

Understanding Church Membership



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Table of Contents

Lesson 1	Introducing Our Church	p. 4
Lesson 2	God and Scripture	p. 10
Lesson 3	Our Sinfulness and God's Sovereign Mercy	p. 17
Lesson 4	Justification by Faith Alone	p. 23
Lesson 5	Sanctification	p. 29
Lesson 6	The Church's Worship and Work	p. 38
Lesson 7	Church Government and Discipline	p. 48

Supplemental Articles:

"Sabbath-Keeping in a Post-Christian Culture"

"The Quest for The Next Big Thing"

"Baptism and Discipleship"

"A Brief Comparison of Charismatic and Reformed Views of Church Music"

"The Vocations of Christians and the Ministry of the Church"

"Jesus Christ is a king, and hath a kingdom and government in his Church distinct from the kingdoms of this world, and from the civil government... This kingly office of Jesus Christ (as well as his prophetic and priestly) is administered and exercised, not only inwardly and invisibly, by the working of the Holy Spirit in the souls of particular persons, but outwardly also, and visibly in the church, as a visible, political, ministerial body, in which he hath appointed his own proper officers, ambassadors, courts, laws, ordinances, censures, and all these administrations, to be in his own name, as the only King and Head of the Church."

~ George Gillespie, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* - 1646

Lesson 1: Introducing Our Church

“There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call — one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (**Ephesians 4:4–6**)

“The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.

(Westminster Confession of Faith 20.1)

“The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.” (*Westminster Confession of Faith 20.2*)

I. Introduction

A. Christianity is not just about having a personal relationship with Christ but is also a lifelong commitment attested by a public profession of faith

1. Because it is the duty of every professing Christian to gather for worship with fellow believers on a regular basis and to be accountable to the leaders of some local church where the Bible is faithfully taught and upheld (see Acts 14:23; 20:28; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17), the credibility of a person’s profession of faith is called into question when that person is unwilling to unite to Christ’s church

2. A profession of faith in Christ needs to be public (1 Tim. 6:12), examined by church leaders (Jn. 20:23), and made with sufficient knowledge (Rom. 10:14)

B. Those who make a public profession of faith in our church are required to assent to the following declarations and promises, by which they enter into a solemn covenant with God and His Church:

1. *Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?*
 2. *Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?*
 3. *Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?*
 4. *Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?*
 5. *Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?*
- C. The purpose of this class is to provide basic instruction about the meaning of these membership vows
- D. We ask prospective members to read through the Westminster Shorter Catechism (provided) and we strongly encourage you to read the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Larger Catechism as well (available in our Book Center or online at www.pcaac.org/resources)
- E. Some helpful books on the matters covered in these lessons include:
- *Presbytopia: What It Means to Be Presbyterian*, Ken Golden
 - *Sacred Bond: Covenant Theology Explored*, Michael Brown and Zach Keele
 - *The Creedal Imperative*, Carl Trueman
 - *Jesus Loves the Little Children: Why We Baptize Children*, Daniel Hyde
 - *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, John Murray
 - *Chosen by God*, R.C. Sproul
 - *The Glorious Body of Christ*, R.B. Kuiper
 - *Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World*, Michael Horton
 - *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, David VanDrunen
 - *How Jesus Runs the Church*, Guy Prentiss Waters
 - *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism*, D.G. Hart and John Muether

II. We Are a Christian Church

- A. We stand in continuity with the historic Christian faith that is set forth in the New Testament as the fruition and fulfillment of what was promised in the Old Testament
- B. How Christianity differs from other religions
 - 1. Christianity is rooted in historical events, especially Jesus Christ's birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and return; other religions are rooted in the subjective experiences and claims of their founders
 - 2. Christianity is the announcement of God's merciful descent to us in his Son, who is the only way to God; other religions are about man's attempts to ascend up to God by attaining secret knowledge, living up to some standard of good, or having certain kinds of experiences
- C. We affirm the early Christian creeds
 - 1. Creeds and confessions of faith are necessary in order for the church to be sound in doctrine
 - 2. The early creeds show us that the basic elements of Christian orthodoxy were agreed upon very early on in church history
 - 3. The Apostles' Creed (originated in third century A.D.)
 - a) Summarizes the apostolic teaching
 - b) Follows a Trinitarian structure
 - c) In the creed, the term "catholic" does not mean "Roman Catholic" but "universal"
 - d) The phrase "He descended into hell" is rightly taken as a symbolic way of describing Jesus's physical death (in the original Greek, the word is "hades", which sometimes refers to the state of death), and as a way of describing the spiritual

suffering that Jesus endured on the cross

4. The Nicene Creed (written at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 and expanded at the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381)
 - a) Response to the Arian heresy (said that Jesus is not fully God; similar to Jehovah's Witnesses)
 - b) Follows a Trinitarian structure
 - c) Affirms that Jesus is of the same substance as God; he is fully God and fully man
 - d) Affirms full deity of Holy Spirit

III. We Are a Protestant Church

- A. The Protestant Reformation was not about a new formulation of the Christian faith but about a recovery of the biblical gospel, which had been overlaid with manmade traditions over the centuries
- B. Two principle causes of the Protestant Reformation
 1. *Sola Fide* — Justification (being accepted as righteous by God) is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone; against the Roman Catholic teaching that justification is by faith plus works
 2. *Sola Scriptura* — Scripture alone is the infallible authority for the church's beliefs and practices; against the Roman Catholic teaching that church tradition is an infallible source of authority and that the church's magisterium is the infallible interpreter of Scripture and tradition

IV. We Are a Confessionally Reformed Church

- A. We have an officially adopted confession of faith whose substance has been derived from the church's reflection upon biblical truth

- B. While the Bible is the church's true constitution, it needs to be interpreted and applied by church courts through the use of confessional documents
- C. Presbyterian churches use the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as our confessional standard
 - 1. Composed during the brief period of Puritan ascendancy in 17th century England (the Puritans were so-named because they sought to further purify the Church of England)
 - 2. The Westminster Confession of Faith consists of thirty-three chapters that cover the major topics of Christian doctrine
 - 3. The Westminster Shorter Catechism has a two-part structure, summarizing the Scriptures under the categories of what we are to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of us (see questions 1-3)
 - 4. The Westminster Larger Catechism follows the same basic structure as the Shorter Catechism, but provides a more extensive treatment of many topics, especially the moral law and the doctrine of the church
- D. Other Reformed churches use the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort)

V. We Are a Presbyterian Church

- A. The name "Presbyterian" comes from the Greek word for the office of elder, the office that the Bible establishes for the church's governance.
 - 1. Historically, Presbyterian churches have identified themselves by this name in order to distinguish themselves from churches that have either hierarchical or congregational forms of government.
 - 2. There is no office above that of elder in our church, but we are in a relationship of mutual accountability and submission with the other churches in our Presbytery (which covers NH, ME, and VT) and denomination (the Presbyterian Church in America / PCA).

B. Presbyterian denominations in America

1. At the time of the Civil War, the northern and southern Presbyterian churches divided and continued as separate denominations until 1983, when they reunited to form a unified mainline denomination known as the PCUSA
2. Our denomination is the PCA, which formed in 1973 in a split with the southern mainline Presbyterian denomination over the influence of theological liberalism
3. The northern mainline church underwent a similar split in 1936 when the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) formed
4. The PCA and OPC are committed to upholding the Reformed faith as it is confessed in the Westminster Standards; we enjoy fraternal relations with each other and with other confessionally Reformed denominations through membership in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)
5. The PCUSA remains the largest Presbyterian denomination, but it is rapidly losing congregations due to the denomination's increasingly liberal views
6. In recent decades, congregations frustrated by the PCUSA's liberalism have left to form the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) and a group called "Eco: a Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians"; these denominations differ from the PCA and OPC in that they are open to the ordination of women and are more broadly evangelical in their theology rather than confessionally Reformed

Lesson 2: God and Scripture¹

“What is God? God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.” (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q4)

“What is the Word of God? The holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience.” (Westminster Larger Catechism Q3)

I. The Doctrine of God

A. The one true God

1. Monotheism (only one true God) sets biblical religion apart from animism (conflating god with nature), polytheism (worshipping multiple gods), and henotheism (worshipping one god while believing in multiple gods); Genesis 1-2 says that Israel’s God is the Maker of heaven and earth; expressed in the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-5)
2. The living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9): not an impersonal force or an idea imagined by man; idolatry involves the creation of false gods or trying to make the true God fit into our ideas of who he should be

B. God’s attributes

1. Infinite in being: omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-10) ; God is a spirit (immaterial in his being); invisible (can only be seen if he manifests himself to us); eternal (not temporal); self-existence / aseity (God has no cause)
2. Infinite in perfection: perfect in every respect; perfect in holiness, wisdom, and power; nothing is lacking in God; nothing can resist his power; most loving, gracious, merciful, patient, and just

¹ The beliefs discussed in this lesson are inherent in our membership vows, even though they are not explicitly stated in them.

3. Without passions (impassible): no mood swings; not subject to human passions
4. Without parts (simplicity): God's attributes cannot be divided from each other; he always acts in accordance with all his attributes
5. Immutable: cannot change; Jesus did not give up any of his divine attributes at his incarnation; against "Open Theism," which says that God makes adjustments in response to our decisions
6. Incomprehensible (Ps. 139:6): no one can completely comprehend who God is; we can only know God to the extent that he reveals himself to us (see Deut. 29:29; Prov. 30:4); our knowledge of God is finite and limited
7. Sovereign: works all things according to counsel of his will (Isa. 40:13; Eph. 1:11); his ultimate purpose is his glory

C. God's perfections

1. The qualities of life, glory, goodness, and blessedness (joy and fulfillment) are intrinsic to God's nature; God is the source of all these things; God is the standard for all these things
2. God is self-sufficient; he does not need anything from any of his creatures (Acts 17:24-25); nothing can add to God's glory or increase it
3. God is the source of all being (Acts 17:28); all things exist for his sake (1 Cor. 8:6)
4. God is all-knowing (omniscient); the future is not "open" to God
5. All of God's purposes and works are perfectly holy
6. God is owed the worship and obedience of all his creatures

D. God's works

1. Creation of the world out of nothing
2. Providential governance over world and all that takes place in it

E. The Trinity

1. God has eternally existed as one God in three distinct persons; one in *essence* and three in *person*
2. The three persons of the Trinity are not offices, parts, or modes of God; they are not merely ways in which God manifests himself; they are not three separate Gods; each person of the Godhead is distinct from the other persons and is fully God
3. Love is relational; God is love because he exists in eternal relationship with the distinct persons in the Godhead
4. While the Son is sent by the Father, and the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son, this does not mean that the Son and Spirit are inferior, subordinate, or in submission to the Father
5. While Jesus submits to the Father in the outworking of the plan of salvation, this submission is not inherent in his nature but is only pertaining to the function that he performs in his office as mediator (against the notion of the eternal subordination of the Son)
6. In all that God does, the Father is the source, the Son is the mediator, and the Spirit is the perfecting agent²

II. The Word of God

A. The canon of Scripture

1. Canon = standard or rule; a term used to describe the books that are held to bear God's authority as holy Scripture

² See Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 301. Cf. Gen. 1:1-3; Jn. 1:1-5; Rom. 5:1-5; Eph. 1:3-14; 2:18; Titus 3:4-7

2. The church did not declare the books of the Bible to be canonical; rather, it received them as Scripture because they are self-attesting (see Jn. 10:47; WCF 1.4)
3. The Scriptures brought the church into being, not vice versa (see Eph. 2:19-20; 1 Pet. 1:23-25)
4. The Apocryphal books (Jewish texts written in between the time of the OT and NT) should not be accepted as a part of the Christian canon because the Israelites never adopted them into their canon
5. The Gnostic writings (such as the Gospels of Thomas and Philip), made popular by Dan Brown's book *The DaVinci Code*, were never included in the NT because they were written much later than the NT books and because they teach a different religion than the books of the OT and NT

B. *Sola Scriptura*

1. The Bible is the only infallible authority for the church's beliefs and practices (see WCF 1.10)
2. The church and tradition are sources of authority in a ministerial and declarative sense, but they are *fallible* authorities that are subject to Scripture
3. The Bible does not say that all tradition is evil (see 2 Thess. 3:6), but it issues a clear warning against setting tradition alongside or above God's written revelation in Scripture (see Mk. 7:8-9)
4. Note the problem of "biblicism", which refers to an attitude that marginalizes the historical development of doctrine by reducing the scope of biblical teaching to explicit statements

C. Revelation

1. Humans do not have direct access to the knowledge of God; dependent on God's self-disclosure

2. While God reveals himself in a general way through his creation, he only gives saving knowledge of himself through his Word (see Ps. 19; WCF 1.1)
3. Christianity is about God speaking to man, whereas other religions have man speaking about God
4. Our grasp of revelation is always beset by weakness in this life and is therefore imperfect; all theology on earth is pilgrim theology

D. Inspiration

1. The books of the Bible have their origin in the will of God, not the will of man
2. We believe that the biblical books were given by divine inspiration (see 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21)
3. The Holy Spirit superintended over the writing of these documents, even though the human authors wrote from their distinctive experiences, styles, vocabularies, etc.

E. Authority

1. Other sources of authority are reason, experience, tradition; all have legitimacy, but all are fallible
2. Because the Bible is God's Word, it is our rule
3. Christians look to the Bible to understand God's revealed will for what to believe and how to practice our faith

F. Sufficiency

1. The Bible contains all that is necessary for us to know in order to be saved
2. "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence" (2 Peter 1:3)

3. Scripture is given in order that God's servants may be fully equipped for their ministry (see 2 Tim. 3:15-17); Scripture is sufficient to achieve this purpose

G. Perspicuity (Clarity)

1. The Bible's basic message is clear; we do not need an infallible interpreter of Scripture (as Rome claims)
2. Not everything in the Bible is equally clear (see 2 Pet. 3:16), but "those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them" (WCF 1.7)

H. Illumination and Profitability

1. We need the inward illumination of the Holy Spirit in order to be able to receive Scripture as God's Word (see 1 Cor. 2:6-16; WCF 1.5)
2. All Scripture is profitable for the Christian life (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Rom. 15:4)
3. The way to progress in the Christian life is by reading and internalizing God's Word
4. Strive to learn everything in the Bible

I. Inerrancy

1. The Bible is without error in its original manuscripts (see WCF 1.8)
2. Copies and translations are not inerrant, but there is abundant textual evidence to assure us that God has preserved the original message of his Word

III. The Bible Is Built on a Covenantal Framework

- A. We should read the Bible through covenantal lenses because this is the framework that arises from the Bible
- B. A covenant is an arrangement governed by sanctions that formally binds parties together
- C. God administers his kingly rule through covenants
- D. Three overarching biblical covenants
 1. ***Covenant of redemption:*** “the covenant established in eternity between the Father, who gives the Son to be the Redeemer of the elect and requires of him the conditions for their redemption; and the Son, who voluntarily agrees to fulfill these conditions; and the Spirit, who voluntarily applies the work of the Son to the elect.”³
 2. ***Covenant of works:*** “God’s commitment to give Adam, and his posterity in him, eternal life for obedience or eternal death for disobedience.”⁴
 3. ***Covenant of grace:*** “the covenant between God and believers with their children, in which he promises salvation through faith in Christ, who merited their salvation by his obedience in the covenant of redemption.”⁵

³ Brown and Keele, *Sacred Bond*, 25.

⁴ Brown and Keele, 45.

⁵ Brown and Keele, 60.

Lesson 3: Our Sinfulness and God's Sovereign Mercy

Vow #1: Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?

“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God... For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:10–11, 20)

I. Human Depravity and Inability

A. Creation and the covenant of works

1. God created the world as the throne room for the display of his majestic glory
2. Man was created by God to be his image-bearing, representative ruler
3. God established a covenant relationship with man that is sometimes referred to as the “covenant of works” (see Hos. 6:7)
4. In this covenant, God promised eternal life to Adam and his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience
5. “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.” (WCF 7.2)
6. The command given by God in Gen. 2:16-17 threatened death if Adam disobeyed and implied the blessing of life if he obeyed

B. The sin of our first parents

1. The prohibition to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a test of man's obedience to God's revealed will

2. Satan's questions to Eve imply that God is being unfair
3. Adam and Eve are tempted to become like God and be autonomous
4. God permitted the fall in accordance with his perfect wisdom and purposed to order it for the sake of his glory

C. How Adam's sin affects us

1. Adam's guilt is reckoned to all mankind because he acted as the representative head of the entire human race (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21-22)
2. Adam was a type of Christ in that Jesus acted as representative head for the elect (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:45); Jesus' righteousness is reckoned to us by faith (Rom. 4:22-25; 2 Cor. 5:21)
3. After the fall, all mankind exists in a state of corruption (Gen. 8:21; Ps. 51:5; Jn. 3:6; Rom. 8:7)
4. We are dead in sin (Eph. 2:1) = spiritually dead and cut off from blessed communion with God; there is no part that is not corrupted by sin
5. Our actual sins flow out of our fallen nature; we sin because we are sinners; the sins that we commit express the inclination of our heart
6. Though we still have a capacity for civic virtue in our dealings with other people, we can never merit God's favor because nothing that we do is free from the stain of sin

D. Sin's punishment

1. Sin exposes us to the miseries of this life
2. Sin results in objective guilt
3. Sin exposes us to God's wrath and the curse of the law

4. Sin makes us subject to spiritual, temporal, and eternal death

II. God's Sovereign Mercy

A. Summarized in the so-called five points of Calvinism

1. Also known by the acronym T.U.L.I.P.
2. Not intended as a comprehensive summary of Calvinism/ Reformed theology
3. First formulated together in response to a 17th century controversy over the doctrine of salvation (the Arminian controversy in the Netherlands)

B. Total depravity (or radical corruption)

1. Because of the imputation of Adam's guilt and the impartation of his fallen nature, every part of our nature has been corrupted by the fall
2. We are therefore incapable of doing anything to advance our salvation (Rom. 3:9-20; Eph. 2:1-3)

C. Unconditional election

1. God appoints some to salvation entirely on the basis of his good pleasure (Eph. 1:3-6)
2. Predestination is not based on God's prior knowledge of human decisions
 - a) If it were, the determining factor of our salvation would be something in us
 - b) Note that Romans 8:29 does not say "*that which* he foreknew" but "*those whom* he foreknew"
 - c) In Scripture, "know" often refers to intimate personal knowledge and love (Gen. 4:1; Amos 3:2); predestination is

based on God's free decision to set his love upon certain people before time began; "foreknew" means 'loved before time'

3. Double predestination

- a) Election: God graciously chooses some and appoints them to eternal life (Jn. 10:26-29; Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:5-6, 11)
- b) Reprobation: God justly passes over some and gives them the damnation that they deserve (Mt. 11:25-26; Jn. 12:39; 1 Pet. 2:8; Jude 4)
- c) In the elect, God actively intervenes to create faith
- d) In the reprobate, God does not create evil or unbelief but simply leaves people in their sin

4. Election and assurance

- a) Don't seek certainty of your election by trying to penetrate into God's eternal decree
- b) Instead, look to Christ; we are elect in him (see Eph. 1)

D. Limited atonement (or particular redemption)

- 1. Jesus' death did not merely make salvation possible for everyone but actually secured salvation for the elect and for them alone
- 2. If Jesus died for everyone, we would either have to say that God has no grounds to send non-Christians to hell, or that unbelief is a sin that we have to overcome by our own effort
- 3. Jesus was given a definite number of people to redeem (Jn. 6:39; 17:6; Rom. 8:30; Isa. 53:10-11)
- 4. Jesus died for all the sins of the elect (Mt. 1:21; Jn. 10:15; Rom. 8:32-33; 1 Pet. 3:18)

5. As our great high priest, Jesus effectively intercedes with God on our behalf (Jn. 6:37-39; 10:14-16; Jn. 17)
6. Christ ensures that his saving work will be applied to us (Jn. 14:26)

E. Irresistible grace (or effectual calling)

1. The Holy Spirit convinces the elect of their sin and misery and makes them willing and able to embrace Christ in faith (1 Cor. 12:3; Tit. 3:5)
2. Through the law, the Spirit convinces us of our sinfulness
3. Through the gospel, the Spirit enlightens our minds and causes us to see the goodness and beauty of Christ
4. The Spirit draws us to Christ, yet he does so without violating our will; he causes us to come to Christ willingly, making our wills sound (Ps. 110:3)
5. A person is not born again by exercising faith in Christ; rather, regeneration precedes faith; faith must be created in our hearts by the Spirit (Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29)

F. Perseverance of the saints

1. None of the elect will lose their salvation but will persevere in faith to the end (Jn. 6:37-39; Phil. 1:6)
2. No true Christian will totally or finally fall away from God's grace (Jn. 10:28-29; 1 Pet. 1:5, 9)
3. God's purpose to save his elect cannot be frustrated
4. Christ continues to intercede effectively for those he was given to save (Lk. 22:31-32; Rom. 8:33-34; Heb. 7:25)
5. Sin's penalty has been paid and its power has been broken because we are no longer under the condemnation of the law (Rom. 6:1-14)

6. We will not be set free from sin's presence until we are with Christ in glory
7. Because our corrupted nature remains after we are regenerated (Gal. 5:17), there is no possibility of perfection in this life (1 Jn. 1:8)
8. God has various purposes for letting his people to fall into temptation⁶
 - a) To expose what is in our hearts, and thereby humble us and cause us to be more watchful
 - b) To protect us from other evils, such as spiritual pride
 - c) To manifest his power to support those who cannot withstand such pressures on their own
 - d) To make us sympathetic towards our fellow believers
 - e) "Temptations, by giving us a painful sensibility of the weakness of our graces, and the strength of our inward corruptions, tend to mortify the evil principles of self-dependence and self-righteousness, which are so deeply rooted in our fallen nature; to make Christ, in all his relations, offices, and characters, more precious to us; and to convince us, that without him we can do nothing."⁷

⁶ John Newton, *Letters*, 93-100.

⁷ Newton, 97-98.

Lesson 4: Justification by Faith Alone in Christ Alone

Vow #2: Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith... For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.” (Romans 3:21–25, 28)

I. The Person and Work of Christ

- A. Jesus is the one Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5)
- B. A mediator with two natures
 - 1. As God the Son, Jesus shares in the same divine essence as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit (Jn. 1:1)
 - 2. At the incarnation, Jesus took upon himself a true human nature (Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 1:1)
 - 3. From the incarnation onward, Jesus has two distinct natures that are joined together in one person
 - 4. Christ’s divine and human natures retain their essential properties (e.g., he cannot be omnipresent in his human nature; he cannot die in his divine nature)
- C. Christ’s offices as our mediator
 - 1. Prophet — through his Word and Spirit, fully reveals the will of God for our salvation

2. Priest — offered himself up as a substitutionary sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God; continues to intercede for us at God's right hand
3. King — subdues us to himself; rules and defends us; restrains and conquers all his and our enemies

D. Christ's execution of his mediatorial office

1. Anointed with the Spirit to be empowered in his human nature for his office (Jn. 3:34; Acts 10:38)
2. Willingly undertook this mediatorial office as our surety (one who agrees to stand for the debt of another); lays the foundation for imputation (Heb. 7:22; 2 Cor. 5:21)
3. Made under the law as a covenant of works so that he could fulfill it on our behalf (Gal. 4:4; Mt. 3:15; 5:17; Heb. 5:8-9)
4. Jesus' active obedience = his perfect fulfillment of God's law
5. Jesus' passive obedience = his bearing the curse of the law in our place

E. Christ's two estates as our Mediator

1. Humiliation (see WSC 27)
 - a) Born under the law
 - b) Underwent the miseries of this life
 - c) Bore the wrath of God and the cursed death of the cross
 - d) Was buried and continued under the power of death for a time (note that his dead body was still united to his divine nature during the three days it was in the tomb)
2. Exaltation (see WSC 28)

- a) Bodily resurrection
- b) Ascension to heaven
- c) Session at God's right hand
- d) Second coming to judge the world

II. Justification by Faith Alone

A. The role of the law in God's plan of redemption

1. The three *aspects* of the law

- a) Moral aspect: reveals God's will for how to love him and other people; still in effect
- b) Ceremonial aspect: prefigured Christ's work as our great High Priest; expired when Christ fulfilled it, though it still teaches us about Christ
- c) Judicial aspect: civil law that governed Israel as a theocracy; expired when the theocracy ended, though it still teaches us basic principles concerning how God would have us live

2. The three *functions* of the law

- a) Conviction of sin: exposes our failure to live up to God's righteous standards and drives us to Christ for salvation
- b) Civil welfare: a function of common grace; the law written on the human conscience restrains evil in the wider world
- c) Guidance for holy living: shows believers God's will for their lives and serves as the measure of our growth in grace

3. The weakness of the law

- a) The law is holy, righteous, and good (see Rom. 7:12)

- b) The law exposes our sin, but it does not show us the remedy (see Gal. 3:19-29)
- c) The law does not provide the strength to do what it requires (see Rom. 7:8-11)
- d) The law is weakened by our sinful flesh (see Rom. 8:3-4)

B. Justification is what makes the gospel good news

- 1. Because God is holy, he is not indifferent to our sin but hates it
- 2. Because God is just, he cannot simply overlook our failure to live by the law's righteous standards
- 3. The gospel declares that God has provided a way of salvation that demonstrates both his justice and his mercy (Rom. 3:23-26)
- 4. "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone." (WSC 33)
- 5. OT believers received justification through faith in God's promise (Rom. 3:21; 4:3)

C. Justification is a matter of *imputed* righteousness, not *infused* righteousness

- 1. Not based upon anything wrought within us (Isa. 46:12-13; Phil. 3:8-9)
- 2. A legal declaration that is the opposite of condemnation (Rom. 5:16); condemnation is not a matter of making a person guilty but of declaring them guilty
- 3. In justification righteousness is imputed (reckoned/ counted) to the believer on the basis of Christ's perfect obedience and atoning death, received by faith alone (Jer. 23:5-6; Rom. 4:1-9)

4. Double imputation: when we trust in Christ, our sin is transferred to Christ and his righteousness is transferred to us (2 Cor. 5:21)

D. Justification is by grace alone

1. Grace = unmerited favor bestowed in spite of our great demerit
2. Salvation can only be received as a freely given gift, not as wages we have earned (see Rom. 3:23-24; 4:4-5; 2 Tim. 1:8-10)
3. Grace alone means no boasting (see Eph. 2:8-9)

E. Faith alone is the instrument of justification

1. Faith is not the condition or basis of God's acceptance of us but the means by which we appropriate the righteousness found in Christ
2. This righteousness is apart from the law and external to us (Rom. 3:20-28)
3. Faith itself is a gift from God (Acts 13:48; Eph. 2:7-8; Phil. 1:29)
4. We are not saved by our faith, but by the object upon which our faith rests
5. "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel." (WSC 86)

F. Justifying faith produces the fruit of good works (James 2:14-26)

1. James' teaching is not in conflict with that of Paul
2. James is saying that good works are the necessary evidence of saving faith, a truth that Paul also teaches (see Rom. 8:9-14)
3. Good works are necessary in an evidentiary sense but not in an instrumental sense

- G. Christians continue to sin after we are justified, but this sin does not undo our justification
1. Because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, the pardon that we receive when we are united to him cannot be revoked (Rom. 8:1)
 2. Both before and after conversion, the only remedy for our sin is the gospel (1 Jn. 2:1-2)
 3. Our sin grieves the Spirit and brings us under God's fatherly displeasure (Eph. 4:30)
 4. The sin of believers can result in temporal chastisements (Heb. 12:5-11)
 5. While true believers continue to struggle against sin (Rom. 7:21-25), they do not live in unrepentant sin (1 Jn. 3:6-9)

Lesson 5: Sanctification

Vow #3: Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?

“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” (2 Corinthians 5:14–15)

I. Living as Becomes the Followers of Christ

A. What is sanctification?

1. To sanctify = to make holy
2. “Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” (WSC 35)
3. Christ not only sets us free from the penalty of sin, but also from the power of sin (see Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10)
4. In regeneration, the believer’s heart and the inclinations of his soul are changed, and this change continues to be worked out in our sanctification until it reaches its goal at our glorification

B. How does sanctification work?

1. The righteousness that God works in us is never the basis of God’s acceptance of us; the proper motivation for Christian obedience is gratitude
2. Pursued in reliance on God’s grace and by faith in God’s promises
3. Note that in Romans 6:11-14, the call to live a righteous life is rooted in our need to believe that God has set us free from sin’s

enslaving power

4. “believers should not act for life, but from life. They must act as those that are not procuring life by their works, but as such who have already received and derived life from Christ, and act from the power and virtue received from him.”⁸
5. We are called to strive after holiness, trusting that it is God who gives us the desire and ability to do so (Phil. 2:12-13)
6. While we have an active role in our sanctification, this does not mean that it is accomplished by our works
7. Sanctification is the work of God’s grace, as the Holy Spirit applies Christ’s saving work to our lives (see Titus 3:5); it is God’s grace that trains us to renounce ungodliness and live upright lives (see Titus 2:11-13)

C. Why is sanctification necessary?

1. The reason why we are justified is so that we can be conformed to the image of Christ (see Rom. 8:29-30)
2. It is God’s will for us to be sanctified (1 Thess. 4:3)
3. “in justification we receive a *title* to heaven; sanctification gives us a *meetness* for, and a capacity of, enjoying it.”⁹
4. While good works are not necessary for salvation in an instrumental sense (Rom. 3:20-28), they are necessary in an evidentiary sense (James 2:14-26)

D. The fight of faith

1. The Christian life is a lifelong struggle with indwelling sin (see Rom. 7)

⁸ Walter Marshall, *The Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, 172.

⁹ Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith*, 195.

2. Sin wages war against Christians, but it cannot reign over us (see Gal. 5:17-18)
3. Though we repeatedly fail, we trust that there is no condemnation for us (see Rom. 8:1, 31-39)
4. God promises his children that if we continually stir up our faith by meditating on his Word we will be given the power to overcome temptation and walk in love (see Rom. 13:8-14; Eph. 5:15-21; Col. 3:12-17)
5. “But seeing that, in this earthly prison of the body, no man is supplied with strength sufficient to hasten in his course with due alacrity, while the greater number are so oppressed with weakness, that hesitating, and halting, and even crawling on the ground, they make little progress, let every one of us go as far as his humble ability enables him, and prosecute the journey once begun. No one will travel so badly as not daily to make some degree of progress. This, therefore, let us never cease to do, that we may daily advance in the way of the Lord, and let us not despair because of the slender measure of success.”¹⁰

II. The Role of the Law in the Christian Life

- A. Are we under the law or not?
 1. Believers are not under the law as a covenant of works
 2. Believers are under the law as a rule of life
 3. As the summary of the moral law, the Ten Commandments are still in effect (see Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21; Mt. 22:34-40)
- B. The functions of the law in the Christian life (see WCF 19.6)
 1. Directs us how to walk according to God’s will in all areas of life

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes*, III.6.5

2. Exposes the sinful pollutions of our hearts
 3. Convicts us of sin and instills an increasing hatred against sin
 4. Gives us a clearer sight of our need for Christ and his perfect obedience
 5. Restrains our corruptions and shows us how to manifest our gratitude to God for his redeeming grace
- C. The *first commandment* deals with the object of our worship (no other gods)
1. There is only one true God and our entire lives belong to him
 2. Requires us to love, worship, honor, serve and delight in God with our whole being; requires us to give up anything rather than go against God's will in any way¹¹
 3. Forbids us from valuing or trusting anything more than God, or from neglecting anything that we owe him
 4. Confronts our tendency to make ourselves the center of everything
- D. The *second commandment* concerns how we should worship (no likenesses of God)
1. God prescribes how he is to be worshipped in his Word (the Regulative Principle of Worship); see Lev. 10, where Nadab and Abihu were judged for offering unauthorized worship
 2. Requires that everything that we do in worship have sound biblical warrant
 3. Forbids the worship of God through images (no pictures or images of Jesus in worship)

¹¹ See Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 94.

4. Forbids all superstitious devices
- E. The *third commandment* concerns hallowing God's name
1. Requires us to make a reverent use of everything by which God makes himself known (his attributes, ordinances, Word, sacraments, prayer)
 2. Requires that we not neglect or ignore God; to do so is to show that we hold him in low esteem
 3. Forbids using God's name in a frivolous manner or worshipping him in a casual or irreverent manner; do not make God into a mascot or logo or slogan
 4. Forbids violating oaths and vows taken in God's name
 5. Forbids complaining about God's providential governance over the world and our lives
- F. The *fourth commandment* concerns the day of worship¹²
1. God instituted the Sabbath as a sign pointing to the completion of his purposes for the world; a sign of the eschatological rest that is the goal of human life
 2. Just as God did his work (of creating the world) and then entered his rest, so also was man to do his work (of obeying God's commands) and then enter God's rest
 3. The Fall made it impossible for man to enter God's rest by our works; we can only enter God's rest by faith in his promise (see Heb. 4:3)
 4. Under the New Covenant, the Sabbath has shifted from the last day of the week to the first day of the week

¹² See article, "Sabbath-Keeping in a Post-Christian Culture."

5. Christ's resurrection on a Sunday (the first day of the week) fulfills God's purposes for the world and marks the beginning of the new creation
6. The New Testament church met for worship on Sunday (see Acts 20:7)
7. "Inasmuch as the Old Covenant was still looking forward to the performance of the Messianic work, naturally the days of labour to it come first, the day of rest falls at the end of the week. We, under the New Covenant, look back upon the accomplished work of Christ. We, therefore, first celebrate the rest in principle procured by Christ, although the Sabbath also still remains a sign looking forward to the final eschatological rest."¹³
8. Because we have not yet entered the final form of this rest, a Sabbath sign is still necessary (see Heb. 4:1, 9)
9. The Sabbath is a weekly interruption in the activities of this present age that testifies to and shapes our identity as a people whose true home is in the age to come (see Heb. 4:9; 11:16)
10. The Sabbath is a day to rest from ordinary labor in order to worship God and find refreshing for our souls
11. "We are called out from our workweek to accept God's gifts to us of the preached Word and the sacraments, as a covenant community. The whole city witnesses our leaving behind the common activities of life for sacred worship. Sabbath reminds us that we are to rest in Christ... God forbid we would not respond by assembling together and receiving his gifts to us."¹⁴

G. The *fifth commandment* has to do with submission to authority (honor father and mother)

¹³ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 141

¹⁴ Aimee Byrd, <http://www.mortificationofspin.org/mos/housewife-theologian/voskamp-vs-pohl-on-gratitude#.Vwer-6tGKme> (accessed April 8, 2016).

1. Applies beyond the family, though it certainly includes honoring our natural parents
2. Requires us to show respect towards all of those whom the Lord places over us in the family, the church, and society
3. Also requires that those in positions of authority perform the duties they owe to those under their authority

H. The *sixth commandment* concerns the sanctity of life (no murder)

1. Requires that we lawfully endeavor to preserve the life of ourselves and others
2. Forbids all violence, harm, and attack (whether physical or verbal) against “innocent” human life - “innocent” compared to situations where the taking of a human life can be just (e.g. self-defense; capital punishment; military combat)
3. Practices such as euthanasia, abortion, and the destruction of embryos for research purposes are immoral
4. We must protect and promote the life of our neighbor, especially those who are unable to speak for themselves

I. The *seventh commandment* concerns the sanctity of marriage (no adultery)

1. Marriage is the God-ordained context for sexual union between one man and one woman
2. Marriage was ordained by God for four purposes¹⁵
 - a) The mutual help of husband and wife through faithful intimacy

¹⁵ See WCF 24.2.

- b) The increase of mankind through childbearing and childrearing
 - c) Providing holy offspring for the church through childbearing and childrearing
 - d) Preventing sexual chaos
3. “Marriage is, of its essence, a comprehensive union: a union of will (by consent) and body (by sexual union); inherently ordered to procreation and thus the broad sharing of family life; and calling for permanent and exclusive commitment”¹⁶
 4. Requires that we pursue chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behavior
 5. Forbids all sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage (including lust, masturbation, pornography, fornication, cohabitation, homosexuality, polyamory)
 6. Sex outside of marriage is forbidden because it is an attempt to enjoy the benefits of the marriage covenant apart from the responsibility of that covenant; sexual immorality makes sex into an empty symbol
 7. Forbids divorce, except in cases of adultery or willful abandonment of one spouse by the other (Mt. 19:8-9; 1 Cor. 7:15; cf. WCF 24.5-6)
 8. Establishes that gender is not a fluid construct but is rooted in God’s creation of man as male and female (against transgenderism)
- J. The *eighth commandment* has to do with respecting private property (no stealing)
1. God owns everything and he distributes it as he pleases; stealing shows a failure to trust God to provide

¹⁶ Sherif Girgis, Ryan Anderson, and Robert George, *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense*, 6.

2. Requires the pursuit of a lawful calling and the use of all just and lawful means to further the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others
 3. Requires that we pay what we owe to people (Rom. 13:7)
 4. Forbids laziness, promotes diligence, requires us to live within our means, and calls us to be content, frugal, thankful, and generous
- K. The *ninth commandment* call us to be truthful (no bearing false witness)
1. Requires that we seek to preserve the good name of our neighbor, that we have a charitable opinion of them, and that we cover over their infirmities in love whenever we can
 2. Forbids falsehood, slander, gossip, and flattery
 3. Forbids calling evil good and good evil
 4. Forbids undo silence in a just cause
 5. Forbids speaking the truth in a malicious manner
- L. The *tenth commandment* has to do with desire and contentment (no coveting)
1. Summarizes and intensifies all the other commandments by internalizing them; outward obedience is not complete unless it comes from the heart
 2. Requires that we be content in God (see Phil. 4:11); requires the proper ordering of our desires (see 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 Jn. 2:15-17)
 3. Forbids discontentment with our own estate and grieving at the good estate of others

Lesson 6: The Church's Worship and Work

Vow #4: Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (**Hebrews 10:23–25**)

I. The Church's Worship

A. God is to be worshipped everywhere

1. Private worship (Dan. 6:10; Mt. 6:6; Eph. 6:18)
2. Family worship (Deut. 6:6-7; Job 1:5; Acts 10:2) — a key means of propagating the true religion from generation to generation

B. The centrality of public worship on the Lord's Day (Lk. 4:16; Heb. 10:25)

1. Jesus' "example lays a strong obligation upon those who profess to be his followers, to be regular and conscientious in their attendance upon the public worship of God... God is eminently honoured by the social worship of his people; and he delights to honour the ordinances of his public worship, by making them means of grace. Most commonly it is by means of these ordinances that sinners are awakened and converted, and that saints are edified and comforted. Christians ought, therefore, to put a high value upon the public worship of God, diligently to improve their opportunities of 'going up to the house of the Lord', and to beware of 'forsaking the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is' (Heb. 10:25)."¹⁷
2. The heart of true worship is not fellowship, entertainment, or sharing our gifts, but glorifying God in accordance with his

¹⁷ Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith*, 293.

revealed will in an atmosphere of reverence and awe

- C. The outward and ordinary means of grace¹⁸
1. The “means of grace” are the outward means by which God communicates his grace to us; the things that God uses to create and nourish saving faith
 2. *Q. What doth God require of us that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin?*
A. To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption.¹⁹
 3. *Q. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?*
A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.²⁰
- D. The preaching of God’s Word (see Lk. 4:43; Rom. 10:14-17; 2 Cor. 4:1-7; 5:20; Eph. 2:17; 1 Pet. 1:23-2:3)
1. God has given a special place to preaching in his redemptive plan
 2. We should cherish the preached Word because it is the means by which Christ and all his benefits are delivered to us
 3. How to listen to sermons (see WLC 160)
 - a) In a careful, conscientious, and alert manner, with eagerness and expectancy (Acts 10:33; 13:42)

¹⁸ See article, “The Quest for The Next Big Thing.”

¹⁹ *Westminster Shorter Catechism* Q/ A 85.

²⁰ *Westminster Shorter Catechism* Q/ A 88.

- b) In obedience, not as mere hearers but also as doers (Jas. 1:22)
- c) With understanding, or else it will be snatched away (Mt. 13:19)
- d) With faith, or else it will not benefit us (Heb. 4:2)
- e) With reverence, trembling at God's word (Isa. 66:2b)

E. Sacraments in general

- 1. The sacraments are the means through which the Holy Spirit confirms God's promises and strengthens the faith that he works in us through the preached Word (see Rom. 4:11)
- 2. God gives us sacraments in order to communicate his grace to all our senses (not just our hearing)

F. The sacrament of baptism²¹

- 1. Meaning and efficacy
 - a) Baptism (like circumcision in the Old Testament) is the outward sign, pointing to an inward reality, that is used to define who belongs to the covenant community
 - b) Baptism signifies the same thing that circumcision did under the old covenant: regeneration, ingrafting into Christ, cleansing of sins, consecration to God (see Col. 2:11-15; Rom. 4:11)
 - c) Baptismal efficacy extends beyond the time of its administration; has lifelong benefits; can help us overcome sin and doubt; assures us that we have been baptized into Christ's death in order that we might walk in newness of life (see Rom. 6:3-4)

²¹ See article, "Baptism and Discipleship."

- d) Not to be repeated because it is symbolic of a one-time event (regeneration)

2. Mode

- a) Immersion is not necessary because the sign is the water, not the mode of application; sprinkling or pouring are proper modes of baptism
- b) There are no instances in the New Testament where the term 'baptize' definitively describes someone or something being immersed in water
- c) There are instances where the term clearly refers to the application of water to something (Mk. 7:4; Lk. 11:38)
- d) Acts 2:41 — in a dry climate like Israel, it is unlikely that 3,000 Christians would have been permitted to pollute so much water by immersing themselves in it, or that so many immersion baptisms could have been performed in a reasonable amount of time in that location (there was no river near where they were in Jerusalem)
- e) Acts 8:36-39 — this took place in "a desert place" (v. 26), which makes it unlikely that they would have found enough water for a full immersion; also, the eunuch's request to be baptized was brought about by reading the song of the suffering servant in Isaiah 52-53, where it says that the Messiah will "sprinkle many nations" (Isa. 52:15)
- f) Acts 16:31-34 — if the jailer and his family were baptized by immersion, this means Paul and Silas would have had to leave the jail in the middle of the night to go find a water supply (they wouldn't have had a pool at the jail); yet the next day Paul and Silas tell the magistrates that they will not leave the jail until they are escorted out by them
- g) The terminology of sprinkling and pouring is often used in Scripture to describe the spiritual benefits that baptism signifies (Isa. 44:3; 52:15; Ezek. 36:25; Acts 10:44-48; Heb.

9:19-22; 10:22)

- h) Paul's mention of being "buried" with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:4) is not a reference to immersion because burials in Palestine were not underground but in caves; it simply refers to how baptism signifies our union with Christ in his death

3. The proper recipients of baptism

- a) Adults who profess faith in Christ and who were never baptized in infancy are to be baptized
- b) Because the meaning of baptism is defined by God, not by the bodies or individuals who administer it, Reformed churches have typically accepted Roman Catholic baptisms (and other Trinitarian baptisms) as valid Christian baptisms, even though we do not believe that Rome as an institution is a true branch of Christ's church²²
- c) The Reformed place this sign on the children of believers because the Bible teaches that God defines the covenant community as one that includes believers and their children (see Gen. 17:10-11; Acts 2:38-39)
 - (1) In the OT the children of believers were accounted as within the covenant and were entitled to its seal; the NT never says that this has changed
 - (2) "Infants were the subjects of circumcision under the Old Testament dispensation; and as baptism under the New Testament has come in the room of circumcision, we conclude that infants have a right to baptism under the present dispensation. That under the Old Testament, the infants of God's professing people were to be circumcised, cannot be doubted... That baptism has now come in the room of

²² This does not mean that there are not any true Christians in the Roman Catholic Church. On the contrary, "There is still a church amid the RCC; in other words, those who look to Christ by faith alone are part of the one invisible church, but the RCC as an institution is not a church." (J.V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine*, 386)

circumcision is evident from Colossians 2:11, where it is called 'the circumcision of Christ.'"²³

- (3) In the NT "household" baptisms, it is highly probable that some children were baptized (Acts 16:15, 33; 1 Cor. 1:16)
- (4) The Jews listening to Peter's sermon in Acts 2 would have assumed that he intended for them to place the mark of the covenant on their children, since that was what they had done with circumcision
- (5) The children of at least one believing parent are "holy" or set apart for God (1 Cor. 7:14)
- (6) Jesus received children, blessed them, and said that the kingdom of God belongs to them (Mk. 10:13-16; Lk. 18:15)
- (7) The new covenant is announced in the Old Testament and inaugurated in the New Testament as a covenant that includes children (see Isa. 59:20-21; Jer. 32:36ff; Ezek. 37:24-27; Mt. 19:14; Acts 2:38-39; 16:15, 33; 1 Cor. 7:14; Eph. 6:1-4)
- (8) The new covenant is not spoken of as an unconditional and unbreakable covenant that is only made with believers, but as one that is conditioned on persevering faith and can be broken by unbelief and apostasy (Jn. 15:1-8; Rom. 11:17-24; Heb. 10:4-39).
- (9) By this sign the Lord declares that he regards us and our children as members of the covenant who are obligated to repent and believe in Jesus Christ and to persevere in faith

²³ Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith*, 366.

- (10) Parents are obligated to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord
- (11) Because the sacraments are to be administered by the church, we require parents to present their children for baptism²⁴

G. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper

1. Provides us with ongoing spiritual nourishment and assurance of God's promise (see Jn. 6:35, 47-51, 53-58); analogous to our body's need for bread: eating once is not enough
2. Feeding upon Christ by faith
3. Not a sacrifice for sin but a commemoration of Christ's once for all sacrifice
4. Christ is not physically present in the elements but is spiritually present — "as really as the bread and wine are given to the communicants, so Christ gives himself, with all his benefits, to the worthy receivers; and in taking these elements — in eating the bread and drinking the wine — they profess to receive Christ by faith, and to rest their hope of pardon and salvation solely upon his death."²⁵
5. Administered simply, based upon Christ's institution of the sacrament
6. Participants must be baptized, be communicant members of some evangelical church, and be able to examine themselves
7. Because 1 Cor. 11:27 issues a serious warning about participating in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, the Session should make a good-faith effort to see to it that all are admitted to the

²⁴ In cases where families that join our church have unbaptized children who are of sufficient age to make a public profession faith in Christ, those children should take our communicants class and be prepared to make a public profession of faith, at which time they would also be baptized.

²⁵ Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith*, 382.

Lord's Table on the basis of an informed and credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ; this means children must reach a sufficient age before their profession of faith can be examined for their admission to the Lord's Table

H. Prayer

1. The divinely appointed means of obtaining what we need from God (Mt. 7:7)
2. Must be offered in Christ's name and in the power of the Spirit
3. In accordance with God's will
4. With understanding (Eccl. 5:1-2) — having some knowledge of God, our needs, the mediation of Christ, and God's promises
5. Reverently (Heb. 12:28) — having a sense of God's majesty
6. Humbly (Jas. 5:16) — having a sense of our unworthiness
7. With fervency (Jas. 5:16), faith (Jas. 1:6-7), love (Mt. 6:12-15), perseverance (Col. 4:2), and in a known tongue (1 Cor. 14:14)
8. For things lawful, for people in all sorts of positions (1 Tim. 2:1-2), for those who have not yet come to faith (Jn. 17:20), for those not yet born (Ruth 4:12; 2 Sam. 7:29)

I. The use of music in public worship²⁶

1. We use musical styles that are well-suited for worshipping God "with reverence and awe" (Heb. 12:28) and that are able to give expression to the Bible's weighty doctrinal content
2. We want our singing to be a means by which God's Word comes to dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16)

²⁶ See article, "A Brief Comparison of Charismatic and Reformed Views of Church Music."

3. Because wisdom is obtained by following the counsel of faithful believers who have gone before us (Prov. 1:7–9), we receive the best hymnody of previous generations as a rich heritage
4. We sing songs that help us grow in maturity in Christ (Col. 1:28)

II. The Church's Work

A. The focus of the church's ministry²⁷

1. The church's ministry was given for the gathering and perfecting of the saints; the church's mission is to make disciples of all nations (see Mt. 28:18-20)
2. The work of making disciples needs to be front and center, not lost amid many other concerns
3. All believers are called to be partners in the church's ministry (attending worship, engaging in prayer, witnessing, studying the Bible, catechizing children, tithing, serving at church in various areas, encouraging and helping fellow believers, etc.)
4. All believers are called to glorify God in their ordinary vocations in their families and in the broader society

B. The rationale for saying that the OT practice of tithing carries over into the NT church

1. OT believers supported the ministry through paying a tithe (10%) of their earnings (see Gen. 14:20; Lev. 27:30–33; Num. 18:21–24; Mal. 3:6–12); also had to give alms above and beyond the tithe to help the poor in their midst (see Ex. 23:10-11; Lev. 19:9-10; 25:35-37; Deut. 15:7-11; 24:12-15)
2. While the figure of 10% is never mentioned in NT in reference to supporting the church's ministry, the NT does explicitly command Christians to financially support the church's ministry (1 Cor. 9:14; Gal. 6:6) and to give generously to help the needy, especially fellow

²⁷ See article, "The Vocations of Christians and the Ministry of the Church."

believers in need (Acts 11:29; Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim. 6:18; Eph. 4:28)

3. Makes sense to say that the OT principles of giving 10% of your income to support the church's ministry, and giving above the tithe to help the poor, are still in effect

Lesson 7: Church Government and Discipline

Vow #5: Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” (Hebrews 13:17)

I. Defining “Church”

A. A people “called out” from the world

1. “The Greek word *ekklesia*, which we render ‘church’ is derived from a word which signifies to *call out*, and denotes an assembly called out and convened for any particular purpose.”²⁸
2. The church is distinct from the world and its members are called to the pursuit of holiness

B. Three aspects of the church

1. The Church Militant: the church in this present evil age, engaged in warfare with the world, the flesh and the devil
2. The Church Triumphant: departed saints whose souls dwell with Christ and await their resurrection at his return
3. The Church Glorious: the church in her final glorified state

C. The sense in which the church is “invisible”

1. The church from God’s perspective
2. Consists of all whom God has chosen to save (past, present, future)

²⁸ Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith*, 331.

- D. The sense in which the church is “visible”
1. The church from our perspective; we can see the true church to some extent
 2. The visible church is both local (e.g. “the church of God at Corinth”) and catholic/ universal (not confined to one nation, as in OT; Eph. 3:1-6)
 3. Consists of the whole number of those who profess the true religion/ call upon the name of Christ (1 Cor. 1:2), together with their children (Acts 2:39; 1 Cor. 7:14; Ezek. 16:20-21)
 4. Not everyone who professes to be a Christian really is a Christian

II. Presbyterian Church Government

- A. Jesus Christ is a real king over his church
1. While Christ rules over all the earth, in this age his redemptive rule is only made visible in the church
 2. “The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His Church, hath therein appointed government, in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.” (WCF 30.1)
- C. Christ has endowed his church with spiritual power that is distinct from the power given to the state over the civil sphere.
4. Church power is exercised by means of persuasion, not coercion; it is ministerial and declarative in nature (it is exercised in service to Christ on the basis of what he has revealed in his Word)
- B. Presbyterianism in general
1. The term Presbyterian comes from one of two interchangeable Greek terms used by the NT to refer to the office of elder: *presbuteros* (translated as “elder”) and *episkopos* (translated as “overseer” or “bishop”)

2. In Presbyterianism, church authority is exercised by a plurality of elders in each local church (called the church Session)
3. Local churches are connected to each other and ruled jointly by all of the elders in a given region (Presbytery) and nation (General Assembly); connectional government is seen in Acts 15
4. All of the courts of the church (Session, Presbytery, and General Assembly) are equal in power; not a hierarchical system but one that provides mutual accountability and the right of appeal
5. Non-Presbyterian churches employ either episcopal (hierarchical) or congregational (democratic) government

C. Church offices

1. In a general sense, every Christian holds an office
 - a. All Christians are called by God's name, called to be holy, and called to serve God in their particular callings / vocations
 - b. Every Christian is a prophet, priest, and king because of his or her union with Christ (see Rev. 1:6); we are all called to the tasks of witness (prophetic office), worship and service (priestly office), and spiritual warfare and stewardship (kingly office)
 - c. *Q. But why are you called a Christian?*
A. Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess his name, to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks, to strive with a good conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for all eternity.²⁹
2. In another sense, God has given special offices through which Jesus shepherds his flock (see Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1; Heb. 13:17)

²⁹ Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 32.

- a. These officers provide for the nurture and discipline of the flock
 - b. God inwardly calls individuals to these offices, but this call needs to be recognized by the church
 - c. For this reason, officers are chosen by the congregation with the recommendation of existing officers
 - d. These officers are then ordained (set apart) to their offices
3. There are three continuing special offices in the church (other special offices, such as apostle and prophet, have ceased due to their foundational character – see Eph. 2:20)
- a. Teaching Elders (Ministers) shepherd the congregation primarily through preaching and teaching (see 1 Tim. 5:17)
 - b. Ruling Elders shepherd the congregation primarily through exercising oversight (see 1 Cor. 12:28)
 - c. Deacons care for the physical needs of the church (see Acts 6:1-7; 1 Timothy 3:8-13)
 - d. As shepherds of God’s flock, the elders (Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders together) serve as the church’s governing “Session.”
 - e. In light of the teaching of Scripture (see 1 Tim. 2:12), these offices are restricted to qualified men only, and are not open to women
 - f. However, both men and women should seek to use their gifts and graces for the edification of the church

III. Church Discipline

- A. Church discipline assumes local church membership

1. In the NT, when people became Christians they became a part of a local branch of Christ's church
 2. In Acts 2:47, those who are being saved are added to the church's "number" (i.e. to the roll of a visible body)
 3. Also includes the children of professing believers (Acts 2:39; 1 Cor. 7:14; Ezek. 16:20-21)
 4. God works through those whom he calls to the office of elder to keep watch over his people, but this can only take place if the elders of a local church know who it is they are responsible to oversee
- B. The "keys of the kingdom" are a symbol of the exercise of government and discipline in the church (Mt. 16:13-18)
1. The power of the keys was initially given to the apostles
 2. Neither Matthew 16 nor any other passage says anything about the notion of apostolic succession (Rome's claim that her bishops are the successors of the apostles)
 3. By good and necessary consequence, we deduce that the power of the keys extends to all who serve in the church's ruling office (elder)
- C. Binding and loosing
1. Making judgments about whether sinners are unrepentant or repentant (see also Mt. 18:17-18; Jn. 20:23)
 2. This binding and loosing is done through the preaching and teaching of the Word and, when necessary, through censures
- D. Church Censures
1. Necessary for various reasons

- a) Reclaiming offending brethren (Jude 23; 1 Tim. 1:20; 1 Cor. 5:5)
 - b) Deterring others (1 Tim. 5:20)
 - c) Protecting the church (1 Cor. 5:6-7)
 - d) Upholding Christ's honor (Mt. 7:6)
 - e) Avoiding God's displeasure (Rev. 2:14-16, 20)
2. To be determined by the nature of the offense and the person's response to the correction
 3. To be carried out in a spirit of gentleness (Gal. 6:1)
 4. Types of censures
 - a) Admonition: a formal word of rebuke (1 Thess. 5:12)
 - b) Indefinite suspension from the Lord's Supper, while still treating the offender as a brother (2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15)
 - c) Excommunication: cut off from the communion of the saints altogether, with the hope that they will be reconciled (1 Cor. 5:1-5) — the person is delivered to Satan in the sense that he is cast out of the church into the world, over which Satan is in one sense ruler (see Jn. 12:31; Eph. 2:2; Col. 1:13)
- E. The limits of church power: only pertains to doctrine, order, and discipline
1. Doctrine: the church is authorized to declare what it believes Scripture to teach and to apply the teaching of the Word to specific circumstances
 2. Order: the church is authorized to arrange details concerning its government, discipline, worship, and the extension of the church; this must be done in a manner that is agreeable to the Scriptural doctrines that relate to such matters

3. Discipline: the church is authorized to require its members to obey the laws of Christ (see 1 Thess. 5:13; Heb. 13:17)

F. Discipline and discipleship

1. In the broad sense, the term “discipline” refers to “the whole government, inspection, training, guardianship and control which the church maintains over its members, its officers and its courts”
2. In a restricted and technical sense, “discipline” refers to judicial process³⁰
3. “The church uniquely puts on display the reign of Jesus to the world around her. In the church the world sees a body of persons professing submission to a majestic and risen King.”³¹

IV. The PCA Book of Church Order (BCO)

A. Our denominational Constitution, which is subject to and subordinate to the Scriptures, consists of:

1. The doctrinal standards set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, with Larger and Shorter Catechisms
2. The BCO

B. The three sections of the BCO

1. Form of Government: defines the church and its offices, courts, processes, etc.
2. Rules of Discipline: sets forth the procedures that are to be followed in disciplinary cases
3. Directory for the Worship of God: explains the principles and elements of worship and the processes that are to be followed in the

³⁰ PCA Book of Church Order 27-1.

³¹ Guy Prentiss Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church*, 29.

administration of the sacraments, admission of communicant members, marriage and funeral services, etc. (only the sections dealing with the sacraments and admission of communicant members have constitutional authority; the rest of this section is advisory)

- C. The BCO is available online at www.pcaac.org/resources