curse of the moral law. He freed us from the evils of this world, from being slaves of Satan, from being ruled by sin. He freed us from the sting of death, from the victory of the grave, and from being forever damned.

This freedom also means we have free access to God. It means we can obey Him freely – not out of slave-like fear, but with a childlike love and a willing mind.

Believers in the time of the law had these freedoms too. But now in New Testament times, our Christian freedom is even greater – we're also free from the ceremonial laws that the Jewish nation had to keep. We're also able to be bolder than they were when we speak before God's throne. And we can communicate more freely with the Holy Spirit.

2. God alone is the ruler of our conscience. Our conscience is free from any man-made teachings and commands that contradict His Word. And in matters related to faith or worship, our conscience is free from whatever adds to His Word.

If we believe these man-made teachings or obey man-made commands out of conscience, we don't really have true freedom of conscience. If we have a blind faith or if we obey without discernment, we destroy our free conscience and our reason.

3. If we keep sinning or holding onto lust and call that "Christian freedom", we're actually undermining the purpose of our freedom. The real purpose of our freedom as Christians is so we can serve God without fear, because we've been rescued from our enemies. We should be holy and righteous as we serve Him, as long as we live.

4. God does not intend the authorities He's put in place to oppose the freedom Christ has bought for us. In fact, the authorities and Christian freedom should mutually support each other. If people disobey lawful authorities – church or state – in the name of Christian freedom, they're really disobeying God.

If people spread opinions or practice things that go against what nature teaches or against the general principles of Christianity, the church has every right to hold them accountable and put them under discipline. This is true whether it's about faith, worship, or how we should live. Such things can be harmful in themselves, or harmful in how they're spread, but either way, if they disturb the peace and order Christ has given His church, the church needs to take action.

## **Chapter 21: Worship and the Sabbath**

1. It's clear from nature that God exists, that He's Lord, and that He controls everything. We can see He's good and He does good to all, and therefore we should fear and love Him. We should pray to Him, praise Him, trust Him, and serve Him – with all our heart, soul, and strength.

But it's only in God's word that He tells us what kind of worship is acceptable. We must not worship Him as we see fit, or as our imaginations lead us. And we certainly shouldn't worship Him as Satan suggests, in any of His visible forms. In fact, we must not worship God in any way that's not written down in Scripture.

2. We must give our worship to God, and to Him alone: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We're not to worship angels, saints, or any other created beings. And, ever since the Fall, we need a mediator, and the only mediator we're to call on is Christ.

3. Thankful prayer is one of the special parts of worship, and God requires everyone to pray. If we want our prayers to be accepted, we must pray in Jesus' name, by the help of the Holy Spirit, and in line with God's will. We need to understand what we're praying, and we should be reverent, humble, and passionate. We need to pray in faith, in love, and with perseverance. If we're praying out loud, we should pray in a known language.

4. We should only pray for what's lawful. We can pray for all sorts of people who are living, but we should not pray for the dead, or for people who've sinned the "sin that leads to death".

5. Our worship of God includes many different parts:

- Reading the Scriptures reverently
- Sound preaching
- Listening to the Word in obedience, understanding, and faith
- Singing psalms with grace in our hearts
- Administering and receiving the sacraments that have been put in place by Christ

Besides that, we can make religious vows, engage in fasting, and give thanks on special occasions and at appropriate times. All of these things should be done in a holy and reverent way.

6. In the time of the gospel, prayer, or any other part of our worship, is not more acceptable if it's done at a certain place or if we face a certain direction. No, God should be worshipped everywhere, in spirit and in truth. For example, in family devotions every day, or in private personal worship. And in a more formal way when we worship with our congregations, which we should not neglect either carelessly or by choosing to stay home – God's word and God's providence call us to go.

7. It's clear from nature that we should set aside a good amount of time to worship God. But in His Word, He specifically commands everyone in all times to treat one day in seven as a Sabbath, a holy day set aside for Him. From the beginning of the world till the resurrection of Christ this was the last day of the week. But after the resurrection it was changed to the first day of the week, a day that Scripture calls the "Lord's Day". This Christian Sabbath should be continued till the end of the world.

8. The Sabbath day should be kept holy for the Lord. We should prepare our hearts for it, and get our everyday affairs ready, so that on the day we can actually rest in a holy way. We should rest the whole day, from actions, words, and thoughts about our everyday work and leisure. We should spend all our time in the public and private worship of God, as well as doing duties that are necessary or doing works of mercy.

## **Chapter 22: Oaths and vows**

1. A valid oath is part of worship – it's when, on the right occasion, a person solemnly swears with God as a witness. When we take an oath, we're asking God to judge us for what we say or promise, and to judge whether what we swear is true or false.

2. God's name is only thing we should swear by, and when we do, we need to treat His name with holy fear and reverence. It's horribly sinful to take an oath in God's great name lightly or carelessly. To swear by anything other than God's name is also sinful and offensive.

However, in very important matters, God's word shows that making an oath is valid, both in the Old Testament and the New. When legitimate authorities require us to take this kind of oath for important matters, we should go ahead and take the oath.

3. Whenever we take an oath we should carefully consider that it's a weighty matter, and only say things we're completely sure are true. When we take an oath, we should only ever swear to do things that are good and just (and we must believe they're good and just). Also, we must only swear to do things we've truly decided and are able to do.

4. When we take an oath, we should mean the words we say in their plain and ordinary sense. We must not be ambiguous or unclear to try to hedge our bets. We must not have any reservations about what we're saying.

An oath can't force us to sin. But in anything that's not sinful, it binds us to do it, even if it means we suffer for it. We must not break an oath even if we've made it to heretics or unbelievers.

5. A vow is similar to an oath, and should be made with the same reverent care, and carried out with equal faithfulness.

6. A vow should only be made to God, not to any created being. For God to accept a vow, we should make it voluntarily, out of faith, and convinced it's our duty. We should make a vow either because we're thankful for mercy or because we want to obtain what we're lacking.

By taking a vow we're binding ourselves more rigidly to our duties, or to other things which will help us carry out these duties.

7. No one should vow to do anything forbidden by God's word, or anything that would hinder us doing what His word commands. We should not vow to do something that's beyond our ability, or beyond the ability God has promised us.

In light of that, Roman Catholic monks or priests vowing to always be celibate, lead a life of poverty, and constantly obey – these aren't steps to a more perfect life. Quite the opposite: they're superstitious and sinful traps that Christians shouldn't get stuck in.

### **Chapter 23: Civil authorities**

1. God is the ultimate Lord and King over the whole world. However, He puts in place civil authorities under Him, to govern the people for His glory and for the public good. For this reason God gives these authorities the “power of the sword” to defend and encourage people who do good, and to punish people who do evil.

2. It's legitimate for Christians to become civil authorities when they're called to that work. As they do their job, they should use the healthy laws of each country to support religion, justice, and peace. In light of that, it's legitimate, and occasionally necessary, for Christians to go to war when the cause is just.

3. Civil authorities must not take over church affairs – either administering God's Word and sacraments, or managing the keys of His kingdom. In fact, they should not interfere in faith issues at all.

However, civil authorities should be like caring fathers – they should protect the Church of the Lord, remembering He's the Lord of us all. They should never show preference to one denomination of Christians over another, so that all church authorities can do their work fully and freely, without fear of violence or danger.

Jesus put in place church government and church discipline, and no law of any country should interfere with that, or prevent it from taking place properly. This is true whatever Christian denomination is involved, and whatever their beliefs.

Civil authorities must protect their citizens and uphold their citizens' reputations. They should do this in such an effective way that no-one suffers violence, abuse or injury, whether it's in the name of religion or of atheism. The civil authorities must also ensure that church worship and religious gatherings can be held without anyone interfering with it or disturbing it.

4. We who are citizens must pray for the civil authorities and honor them. To keep a clear conscience, we must pay our taxes, obey all legitimate laws, and respect their authority. Unbelievers and people of different religions must still respect and obey legitimate authorities. Church leaders are no different – they too must obey the authorities.

The Pope does not have power over the sphere of the civil authorities, or over any of their citizens. He certainly doesn't have the power to take away their authority, or to take their lives, even if he thinks they're heretics or for any other reason.

### **Chapter 24: Marriage and divorce**

1. Marriage must be between one man and one woman. It's against God's law for a man to have more than one wife, or for a woman to have more than one husband. (That is, more than one at the same time – death and divorce are discussed below.)

2. God gave us marriage for a number of reasons:

- To help both husband and wife, and to help them help each other
- To increase the population with legitimate children
- To provide the Church with godly young men and women
- And to prevent sexual immorality

3. All sorts of different people are allowed to get married, as long as they're able to give their informed consent – in other words, to be able to think about it and then say they want to.

But Christians must only marry others who love the Lord. So we who say we're true Christians should not marry unbelievers, Roman Catholics, or other people who put idols above God. Neither should we marry people who lead terrible lives or who hold to false teachings that are "salvation issues".

4. We must not marry people who are more closely-related to us than the Bible allows. That would be incest, and would not be right even if the people involved gave their consent.

5. If an engaged person commits adultery or sleeps around when they're engaged, that's enough reason for the innocent person to break off the engagement. And if a husband or wife commits adultery after marriage, it's enough reason for the innocent person to get a divorce. If the divorce goes through, the innocent person can marry someone else, just as if the guilty person had died.

6. People are sinful, and will try to come up with arguments that justify breaking apart marriages that God has joined together. However, divorce is only an option if the man or woman has committed adultery, or has stubbornly deserted the marriage so it can't be remedied by the Church or civil authorities. In that case, the divorce proceedings must be public and orderly, and the man and woman must not be left to their own will or judgment in the matter.

## **Chapter 25: The church**

1. The "invisible church" is made up of all the people God has chosen, world-wide. They have been (or will be) gathered into one group under Christ, who's the head of the church. The church is His body, His bride. She completes Him, and He completes her and everything else.

2. The "visible church", on the other hand, is made up of all of us who say we're Christians, along with our children. In this time of the gospel it's also world-wide, unlike in the time of the law, when it was just the nation of Israel. The visible church is the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's the house of God, His family. Those outside this visible church are ordinarily not saved.

3. Christ has given the visible church God's ministry, prophecies, and commands. He gives these to gather His people together and make them perfect – both in this life, and to the end of the world. He also gives them in a way that's effective, just like He promised, by being near with His Spirit.

4. The world-wide church has sometimes been more visible, sometimes less. Individual churches and their members are more pure or less pure according to how they teach and believe the gospel. They're also pure to the extent they follow God's commands and worship Him publically in a pure way.

5. Even the purest church on earth can be mixed up and make mistakes. Some churches even deteriorate to the point where they're no longer churches of Christ, but disciples of the Devil. Despite that, there will always be a church on earth that worships God in the way He wants.

6. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the only head of the church – there's no one else. The Roman Catholic pope is not the head of the church in any sense.

### **Chapter 26: The communion of saints**

1. As saints who are united to Jesus Christ our head, we have fellowship with Him in His graces, His suffering, death, resurrection, and glory. We are united to Him by His Spirit and by faith.

We are also united in love to each other. We intimately share each other's gifts and blessings. And we need to do our duties for each other – both in public and in private – in a way that's good for each person's body and soul.

2. If we say we're saints, we must support the "communion of saints" – a holy fellowship and community that worships God. We in this community need to serve each other spiritually and build each other up. As people have needs and as we have the ability, we must also support each other's physical needs.

As God gives us opportunities, we need to share this communion with everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus, no matter where they live.

3. The communion that we have with Christ does not mean we share part of His divine nature or Godhead, or that we're equal to Him in any way. To believe that would be irreverent and blasphemous. Nor does our communion with each other as saints remove the fact that the things we own are private property.

### **Chapter 27: The sacraments**

1. Sacraments are holy signs that show us and seal to us Christ and His benefits. God directly put the sacraments in place as part of the covenant of grace, and they confirm the relationship we have with Christ.

As we share in the sacraments, we show one way the church is different from the world. We must use them to serve God in Christ, as His Word says.

2. In each sacrament there's a spiritual relationship between the sign itself and what it stands for. This is why words and actions used to describe the sign can also describe what it stands for.

3. When the sacraments are properly used, the grace they give us does not come from power in the sacraments themselves. Nor are they effective only when the person giving them has pious intentions.

No, the grace the sacraments give us depends on the work of the Holy Spirit and on the passages of Scripture that speak about them. These passages authorize us to use them, and also promise us many benefits as we use them respectfully.

4. There are only two sacraments put in place by Christ our Lord in the gospel: baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Not just anyone should administer them, but only ministers of God's Word who've been lawfully ordained.

5. In terms of the spiritual things they show and stand for, the sacraments in the Old Testament are fundamentally the same as the sacraments in the New Testament.

## **Chapter 28: Baptism**

1. Baptism is a sacrament that Jesus put in place in the New Testament. It initiates the person being baptized into the visible church. Our baptism symbolizes and seals to us that:

- We have Jesus' free gift of grace
- We're grafted onto Christ, the tree of life
- We're born again
- Our sins are forgiven
- Through Jesus, we've surrendered to God to walk a new path

As Jesus told us, baptism should be practiced in His church till the end of the world.

2. A baptism should be done with ordinary water. Using the water, the person should be baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Baptism should only be administered by a lawfully ordained minister.

3. Baptism doesn't have to be done by submerging the person in water. It's equally valid to pour or to sprinkle water on the person.

4. Not only adults who profess their faith in Christ should be baptized – we should also baptize babies, if they have at least one Christian parent.

5. It's a serious sin to condemn baptism or to neglect it. However, baptism is not tied so tightly to God's grace and salvation that we can't be saved without it. In a similar way, not everyone who's baptized is truly born again.

6. Baptism is effective not just at the moment in time it was done. When we use baptism properly, the Holy Spirit offers us and truly gives us His grace, whether we're adults or babies. He gives His grace to whoever it belongs to by God's will, and in God's timing.

7. A person should only ever be baptized once.

## **Chapter 29: The Lord's Supper**

1. Our Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, put in place the sacrament of "his body and blood", which we call the Lord's Supper. This supper is a deeply significant meal we use to remember the sacrifice Jesus made by dying for us. The Supper also:

- Reminds us of our spiritual feeding and growth in Christ
- Helps us do the duties we owe to God
- Shows our close relationship with Jesus and with our fellow believers (who are part of His body)
- Seals all of these benefits to us who believe

The church should use the Lord's Supper to remember Jesus' death, till the end of the world.

2. In the Lord's Supper, Christ is not offered up to God the Father – in fact, it's not a sacrifice at all, and it doesn't forgive the sins of either the living or the dead. No, it's a ceremony that commemorates the once-and-for-all sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross. It's also a spiritual offering of ultimate praise that we bring to God.

The Roman Catholic sacrifice of the mass (as they call it) is a huge insult to Christ's one and only sacrifice. His sacrifice is the only thing that can pay for the sins of God's people.

3. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus has appointed the minister to:

- Remind us what it means, using the words Jesus used to put the sacrament in place
- Pray over the bread and wine, which blesses it and sets it apart from ordinary things, for holy use
- Take and break the bread, take the cup, and give both to us (but not to those who are absent at the time)
- Join in the meal himself

4. There are several things that go against the nature of the Lord's Supper:

- Holding private "Lord's Supper" ceremonies
- Receiving the Lord's Supper alone (from a priest or anyone else)
- Not giving the cup to the people of the congregation
- Worshipping the bread or the wine
- Lifting the bread or wine up high or carrying it around so people idolize it
- Keeping the bread or wine for a supposedly religious purpose

All of these go against the nature of the Supper as Christ put it in place.

5. The bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are set apart as holy, and are so closely related to the crucified Christ that they are sometimes called by the names of what they represent, for example, "the body and blood of Christ". They truly are "the body and blood of Christ", but only in terms of the sacrament. Physically they remain bread and wine, just like they were before.

6. The teaching of "transubstantiation" – which says that the bread and wine physically change into Christ's body and blood when the priest consecrates them – is offensive both to the Bible and to our common sense and reason. It undermines the meaning of the Lord's Supper. It has been and still is the cause of superstition and even idolatry.



7. We who humbly receive the bread and wine of the Supper also receive the crucified Christ, and feed on all the benefits His death brings. We're fed spiritually and inwardly by faith. It's not a physical feeding, but it really is true food.

The body and blood of Christ are not physically present "in, with, or under" the bread and wine. However, His body and blood really are present to our spiritual senses in faith, just like the bread and wine are present to our physical senses.

8. When ignorant and evil people receive the bread and wine physically, they don't receive what it stands for spiritually. Because they're unworthy to come, they're guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, which will lead to their condemnation.

This means that those who are ignorant and ungodly should not be allowed to come to the Lord's Supper or share in this holy mystery. They're not fit to enjoy fellowship with Christ and are not worthy to come to His table. It's a terrible sin against Christ for people to come while they remain ignorant and ungodly.

### **Chapter 30: Church government and discipline**

1. King Jesus, who's head of His church, has put in place church officers to govern the church. Church government should be separate from the civil government.

2. Jesus gives the church officers the "keys of the kingdom of heaven". With these keys, the church officers have the authority to:

- Forgive sins and hold back forgiveness
- Shut the kingdom against those who don't repent – this is done using the Word or putting them under church discipline
- Open the kingdom to those who do repent, by gospel ministry or lifting the church discipline as needed

3. Church discipline is necessary for several reasons, namely to:

- Bring sinning Christians back
- Deter others from similar sins
- Remove sinful yeast which might infect the whole loaf
- Honor Christ's name and the work of the gospel
- Prevent God's anger, which He has every right to bring on the church if they break His covenant and allow it to be dragged through the dirt by infamous and stubborn sinners

4. To exercise church discipline, the church officers should first warn the person, then prevent them from coming to the Lord's Supper, and finally excommunicate them – removing them as members of the church. This should be done carefully, in line with the nature of their sin and guilt.

### **Chapter 31: Church councils**

1. Church leaders should organize meetings between the churches to help govern and build up the wider church. These meetings are often called "synods" or "councils".

The elders and other church leaders have been given authority to organize these councils – but it’s authority given by Christ to build up, not to destroy. The leaders of various churches should meet together in this way as often as necessary for the good of the church.

2. Church councils should be used to help to:

- Decide what’s right on controversial issues
- Make rules and directions for worshipping God in an orderly way
- Handle complaints about bad leadership in the church, and determine their outcome

Churches and individuals need to respect and submit to these decisions, if they’re consistent with God’s Word – not only because the decisions agree with the Word, but also because the authority of church councils is put in place by God in His Word.

3. All church councils since the time of the apostles can make mistakes, and many have made mistakes. So their decisions are not to be made into law for our faith or our practice, but they should be used to help our faith and practice.

4. Church councils should only deal with church matters. They should never meddle in the affairs of the civil government, except with respectful petitions for extraordinary issues, or to satisfy people’s consciences if the government requires the church to give them advice.

### **Chapter 32: Afterlife and resurrection**

1. After death, our bodies decay and return to the dust. But our souls live forever. They don’t die or sleep, but return to God who gave them to us.

The souls of righteous people are made perfectly holy, and are taken up into the highest heavens, where they see the shining light of God’s face. There they wait till their bodies are made fully new. But the souls of wicked people are thrown into hell, where they’re tormented in complete darkness, waiting for judgment day.

According to the Bible, souls that are separated from their bodies can only go to one of two places – heaven or hell.

2. On the last day, people who are still alive will not die, but be changed. People who have died will be resurrected with the same bodies (though with different qualities), and their bodies will again be joined to their souls, forever.

3. The bodies of wicked people will be raised by Christ for dishonor. But the bodies of righteous people will be raised by the Holy Spirit for honor, and will be made like Christ’s glorified body.

### **Chapter 33: Judgment day**

1. God has determined a day when He’ll judge the whole world. It will be a righteous judgment by Jesus Christ, who’s been given this power by God the Father.

On that day, not just fallen angels will be judged, but also all of us who have ever lived on earth. We'll stand in front of the seat of Christ the judge, and we'll have to give an account of our thoughts, words, and actions. Jesus will judge us according to what we've done, whether it's good or evil.

2. The reason God put this day in place is to show His glory and His mercy by saving those He's chosen, and also to show His justice by condemning the wicked and disobedient people He's rejected.

After the judgment, righteous people will be given life that lasts forever, and will receive the full, refreshing joy that comes from God's presence. But the wicked, who don't know God and don't obey the gospel of Jesus, will be thrown into torment that lasts forever. They'll be punished with the everlasting destruction that comes from being wicked in God's glorious presence.

3. Christ wants us to be certain that there will be a day of judgment, both to deter all people from sin and to comfort godly people in hard times. However, He doesn't tell us when that day will be – He wants us not to be sure of ourselves, but to always be watchful. We don't know what day or hour the Lord will come back, but we should always be prepared to say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Amen."

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***American Revisions to the Westminster Confession of Faith as Adopted (for example) by the OPC (Orthodox Presbyterian Church)***

This comparison shows about 145 words that were changed from the original Westminster Confession to the so called American Revision. The number of words are few, but the doctrinal changes are significant. Study the changes and make up your own mind. Here are a few thoughts to get you started. The Establishment Principle is done away with; the identity of Antichrist is removed (this is an important change in teaching about eschatology); equal protection under the law is taught so the even heretical groups are afforded the same rights as the true Reformed Church; in marriage the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden by the Word are diminished

## Original Wording

### Chapter XX Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience

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

### Chapter XXII Of Lawful Oaths and Vows

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

## American Revision

### Chapter 20 Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience

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

### Chapter 22 Of Lawful Oaths and Vows

3. Whosoever taketh an oath ought duly to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act; and therein to avouch nothing but what he is fully persuaded is the truth. Neither may any man bind himself by oath to anything but what is good and just, and what he believeth so to be, and what he is able and resolved to perform.

### **Chapter XXIII Of the Civil Magistrate**

III. The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed; and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.

### **Chapter XXIV Of Marriage and Divorce**

IV. Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden by the Word. Nor can such incestuous marriages ever be made lawful by any law of man or consent of parties, so as those persons may live together as man and wife. *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.*

### **Chapter XXV Of the Church**

VI. There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof: *but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself, in the Church,*

### **Chapter 23 Of the Civil Magistrate**

3. (Completely rewritten) *Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; or, in the least, interfere in matters of faith. Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger. And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, either upon pretense of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever: and to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical.*

### **Chapter 24 Of Marriage and Divorce**

4. Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden by the Word. Nor can such incestuous marriages ever be made lawful by any law of man or consent of parties, so as those persons may live together as man and wife.

### **Chapter 25 Of the Church**

6. There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof.

*against Christ and all that is called God.*

**Chapter XXXI Of Synods and Councils**

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

II. As magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers, and other fit persons, to consult and advise with, about matters of religion; so, if magistrates be open enemies to the Church, the ministers of Christ of themselves, by virtue of their office, or they, with other fit persons, upon delegation from their Churches, may meet together in such assemblies.

*(Original paragraph II is omitted; paragraphs*

**Chapter 31 Of Synods and Councils**

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

*(III-V are renumbered 2-4.)*