

# OMNIBUS III

Reformation to the Present

Third Edition

# OMNIBUS III

Reformation to the Present

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**veritas**  
PRESS



For Nathan, Ben, and Luke, who have been  
wonderful sons.

—DOUGLAS WILSON

To Madelyn, Layne, Karis and Elyse, my Muses:  
Long may you sing; and  
To Emily (again), my main Muse and our Eve.

—G. TYLER FISCHER

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# FOREWORD

One of the most obvious questions that Christians might ask about a curriculum like this one is, “Why study this stuff?” The question can be asked for different reasons. Perhaps a concerned parent is attracted to the rigor of a “classical and Christian approach,” and yet has thumbed through a couple of the texts and is taken aback by some of the material. “It was this kind of gunk,” he thinks, “that chased us out of the government school.” Or perhaps the question is asked by the student himself when he “hits the wall.” The rigor that is built into this course of study is significant, and about a third of the way through the year, a student might be asking all sorts of pointed questions. “Why are you making me do this?” is likely to be one of them. The student may be asking because of his workload, but if he points to the nature of the material, the question still needs a good answer. It is a good question, and everyone who is involved in teaching this course needs to have the answer mastered.

G.K. Chesterton said somewhere that if a book does not have a wicked character in it, then it is a wicked book. One of the most pernicious errors that has gotten abroad in the Christian community is the error of *sentimentalism*—the view that evil is to be evaded, rather than the more robust Christian view that evil is to be conquered. The Christian believes that evil is there to be fought, the dragon is there to be slain. The sentimentalist believes that evil is to be resented.

My wife and I did not enroll our children in a classical Christian school so that they would never come into contact with sin. Rather, we wanted them there because we wanted to unite with like-minded Christian parents who had covenanted together to deal with the (inevitable) sin in a consistent, biblical manner. We fully expected our children to encounter sin in the classroom, on the playground and in the curriculum. We also expected that when they encountered it, they

would see it dealt with in the way the Bible says sin should be dealt with.

A classical Christian school or a home school following the classical Christian curriculum must never be thought of as an asylum. Rather, this is a time of basic training; it is boot camp. Students are being taught to handle their weapons, and they are being taught this under godly, patient supervision. But in order to learn this sort of response, it is important that students learn it well. That is, setting up a “straw man”

paganism that is easily demolished equips no one. All that would do is impart a false sense of security to the students—until they get to a secular college campus to encounter the real thing. Or, worse yet, if they continue the path into a soft, asylum-style Christian college and then find themselves addressing the marketplace completely unprepared.

If this basic training is our goal, and it is, then we should make clear what one potential abuse of the Omnibus curriculum might be. This curriculum was written and edited with the assumption that godly oversight and protection

would accompany the student through his course of work. It was written with the conviction that children need teachers, flesh and blood teachers, who will work together with them. It was also written with the assumption that many of these teachers need the help and the resources that a program like this can supply. But we also believe that, if a seventh-grader is simply given this material and told to work through it himself, the chances are good that the student will miss the benefit that is available for those who are taught.

The Scriptures do not allow us to believe that a record of sinful behavior, or of sinful corruption, is inherently corrupting. If it were, then there are many stories and accounts in the Bible itself that would have to be excluded. But if we ever begin to think our children need to be protected “from the Bible,” this should



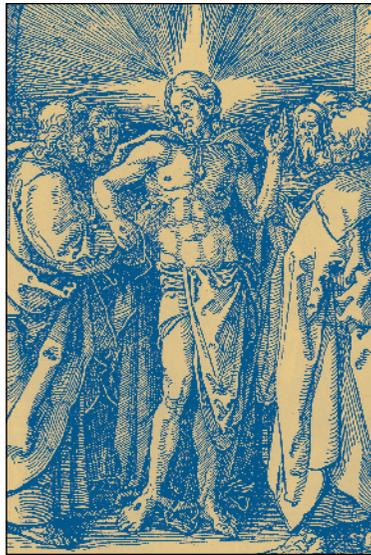
bring us up short. Perhaps we have picked up false notions of holiness somewhere. In short, there is no subject that this curriculum will raise in the minds of seventh-grade students that would not *also* be raised when that student reads through his Bible, cover to cover. It is true that this curriculum has accounts of various murders, or examples of prostitution, or of tyranny from powerful and cruel kings. But we can find all the same things in the book of Judges.

So the issue is not the *presence* of sin, but of the *response* to that sin. What we have sought to do throughout—in the introductory worldview essays, the questions and exercises, and in the teachers' materials—is provide a guideline for responding to all the various worldviews that men outside of Christ come up with. This program, we believe, will equip the student to see through pretences and lies that other Christian children, who have perhaps been too sheltered, are not able to deal with.

Of course, there is a limit to this, as we have sought to recognize. There *are* certain forms of worldliness and corruption that would overwhelm a student's ability to handle it, no matter how carefully a parent or teacher was instructing them. And while children differ in what they can handle, in our experience with many students of this age, we believe that the content of this curriculum is well within the capacity of Christian children of this age group. But again, this assumes godly oversight and instruction. The challenge here is two-fold. The rigor of the curriculum can seem daunting, but we have sought to provide direction and balance with regard to the demands of the material. The second concern is the question of false worldviews, paganism and just plain old-fashioned sin, which we have addressed above.

As our students work their way through this material, and in the years of the Omnibus program that will follow, we want them to walk away with a profound sense

of the *antithesis*. What we mean by this is that right after Adam and Eve fell in the Garden, God gave His first messianic promise (Gen. 3:15). But along with this promise, He also said that there would be constant antipathy between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. This is what we mean by the antithesis, and we want our students to come to share in that godly antipathy. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil (Ps. 97:10; Prov. 8:13). In every generation, in all movements (whether of armies or philosophies), in all schools of literature, the men and women involved are either obeying God or disobeying Him. They are either trusting Him or they are not trusting Him. All students are learning to love God, or they are not learning to love God.



But when they love and trust Him, they must do so in the face of conflict. Jesus was the ultimate Seed of the woman, and yet when He came down and lived among us, He faced constant opposition from “broods of vipers.” It is not possible to live in this world faithfully without coming into conflict with those who have no desire to live faithfully. The task of every Christian parent bringing children up to maturity in such a world is to do it in *a way that equips*. False protection, precisely because it does not equip, leaves a child defenseless when the inevitable day comes when that artificial shelter is removed. True protection equips.

We do not want to build a fortress for our students to hide in; we want to give them a shield to carry—along with a sword.

Students who have faithfully worked through this course of study will not be suckers for a romanticized view of ancient paganism offered up by Hollywood. They have read Suetonius, and they have worked through a Christian response to true paganism. They are grateful that Christ came into this dark world, and they know *why* they are grateful.

—Douglas Wilson

# P R E F A C E

We are now moving into our study of the modern era. In this third volume of the *Omnibus* series, we are standing on the threshold of our own times.

In one sense, we are getting much closer to home. It is certainly easier for us to understand Victorian England than Ithaca at the time of Odysseus. We have less trouble comprehending the English (in which most of the works in this volume were written) than we had with translations from Homeric Greek or Augustan Latin. We have visited alien worlds, and we are now homeward bound. We are all looking forward to the comforts of home, to the ease with which we can get around. When you read *The Tale of Two Cities* or *Pride and Prejudice*, you won't have to struggle with footnotes about what the original language might have meant. When an author refers to "a desk" you won't have to look it up in a dictionary of archeology. This is home.

But in another important sense, as believing Christians, we are moving farther away from our home. This is because this modern period has been a time in which a great Christian civilization has gone through a great apostasy, falling away from the faith that was once

delivered to us, and which delivered our fathers from barbarism. As Christians, we have not personally participated in that apostasy, and we do not assent to it, but it still surrounds us on every hand. The great project of modernity, the great modernity experiment, has been an attempt to order our lives, and our laws, and our culture, and our arts, without reference to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. We believe that the experiment has been a great disaster, but it is a disaster that we as Christians are required and called to understand. Knowing how we got here will be invaluable as we make our plans for getting out.

In *Omnibus I*, we studied the great works of pagan civilization. In the second *Omnibus*, we moved on to learn and appreciate the works of the medieval and reformational period, a time when Christ was imperfectly but genuinely honored. We are now setting ourselves to read the works of a post-Christian culture.

Not surprisingly, this is a period of great cultural disintegration.

But at the same time, it is a time when faithful



Christians continued to write, but with the context of the older order in mind. As a result, this is a period of history where we can profit from good and bad examples both. We are happy to commend to you Jane Austen, Edmund Burke and the American founders, and to warn you away from Karl Marx and Adolf Hitler. But in warning you away from such men, we are not just “shooing” you away from them. It is important for us to understand why such sinful men had such a following, and so we want to spend some time learning real worldview discernment as we examine what they tried to sell to the world.

Scripture teaches us that there is significant moral power for good in bad example. “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer” (1 Cor. 10:6–10). If the Israelites in the wilderness provided an object lesson for those who read about them in the Bible, shouldn’t we, in a similar way, be able to draw some benefits from observing our disasters in the wilderness of modernity?

I mentioned just a moment ago that we are engaged in making some plans to get out of the cultural chaos we are in. In a very real sense, that is what the classical Christian school movement is all about. We want to acquaint students with the permanent things. We want to educate in such a way that we reacquire

the perspective that history provides—so that we don’t get caught up in the intellectual fads and follies of just one generation. This is not being done with a glib assumption that “older must be better.” As Christians we have the touchstone of God’s Word—the Scriptures enable us to understand the tragedy of Greek tragedy, the hopelessness of ancient paganism, the forgiveness and nobility that comes when Christ is honored in all things, and the destruction that comes when in our pride we wander away from His blessings. In these pages you will see modern works praised, and ancient works critiqued . . . and *vice versa*. Our loyalty is always to Jesus Christ, and to His people, and not to one particular language or nation or literary tradition.

As diligent students work through the *Omnibus* project (and, with this volume, we are halfway there!), the result will be that they are oriented. They will be acquainted with what men have thought and practiced throughout history. They will know what the intellectual options are. They will have direct acquaintance with what the world was like before Jesus Christ came into it. They will know the transforming cultural power of the gospel, and they will be able to testify to what happened when the gospel took root in societies far more pagan than ours currently is. They will understand what happens to humanistic regimes that refuse to honor Jesus Christ. And they will have a great deal of experience in working through many books of the Bible, applying what is in them to the world around. As a result, our hope and prayer is that they will continue to grow up into mature Christian men and women, who will be equipped to decipher and understand what is happening in the culture around us.

—Douglas Wilson

## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

Have you ever stopped to think what the President of the United States in the year 2040 is doing right now? What about the next Martin Luther or John Calvin? I'll tell you what I hope they are doing. I hope they just finished reading this sentence!

There is no doubt in my mind that classical Christian education and the rigorous study of the greatest works of Western Civilization is a tool to create leaders like no other—godly leaders who understand that this is God's world, Christ inherited it, and we are to take dominion of it to His glory.

Many have begun down the path of studying this material and have not persevered—in their minds it was too hard, too salacious for Christian ears, too unrealistic, too much to grasp, the books were too old or some other “too.” Be assured, like the Scriptures say in the Parable of the Sower, the work you do will *bear fruit a hundredfold* if you stick with it. In the lives of our own children we have already seen tremendous benefit and really have just barely scratched the surface.

Our goal with this text is to make the work easier for you. This text should make approaching *Omnibus*, and other material not previously encountered, come alive in a way that instills confidence, and it should convey a sense that young students (and teachers) can handle it.

We have done all we could to make this text a stand-alone guide for reading, studying and understanding these great books. A couple reference books will prove beneficial as resources for this year as well as the following years. *Western Civilization* by Jackson Spielvogel and *A Short History of Art* by H.W. Janson and Anthony F. Janson are the two main ones. If you have previously used our *Veritas Press History and Bible Curriculum*, you will want to keep the flashcards from them handy, too.

May you be blessed as you dig in and study the hand of God at work in the past and prepare for His use of you in the future.

—Marlin Detweiler

### ADVISORY TO TEACHERS AND PARENTS

In the course of history there has been much fluctuation on what has been deemed age appropriate for young students. And for those of us alive today, there remains great variation as to what is considered age appropriate. The material we have created and the books we have assigned address numerous subjects and ideas that deal with topics (including sex, violence, religious persuasion and a whole host of other ideas) that have been the subject of much discussion of whether they are age appropriate. The judgment we applied in this text has been the same as we apply to our own children.

In the creation of this program we have assumed that it will be used by students in seventh grade and above. Furthermore, we have assumed that there is no part of the Bible deemed inappropriate to discuss with a seventh-grade student. Therefore, the material assumes that the student knows what sex is, that he understands the existence of violence, that he understands there are theological and doctrinal differences to be addressed and that he has the maturity to discern right and wrong.

The worldview we hold and from which we write is distinctly protestant and best summarized in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. The Bible is our only ultimate and infallible rule of faith and practice.

We encourage you to become familiar with the material that your students will be covering in this program in order to avoid problems where you might differ with us on these matters.



# INTRODUCTION



From a distance, the modern world appears to be on a quest for truth on many different levels. In the recent past, white-coated scientists ruled over truth and brought it out to us when it was fit for us or we for it. They told us that something came out of nothing and that order arose from chaos. “Matter and energy—that’s it. Nothing else,” they said. Or perhaps more popularly, “*The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.*” They told us that truth is whatever we can prove scientifically. That’s it. Nothing more. While this seemed a little shortsighted, as a culture we bought this for a while. Not because it made sense, but because those folks seemed so authoritative with their white jackets, and they made a lot of neat gadgets. It seemed, however, that something was missing. More recently, however, a revolt has risen against white jackets. *What is true for me is not true for you.* These folks look for truth in the relationships that exist between people. Truth is subjective rather than rational. These folks are *indie* and cool and a little scruffy around the collar, but they seem so sincere. Still, neither group—indie or white jackets—is willing to submit themselves to Christ, who *is* the truth. The grand quest for truth is really just a charade. It is a myth of the modern world.

As people have started using Omnibus, there have

been a couple of misconceptions that I have noticed cropping up among Omnibus users. Strikingly, the chief misconceptions involve failing to strip away some of the deeply ingrained modern assumptions that have infected us.

The first and greatest fallacy concerning Omnibus is thinking that Omnibus works *ex opere operato*. While this Latin phrase is often connected to medieval views of the sacraments, its substance fits neatly into the modern world. Basically, it means, *if you do it right, it works*, or one could say *the what matters much more than the how*. Reading the Great Books does not work like this. You can read every word in the *Omnibus I, II* and *III* texts, all of the assigned books and any of the “For Further Reading”<sup>1</sup> choices and still miss the mark completely. The Omnibus curriculum only works right if you do it right, or maybe more rightly stated, the Omnibus only works correctly if you read these books with the extremely *unmodern* virtues of faith, hope and love.

Reading with faith is the first test. Any further success hinges on this. As the writer to the Hebrews says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (11:6). Recognizing this, however, we must mourn the fact that most of the reading of the Great Books today is

done without a scrap of faith. You might remember the advice given by the demon Screwtape in Letter 27 when he speaks of gaining wisdom from Old Books:

But in the intellectual climate which we have at last succeeded in producing throughout Western Europe, you needn't bother about [people learning the wisdom of Old Books]. Only the learned read old books and we have now so dealt with the learned that they are of all men the least likely to acquire wisdom by doing so.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, this raises the obvious question of why these “learned people” gain nothing from reading books packed tight with great wisdom. The root of the problem is that they lack faith. Without faith the coherence of the world falls apart. We have witnessed this in the modern world. Everything becomes simply a method to wield power over others or to keep others from wielding power over us. We must admit that most of the reading of the Great Books today is done to this unsavory end. The professor becomes an expert in Dante but never learns the lesson that the Poet is trying to teach him when Dante undergoes the tests of faith, hope and love in Paradise. The professor reads in order to publish in order to retain his position in order to keep his status or to avoid manual labor.

Thankfully, many of us are poised to avoid this temptation—mainly through knowledge of our own ignorance. We come to the Great Books to learn the wisdom of our fathers and can do that effectively, particularly now, when we—as teachers, students, parents, children and editors—admittedly know so little. We are not the “learned,” and in this case that is good.

But how do you know if you are reading in faith? There are a couple of things that you should watch for. First, are you both accepting and rejecting what you should? Few things irk me more than when I am reading with my students, and they are only interested to find some sort of flaw in the author that we are reading. *Augustine's view of creation is weird. Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper is too mystical.* It is not so much that students are wrong when they say these things. It is that they are *so wrong*. Not on the point before them, but in the manner in which they are reading the book. When we read Augustine or Dante or Calvin or Bunyan, we need to remember where we belong—at their feet, listening and learning. They are our fathers, and we should treat them with the respect that they deserve.

Thinking that we have something to say worth listening to is, in fact, a great modern fallacy, and it is a fallacy which, if practiced enough, will keep the person from ever having anything to say that is actually worth listening to. Faith trusts the right people.

Faith, however, also rejects the wrong people. Christ claims that His sheep obey His voice. The implication is clear—the sheep do not obey other voices. In *Omnibus III*, there are a number of other voices shouting for our attention. We should listen to them but not trust them. We will be reading books like the *Communist Manifesto* and *Mein Kampf* this year. These voices are ones that we should hear in order to more firmly and intelligently reject. This practice of rejecting and despising is hopelessly *unmodern*. The modern world tends to reject only one thing—sane standards whereby things can be rejected. Christ, the ultimate standard, has been ejected from the modern courtroom, the modern school, the modern marriage and all things are adversely affected in a very real and significant way because of this lack of faith.

We must also take pains to read with hope. Keeping hope alive as we consider the modern world can be a real challenge. If we consider what has happened to the Christian faith in Western culture over the four-hundred year span considered in *Omnibus III*, it is easy to be downcast. The West, it seems, is running headlong in the wrong direction. It is no wonder that Christian eschatology has gone from the hopeful vision of the future in 1647 when most of the Westminster Divines believed that Protestantism would roll back all forms of unbelief and hasten the kingdom. By the end of the *Omnibus III*, Orwell's disastrous dystopia presented in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seems more realistic than the Pilgrim's Hope for a City on a Hill. Our fathers dreamt of a world where Christ's name would be praised by every lip; today most people long to be taken out of this world. The modern world is crumbling all around us, and everyone is scrambling for shelter.

The fact that the modern world is full of hopelessness should shock us. Many of the diseases and disasters that caused horrible suffering in the past have been eradicated. Other concerns have been lessened. More people than ever live with easy access to food, water and heat. Still, the modern world is filled with misery, and it seems that many of the most blessed end up the most miserable.

This does give us one unique opportunity, however. If

we can have hope, we will stand out. Today, many wander through a desert (T.S. Eliot would say a Waste Land). If they see real hope in us, they will be open to experiencing it—if and only if, they see real hope in us, not some sort of cheap veneer which hides a corrupt life.

God has given us great reason to hope. He has filled the world with pleasure—and the best of it is available to us with his blessing. Sometimes, especially when you are in the midst of some problem, this is hard to see. Recently, I was talking with a young man who was going through some trouble. We were sitting on my back patio after enjoying a wonderful meal. The evening was cool but not too cool, and stars were twinkling. He said, staring into his own soul, “My world is so dark.” I asked him to look outside of himself and consider the real and actually external world. He had been blessed with a wonderful meal, interesting conversation and a cool summer breeze. The heavens were smiling down on us. “The world out here is not so bad,” I replied.

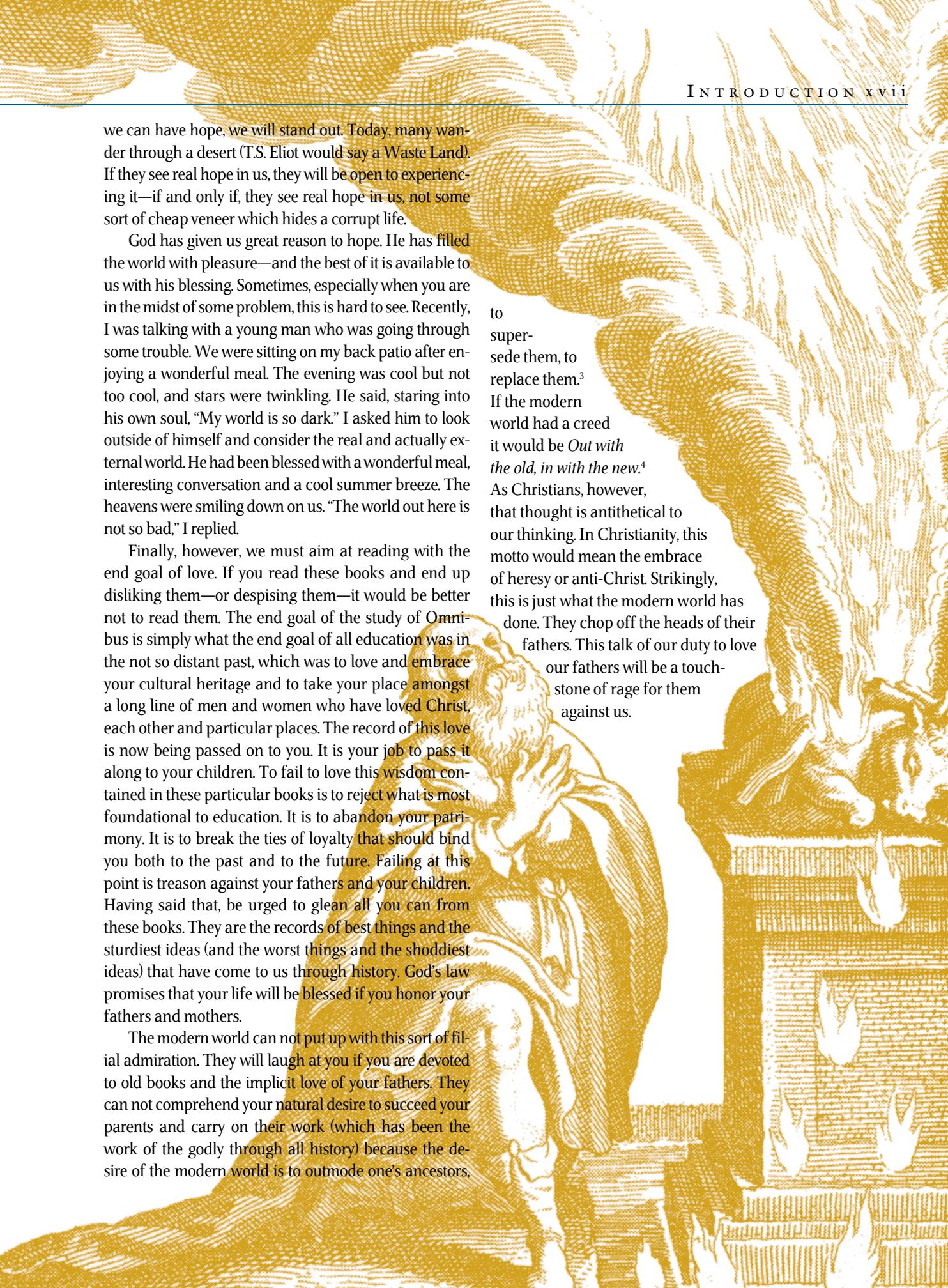
Finally, however, we must aim at reading with the end goal of love. If you read these books and end up disliking them—or despising them—it would be better not to read them. The end goal of the study of *Omni-bus* is simply what the end goal of all education was in the not so distant past, which was to love and embrace your cultural heritage and to take your place amongst a long line of men and women who have loved Christ, each other and particular places. The record of this love is now being passed on to you. It is your job to pass it along to your children. To fail to love this wisdom contained in these particular books is to reject what is most foundational to education. It is to abandon your patrimony. It is to break the ties of loyalty that should bind you both to the past and to the future. Failing at this point is treason against your fathers and your children. Having said that, be urged to glean all you can from these books. They are the records of best things and the sturdiest ideas (and the worst things and the shoddiest ideas) that have come to us through history. God’s law promises that your life will be blessed if you honor your fathers and mothers.

The modern world can not put up with this sort of filial admiration. They will laugh at you if you are devoted to old books and the implicit love of your fathers. They can not comprehend your natural desire to succeed your parents and carry on their work (which has been the work of the godly through all history) because the desire of the modern world is to outmode one’s ancestors,

to supersede them, to replace them.<sup>3</sup>

If the modern world had a creed it would be *Out with the old, in with the new.*<sup>4</sup>

As Christians, however, that thought is antithetical to our thinking. In Christianity, this motto would mean the embrace of heresy or anti-Christ. Strikingly, this is just what the modern world has done. They chop off the heads of their fathers. This talk of our duty to love our fathers will be a touchstone of rage for them against us.



There is one other fallacy to debunk. This one is particularly relevant to those of you cloistered in some far off corner of the Empire wondering—and I am sure you have—if you are alone. Considering that perhaps you are the only one on your block or in your city, county or state reading these books, you may feel like Elijah at Mount Horeb. He thought that he was all alone—the Last of the True Israelites. Most theologians pile on poor Elijah at this point. “He has a bad attitude,” say the commentators, “What a lack of faith! Just after the victory at Mount Carmel!” Note, however, that the text does not condemn Elijah.<sup>5</sup> God sustains, encourages and meets with Elijah. So, if you feel like you are alone, you might, like Elijah, have good reasons for feeling this way. You might go to church and have to suffer through Sunday School material that could inoculate people against Christianity. You might get together with your family or friends and feel like a bit of an odd duck. Today, we are, but two things should encourage you. First, historically, we must recognize that we are (and will be for all eternity) the majority. G.K. Chesterton, in his classic *Orthodoxy*, claims, “Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead.” Have no doubt. If the dead could vote for what is most important, to read the books that you are reading would win in a landslide. There is more good news! The dead are going to rise. The work that you are doing now and the loves that you are feeding now

might well enable you to have something interesting to talk

about with your great-great-great-grandfather when you meet him. The second reason to be encouraged that you are not alone is that the number of people reading these books and using this book is increasing. Recently, I was at a church service in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in which we had a couple of visitors. I got to meet both of them after the service. One was the minister filling in for our pastor. He was from Allentown, Pennsylvania. The other was from Australia. Both of them were using Omnibus with their children. You are not alone.

So take courage, and take up your fathers' sword.

—G. Tyler Fischer  
Trinity Season, 2006

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 For some of you this might be the most staggering and audacious part of each chapter. The “For Further Reading” list—as if you could possibly be sitting around looking for more reading—could add a lot.
- 2 C.S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996) 150.
- 3 If, as I am guessing, in our day when the first generation to escape the womb—made deadly by their parents' acquiescence to abortion—enacts euthanasia laws that effectively turn the table on their elderly parents, it will be the fulfillment of some vast cultural parable.
- 4 While mentioning filial admiration, note that if you desire a much more cogent presentation of some of these thoughts you can find them in Wendell Berry's essay “The Work of Local Culture,” which can be found, among other works, in his fine books of essays called *What are People For?*
- 5 I was blessed to have Dr. Dale Ralph Davis point this out to me.



# USING OMNIBUS

Students throughout the ages have read the books that you are about to read. These books have been their teachers and have done a lot to make them the great men and women that they became. Now, you are being welcomed to come along and join with them and to learn from them. It is important to realize that some of these books are not to be learned from uncritically—some of them we learn from by the problems they caused. Before you get started, however, there are a few terms you need to understand. First among them is the word *omnibus*. This Latin word means “all encompassing” or “everything.” So, in a very loose sense, the Omnibus curriculum is where we talk about everything. All of the important ideas are set on the table to explore and understand. In a more technical sense, however, this Omnibus focuses our attention on the ideas, arguments and expressions of the Western Canon, which have also become known as the Great Books of Western Civilization.

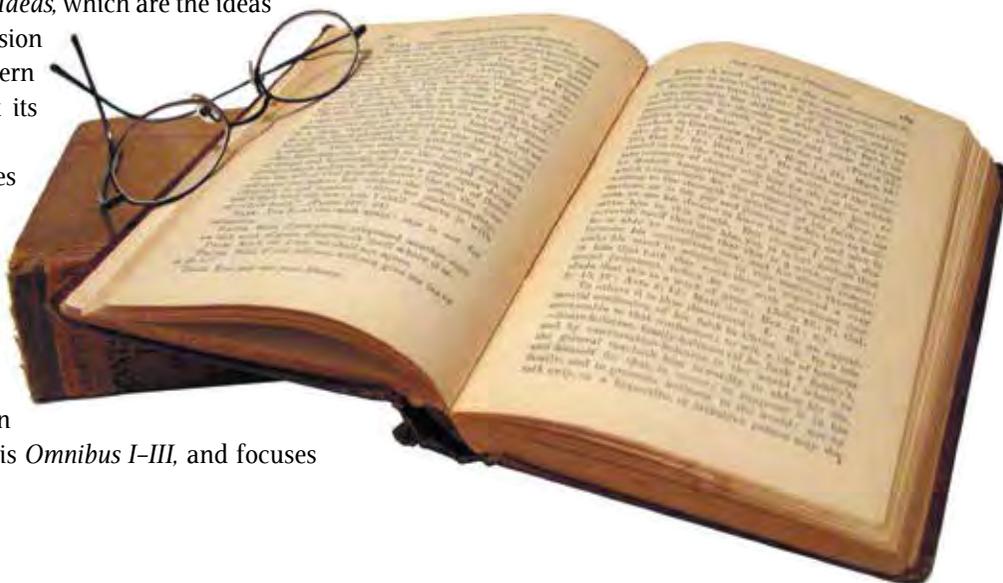
The *Great Books* are those books that have guided and informed thinking people in Western Civilization. They are the books that have stood the test of time. They come from many sources, starting with the Hebrews and Greeks and extending to their Roman, European and Colonial heirs. These books represent the highest theological and philosophical contemplations, the most accurate historical record and the most brilliant literary tradition that have come down to us from our forefathers. The Great Books lead us into a discussion of the *Great Ideas*, which are the ideas that have driven discussion and argument in Western Civilization throughout its illustrious history.

The Omnibus takes students on a path through the Great Books and the Great Ideas in two cycles. It follows the chronological pattern of Ancient, Medieval and Modern periods. The first cycle is *Omnibus I-III*, and focuses

on sharpening the skills of logical analysis. The second is *Omnibus IV-VI*, focusing on increasing the rhetorical skills of the student.

TITLE	PERIOD	YEARS	EMPHASIS
Omnibus I	Ancient	Beginning–A.D. 70	Logic
Omnibus II	Medieval	70–1563	Logic
Omnibus III	Modern	1563–Present	Logic
Omnibus IV	Ancient	Beginning–A.D. 180	Rhetoric
Omnibus V	Medieval	180–1563	Rhetoric
Omnibus VI	Modern	1563–Present	Rhetoric

Two kinds of books are read concurrently in the Omnibus, *Primary* and *Secondary*. The list of Primary Books for each year is what might be termed the traditional “Great Books.” On this list are authors like Homer, Dante and Calvin. The Secondary Books are ones that give balance to our reading (balance in the general areas of Theology, History and Literature). The secondary list contains works such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*. These books are usually easier, and less class time is devoted to them. Each year is similarly organized. There are thirty-seven weeks’ worth of material. Each week is divided into eight sessions of roughly seventy minutes each, optimally. The time estimate is approximate. Home schooling situations might vary greatly from student to student. Five of these sessions are committed to the study of the Primary Books. The other three are dedicated to the Secondary Books.



## KINDS OF SESSIONS

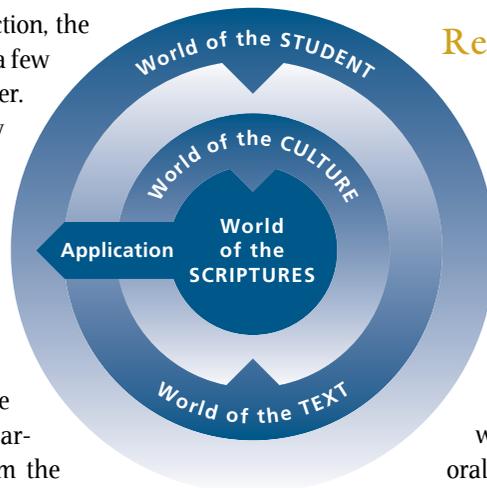
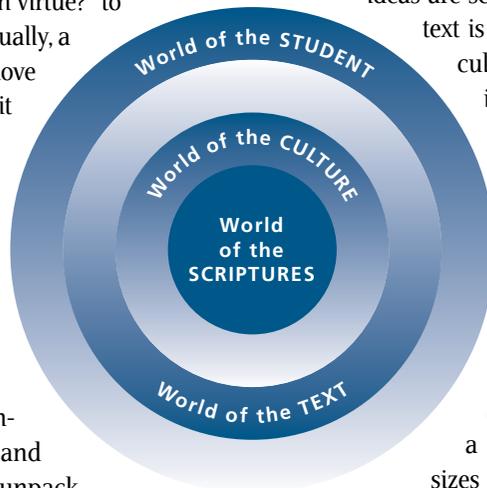
### Prelude

Each chapter is introduced with a session called a Prelude. In each Prelude we seek to stir up the interest of the students by examining a provoking question that is or could be raised from the book. This is done in the section called A Question to Consider. When the teacher introduces this question he should seek to get the students' initial reaction to the question. These questions might range from "Can you teach virtue?" to "Are all sins equally wicked?" Usually, a student in the Logic years will love to argue his answers. Generally, it will prove helpful for a student to read the introductory essay in the student text *before* tackling A Question to Consider. Sometimes a teacher may want to introduce the question first to stir up interest. This "introductory material" will give the students both the general information on the work and a worldview essay which will unpack some of the issues that will be dealt with in the book. After reading this section, the student will be asked to answer a few questions concerning the chapter. These questions are based only on the introductory material they have just read, not on the reading of the book itself.

### Discussion

The Discussion is the most frequently used class in the Omnibus. It has five parts. The Discussion seeks to explore a particular idea within a book from the perspective of the text itself, our culture and the Bible. It begins, like the Prelude, with A Question to Consider, which is the first of "four worlds" that will be explored, the *world of the student*. The *world of the text* is discovered through the Text Analysis questions. These questions unlock the answer that the book itself supplies for this question (e.g., when reading the

*Aeneid*, we are trying to find out how the author, Virgil, would answer this question). After this, in the Cultural Analysis section, the student examines the *world of the culture*, how our culture would answer the same question. Many times this will be vastly different from the answer of the student or the author. The Biblical Analysis questions seek to unearth what God's Word teaches concerning this question. We can call this discovering the *world of the Scriptures*. So the progression of the questions is important. First, the students' own opinions and ideas are set forth. Second, the opinion of the text is considered. Next, the view of our culture is studied. Finally, the teaching of the Scriptures is brought to bear. All other opinions, beliefs and convictions must be informed and corrected by the standard of God's Word. Often, after hearing the Word of God, the material seeks to apply the discovered truth to the life of the students. Finally, the students are challenged to think through a Summa Question which synthesizes all they have learned about this "highest" idea from the session.



### Recitation

The Recitation is a set of grammatical questions that helps to reveal the student's comprehension of the facts or ideas of the book. This can be done in a group setting or individually with or by students. The Recitation questions can also be answered in written form and checked against the answers, but we encourage doing the Recitation orally whenever possible. It provides great opportunity for wandering down rabbit trails of particular interest or launching into any number of discussions. Of course, we cannot predict what current events are occurring when your students study this material. Recitations can prove a great time to direct conversation that relates to the questions and material being covered in this type of class.

## Analysis

This session of worldview analysis is focused on comparing a character, culture or author you are studying to some other character, culture or author. This might be done by comparing two or three characters' or authors' answers to the same questions. This type of session effectively helps students to understand the differences between cultures and characters, especially in the arena of worldview.

## Writing

There are a variety of writing assignments all focusing on expanding a student's ability to write effectively and winsomely. In the earlier years the focus is on the basics. This includes exercises of the *progymnasmata*, beginning writing exercises used by Greek and Roman students in antiquity and by their medieval and colonial counterparts. Also, essay writing and argument is at the forefront. The assignments in these sessions will progress each year from teaching the basics to including composition in fiction and poetry.

## Activity

These classes are focused on bringing creative ideas into the mix. Activities might include debates, trials, sword fights, board games and dramatic productions. Music and art appreciation are also included in this category. These classes are harder to prepare for, but are quite important. Often, the student will remember and understand (and love) the material only if our discussions and recitations are mixed with these unforgettable activities. There are also a number of field trips that are recommended. Often, these are recommended in two categories: ones that most people can do and ones that are "outside the box" experiences that only some will be able to do. The first category might send you to the local museum or planetarium. The latter will recommend ideas like chartering a boat at Nantucket to experience what Ishmael felt on the *Pequod*. Careful pre-planning is important to be able to take advantage of these opportunities.

## Review and Evaluation

Weekly testing is not recommended. Students will weary of it and will spend all of their time preparing for tests instead of learning. Choose your tests carefully. Even if a chapter has an evaluation at the end, know that you can use it as a review. The test and the review

both work toward the same goal of demonstrating the knowledge of the students and cementing the material into their minds.

Evaluations are divided into three sections. The first section tests the student's *grammatical* knowledge of the book. Answers to these questions should be short, consisting of a sentence or two. The second section is the *logic* section. In this section students are asked to answer questions concerning the ideas of the book and to show that they understand how ideas connect with each other within the book. The final section is called *lateral thinking*. This section asks students to relate ideas in one book with the ideas that they have studied in other books. For instance, the student might be asked to compare Homer's ideal heroes (Achilles and Odysseus) with Virgil's character Aeneas to discover how the Roman conception of the hero was different from the Greek idea. Finally, students often will be asked to compare and contrast these pagan ideas with a biblical view. So, students might be asked to contrast Homer and Virgil's teaching on what is heroic with the ultimate heroic work of Christ. In this way students demonstrate that they can set ideas in their proper biblical context, showing the relationship between the writing of one author and another. Students should be allowed to have their books and Bibles available during testing. If they are having to do extensive reading during the tests, they are not going to be able to finish or do well anyway. Students should not be permitted to have notes of any kind during the test.

## Optional Sessions and Activities

For each chapter there are also some optional classes included. These allow the teacher to be flexible and to add to, or omit classes as they think wise. Usually the number of optional classes is approximately one optional class for every week that the book is taught. There are also a number of optional activities included. These activities allow you to spend additional time on ideas that your students might find fascinating.

Midterms and finals have been provided on the *Omnibus* Teacher's Edition CD. These tests are optional, but can be a helpful gauge of how much the student is retaining. Usually midterms are given around the ninth week of the semester, and finals are given during the last week of the semester. Midterm exams are designed to be completed in a class period. (You might want to give the students slightly more time if possible.)

The finals, however, are made to be completed over two class periods (or roughly two and a half hours). Most students will finish more quickly, but some might need all of the time. If possible, give the finals when the student has no time limit. These tests, as well, are given with open books and Bibles, but no notes, and they feature the same sections as the review and evaluation (i.e., grammar, logic and lateral thinking).

For those getting ready to teach this curriculum, preparation should be carefully considered. The ma-

terial has been designed so that it can be taught with little preparation, but this is not recommended. If you want your students to get the most out of this program, you should prepare carefully. First, make sure you are familiar with the book being studied. Also, consult the Teaching Tips on the Teacher's Edition CD before teaching. Knowing where you are going in the end will help you to efficiently move through the material and interact with your students effectively.

## WHAT'S ON THE TEACHER CD?

### Teacher's Edition of the Text

The teacher text includes additional pages of material, with suggested answers for all the questions, writing assignments and activities in the daily sessions.

### Lesson Plans

Session-by-session lesson plans for each chapter.

### Midterms and Exams

Tests with answer keys for both semesters. Three versions are provided for each test (labeled A, B and C).

### Grading Tools

An explanation of our suggested grading routine, including sample and blank grading charts, as well as a grading calculator in a popular spreadsheet format.

### Requirements and Use

The CD is Windows and Macintosh compatible, and requires Acrobat Reader. The installer for the latest version is right on the CD or may be downloaded for free at <http://get.adobe.com/reader>.

#### WINDOWS OS

If the main application does not appear automatically, double-click the file named "Omnibus-III-TE".

#### MACINTOSH OS

Double-click the appropriate PDF file in the Teacher's Manual Files folder to open the desired chapter.

# THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Imagine someone throwing a basketball at your head, suddenly, without any warning. And with that throw, all he says is, “Think fast!” And so you do think fast, and manage to catch the ball—thanking the Lord for quick reflexes.

But suppose it was not a basketball he threw, but something much harder. What if what he threw at your head was a question, a hard question? The question was, “What do you think . . . about *everything*?” How would you go about summarizing your view of the world—about God, about Jesus, about the creation, about men and women, and about the end of the world? You are not given any time to research the matter because your

questioner wants to know now.

How could you respond? Just as reflexes can be trained by going out for the basketball team and working hard in practice, so these questions should be worked through during the course of your education. You should deal with them in the classroom, and if the practice is enjoyable (as good classroom work is), then you will be prepared for any emergency and not have to worry about that hard question bouncing away from you across the gym.

This is how you should think of the chapters of the Westminster Confession. They are series of basketballs being thrown at your head during



practice, and the man throwing them is a particularly disciplined coach. He doesn't want to hurt you—he wants you to *avoid* getting hurt when one day on a bus, years from now, the person next to you turns and asks, “So what do you think about how predestination and free will should be harmonized?”

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### Author and Context

The Westminster Confession was not written by one individual man or woman. Rather, it was written in the middle of the seventeenth century (1643–1649) by thirty laymen and 151 clergymen. The ministers represented different theological views regarding what the relationship between church and state should be like—and these differences were very important because the ministers' task was to develop a confession of faith that could be used in the three kingdoms of Ireland, Scotland, and England, as well as a Directory of Worship that would standardize the worship in the various kingdoms. The four basic groups assigned to the assembly were the Episcopalians (Anglicans), the Presbyterians, the independents and the Erastians. Of these, the Presbyterians were the largest group. The Episcopalians did not come because they were loyal to the king, and the king had not granted his permission to come. This was significant because the Assembly was called by the Long Parliament during the English Civil War, and the Long Parliament was on the opposite side of the king in that war. It is important to note that the resultant Confession was in many respects a consensus document be-

Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector of England in 1653, after brilliantly leading the military forces of Parliament in efforts to curb the power of King Charles I during the English Civil War. We can see the power he wielded by something Patrick Henry said in a speech in 1765: “Caesar had his Brutus; Charles the First, his Cromwell; and George the Third may profit by their example.”

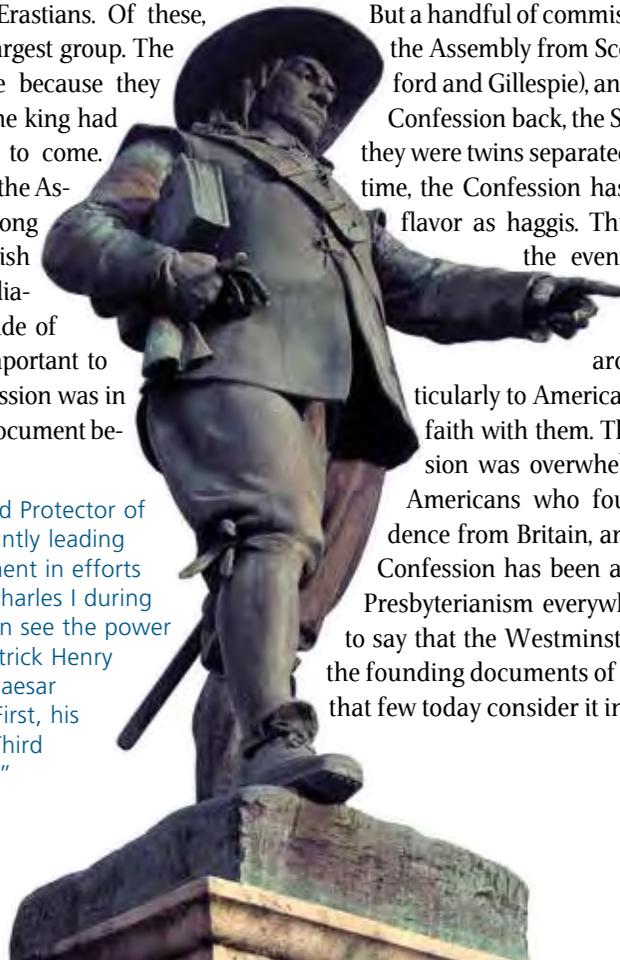
tween the parties that did come.

In some ways, we cannot say that 181 men wrote this document, because, as we have noted, some didn't come. But that is the nature of committee assignments. And as mentioned, the Presbyterians were the biggest and most influential group, and they wanted to have a representative system of government in both church and state, although they were not against the monarchy. The Erastians wanted the church to be under the control of the state, a view that many members of Parliament shared. And the independents, although a small group, had the support of Oliver Cromwell, who came to power as Lord Protector<sup>1</sup> during this time.

### Significance

Although the Westminster Confession has to be considered a failure in terms of the objective intended for it (the unification of the three kingdoms of England, Ireland, and Scotland), in another sense it has to be considered one of the most influential confessions of faith in the history of the world. This is because in the place where it was drafted (England), it never really caught on, and after the return of the monarchy, the influence of English Presbyterians went to almost zero.

But a handful of commissioners had been sent to the Assembly from Scotland (men like Rutherford and Gillespie), and when they brought the Confession back, the Scots greeted it as though they were twins separated at birth. And since that time, the Confession has been as Scottish in its flavor as haggis. This is important because the events of the next century would send the Scots and the Scots/Irish all around the world, but particularly to America. And they brought their faith with them. The Westminster Confession was overwhelmingly the faith of the Americans who fought for their independence from Britain, and the framework of the Confession has been a formative influence on Presbyterianism everywhere. It is not too much to say that the Westminster Confession is one of the founding documents of *our* nation. It is a shame that few today consider it in this way.



## Setting

The seventeenth century was a time of monumental upheaval. During this time, the great migration to America began in earnest. London was afflicted with the great plague and then a great fire. The nation erupted into civil war, and Charles I was first deposed from the throne and then executed. Oliver Cromwell refused to become king, but he did reign as “Lord Protector.” After he died, his son Richard was not able to hold things together, and Charles II was called back to the throne in what is called the *Restoration*. After the Restoration, many Puritan ministers were persecuted for their role (or what was assumed to have been their role) in England’s troubles. The rule of Cromwell was called the *Interregnum* (meaning “between the kings”). In the midst of all this chaos, the theologians and ministers of the Westminster Assembly were summoned and commanded to “do theology!” This is a difficult task in the best of times, and this was most certainly not the best of times. C.S. Lewis described the historical setting of the development of Protestant theology very well: “In fact, however, these questions were raised at a moment when they immediately became embittered and entangled with a whole complex of matters theologically irrelevant, and therefore attracted the fatal attention both of government and the mob . . . It was as if men were set to conduct a metaphysical argument at a fair, in competition or (worse still) forced collaboration with the cheapjacks and the round-about, under the eyes of an armed and vigilant police force who frequently changed sides.”<sup>2</sup> The Westminster Confession is an outstanding example of this, and it is astounding that theology of this caliber was the result.

It is too often assumed that the English Civil War simply had two sides—the Crown and Parliament—where, depending on your prejudices, you can put white hats and black hats on one side or the other. But to describe Parliament as being in the hands of “the Puritans” is woefully inadequate. We have to remember that there were multiple Protestant factions involved, as well as varying national interests. The Presbyterians were dominant in the Westminster Assembly, while the independents were a vocal minority. But this vocal minority had clout because the military genius and success of Oliver Cromwell dominated Parliament. Cromwell was a conscientious Christian man, but one of the Presbyterian nicknames for him was Cromwell the Destroyer.

The best way to get an overview of the English Civil War is this: Charles I was defeated in battle by the army of Parliament, with Cromwell as its general. King Charles was a treacherous man, and at the last it was decided that he had to be executed, and so he was beheaded. After this, Cromwell ruled as the Lord Protector on the basis of his military prowess. When he died, his son Richard did not have the gifts to continue the *ad hoc* political set-up that had been created. Charles II was then brought back and the monarchy was restored.

In this conflict, the Anglicans—who believe that the church should be governed by bishops (episcopacy)—generally supported the king. The Presbyterians supported the monarchy as an institution, but not the policies of Charles I. When Charles was executed, many of the Presbyterians were appalled. The independents were more radical and republican in their politics, and many of them were opposed not only to the policies of Charles, but also to the monarchy as an institution as well. The other term used earlier (Erastian) is a term that simply means that the state should control the church. The Erastians in Parliament were independents who wanted the church to be subordinate to the state. But of course, Anglicans were Erastian also (in another sense).

## Worldview

The Westminster Confession of Faith addresses many topics, and so, in a short essay like this one, it is necessary to be selective. The principle of selection we will use here is to follow the broad outlines of John Calvin’s great book, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The Westminster theologians were Calvinistic theologians, living a century later, and they formalized and refined many of the doctrinal issues first articulated by the great Genevan reformer. We will therefore look at what the Westminster Confession says on the topics of God the Creator, Christ the Redeemer, the question of personal salvation and the doctrine of the Church.

Remember that a systematic understanding of any given text is really synonymous with a formal understanding of the text. Understanding of a work is impossible unless there is an ability to summarize it, and summary is nothing but a systematic distillation. The real enemy is systematic *misunderstanding*.

of the text. The other danger is a correct systematic understanding of the text which is divorced from any living knowledge of the text itself. Imagine a student who had read the Cliff's Notes and Barnes Notes for a work of literature multiple times but had never read the work itself. His knowledge would perhaps be accurate, but *barren*.

## God the Creator

So let us begin with God the Creator. Not that this should be necessary to say, but Christianity is monotheistic. The living and true God is the One Who made heaven and earth, to Whom the Christian faith points, and within Whom the Christian faith operates. "There is but one only (Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6), living, and true God (1 Thess. 1:9; Jer. 10:10)" (WCF 2.1).

This triune God is

"a most pure spirit (John 4:24), invisible (1 Tim. 1:17), without body, parts (Deut. 4:15-16; John 4:24; Luke 24:39), or passions (Acts 14:11, 15)" (WCF 2.1). This means that God's being is spiritual, not material, and He cannot be seen with our eyes. When it is said that He is without body, parts or passions, this refers to the fact of God's simplicity. He is not a complicated, tangled knot of attributes. But we have to be careful with the truth that He is without "passions." If this is handled wrongly, it can make the orthodox position vulnerable to the charge of making God into an impersonal force, like electricity. His anger, of course, is not like a man's temper tantrum—a man's passion. But neither is it like a calm summer day. His anger is far more terrible than a man's anger.

God is "immutable (James 1:17; Mal. 3:6), immense (1 Kings 8:27; Jer. 23:23-24), eternal (Ps. 90:2; 1 Tim. 1:17), incomprehensible (Ps. 145:3), almighty (Gen. 17:1; Rev. 4:8), most wise (Rom. 16:27), most holy (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8), most free (Ps. 115:3), most abso-

During the English Civil War, those who supported the king were the Royalists (nicknamed the Cavaliers). They were opposed by the Parliamentarians (who were nicknamed the Roundheads). Although the Roundhead soldiers may have worn rounded helmets, the term actually referred to the typical short hairstyle of the Puritans, who tended to be supporters of the Parliamentary cause. The word was meant to be derogatory, and in the New Model Army it was even a punishable offense to call a fellow soldier a Roundhead.



lute (Exod. 3:14).” From this we know that God cannot change or be changed. He is boundless, immense. He is eternal, which is not the same as everlasting. Eternity refers to an existence independent of time. A finite head (like ours!) cannot contain the full truth about God; He is incomprehensible. He has all power, but the power is not disconnected from wisdom. His holiness is the confluence of all His attributes, just as white is the combination of all colors. He is free, not constrained by anything other than His own nature and attributes. He is the standard by which anything else is to be judged.

God is “most loving . . . and withal, most just, and terrible in His judgments (Neh. 9:32–33) (WCF 2.1). The world is a display case for many of God’s attributes. In a world without sin, God’s mercy and justice would have gone unrevealed. As this is intolerable, God determined to create a world in which sinners would rebel against Him, some of them receiving mercy and others justice. Those who receive mercy understand that He is most loving and gracious. They see His patience and the abundance of His kindness, including His willingness to put away sin and iniquity. Further, His goodness is shown in how He rewards those who seek Him. At the same time, with others, His justice is plainly in evidence. He is terrible, and He hates sin. Apart from atonement, in no way can God be brought to clear the guilty.

In order for God to be this way—loving, just, compassionate, and so forth—it is necessary for Him to be *triune*. “In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost (1 John 5:7; Matt. 3:16–17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14)” (WCF 2.3). When we confess the Trinity, we are confessing the tri-unity of the one God. One and three are not describing the same thing. *One* refers to the substance, power, and eternity of God, while *three* refers to the Persons within the Godhead, who each have all the attributes of the one God. Each Person of the Trinity is eternal, meaning that the Trinity did not begin at a certain point, being mere Unity before that. The three Persons involved are given to us in Scripture: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

This triune God is the sovereign God over all. “God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass (Eph. 1:11; Rom. 11:33; Heb. 6:17; Rom. 9:15, 18): yet so, as thereby neither

is God the author of sin (James 1:13, 17; 1 John 1:5), nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established (Acts 2:23; Matt. 17:12; Acts 4:27–28; John 19:11; Prov. 16:33)” (WCF 3.1). This part of the Confession describes what is usually called predestination but should more properly be called foreordination. The word *predestination* is usually applied in Scripture to the surety that the elect will come to the resurrection of the body. But the truth represented by the common use of this word is sure; before the world was made, from all eternity, God decreed the number of hairs on that yellow dog’s back. This is something He did in all wisdom. What was so decreed is settled, both freely and alterably.

This was done in such a way that God cannot be charged with sin. This is, of course, true by definition, but it is important to emphasize the point. God is the Creator of a world which is now full of sin, and yet He cannot be charged with the guilt of it. This Confession says that God ordains that a sinful action, let us call it Theft A, or Treachery B, will take place, and yet God is not the author of it. Another position holds that God *foreknows* Theft A and yet is not the author of it. Still another position says that God does not know the future, and He created the world anyway. But if men can charge God with being implicated in evil, then they may with justice continue to charge Him as long as the doctrine of creation is affirmed. There is no escape; if God is the Creator, then He is responsible for the presence of that evil Theft A in the world He made. We might as well face it.

At the same time, this does not make God the master puppeteer. What He foreordained was a world full of free choices. He not only ordained that a man would be in the ice cream store choosing one of 31 flavors, He also decreed which flavor would be chosen. But this is not all; He ordained that the cookie dough ice cream would be chosen by this man *freely*. God ordains non-coercively. This makes no sense to some people, but how many basic doctrines do make sense? We do not understand how God made Jupiter from nothing any more than how He determined my actions today without annihilating me. But He does. Remember, the point being made here is not that divine sovereignty is merely *consistent* with secondary freedom, but rather, that it is that which *establishes* it.

## Christ the Redeemer

What we know about God, we know because God has revealed Himself to us in Jesus. And this is why it is very important for us to focus on Jesus.

“It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose

and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man (Isa. 42:1; 1 Pet. 1:19–20; John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:5), the Prophet (Acts 3:22), Priest (Heb. 5:5–6), and King (Ps. 2:6. Luke 1:33), the Head and Savior of His Church (Eph. 5:23), the Heir of all things (Heb. 1:2), and Judge of the world (Acts 17:31): unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed (John 17:6; Ps. 22:30; Isa. 53:10), and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified (1 Tim. 2:6; Isa. 55:4–5; 1 Cor. 1:30)” (WCF 8.1).

Jesus Christ is the Elect One of God. The only-begotten Son of God was chosen to fill many of-fices. The first was that of Mediator, bridging the divide between men and God. He was ordained to teach His people, filling the office of Prophet. He was chosen to be our Priest, presenting a sacrifice on our behalf to God. He was chosen to be King, so that we might have someone to rule over us. His position of authority is organic; He is the Head and Savior of the Church. He will inherit everything and be the sovereign Judge over all things. From all eternity, a particular people were given to the Son to be His seed, and what we call history is the process in which we see the out-working of that gift. In history, we were redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

In order to reveal God to man, it was the pleasure of God to become a man. Now when the Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Word of God, became a man, this led not only to our salvation, but also to lots of interesting questions.



*In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding: the Son is eternally begotten of the Father: the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son. This painting, *Trinity* (1635–1636), is by Jusepe de Ribera.*

The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 5:20; Phil. 2:6; Gal. 4:4), with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin (Heb. 2:14, 16–17; Heb. 4:15); being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance (Luke 1:27, 31, 35. Gal. 4:4). So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion (Luke 1:35; Col. 2:9; Rom. 9:5; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 Tim. 3:16). Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man (Rom. 1:3–4; 1 Tim. 2:5). (WCF 8.2)

The second person of the Trinity, being infinite, *added* the finitude of human nature to His attributes. The finitude of the human nature of Christ is not to be understood as a subtraction from the divine nature. In taking on human nature, He took on all its essential properties and limitations, the only exception to this being sin. The fact that He was conceived by the Holy Ghost did not make Mary a “surrogate mother.” He was conceived without a human father but was conceived “of her substance.” In other words, she was truly His mother in every sense of the word.

In this mystery of the Incarnation, two natures (divine and human) were joined. The two natures were inseparably joined, which is to say, the Incarnation was *permanent*. Neither of the natures was altered by this union, meaning that the one person involved, the Lord Jesus Christ, is rightly said to be truly God and truly man.

The Lord Jesus, in His human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure (Ps. 45:7; John 3:34), having in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3); in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell (Col. 1:19); to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth (Heb. 7:26; John 1:14), He might be thoroughly furnished to execute the

office of a Mediator and Surety (Acts 10:38; Heb. 12:28; 7:22). (WCF 8.3)

The human nature of Christ did not “tag along” as He fulfilled the ministry appointed to Him. The Spirit of God was upon Him, sanctifying and anointing Him as man above all measure. Because of the work of the Spirit, Christ was filled with all wisdom and knowledge, and in Him all fullness came to dwell. The human nature of Christ was not a hindrance in the work of mediation but was rather an essential aspect of His qualification to execute that office.

“This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake (Ps. 40:7–8; Heb. 10:5–10; John 10:18; Phil. 2:8) . . . was crucified, and died (Phil 2:8), was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption (Acts 2:23–24, 27; 13:37; Rom. 6:9). On the third day He arose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:3–5)” (WCF 8.4).

Christ willingly submitted to this requirement of the Father. In order to enable Him to perform His ministry, He was born of a woman, under the law. He lived in obedience to the law perfectly. Despite His obedience (and in some senses, because of it), He suffered grievously. He was crucified, He died, and was buried briefly but was not in the grave long enough to see corruption. When He rose from the dead, it was with and in the same body He had had during His passion. He has that same body now that He ascended into heaven, where He has a position of ultimate authority at the Father's right hand. In heaven, He prays for His saints and will return from heaven to judge all men and angels, which He will do at the end of the world.

## Personal Salvation

“Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifieth (Rom. 8:30; 3:24); not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone . . .” (WCF 11.1). God justifies those He calls, but this justification must not be understood as an infusion of righteousness. Rather, justification is the pardon for sins and the legal reckoning of our persons as righteous. It is important that we do not stumble through a misunderstanding of the basis of this. We are justified for Christ's sake only. God does not justify us for anything done by us, and, far more important,

for anything done in us (even by Him). Nor does God justify us “because of” our faith—rather He justifies us because of Christ’s obedience and work, and this is appropriated by us through faith. Understanding these prepositions (in the gut and in the heart) is a matter of life and death, heaven and hell.

We are saved through faith alone but never through a faith that is alone. Saving faith is never lonely. We can separate faith from other graces and virtues logically and conceptually, but not practically. We may distinguish but never separate (WCF 11.2).

This justification is permanent, and God never ceases to see a justified person as perfect. This has reference to the person’s legal status; he is secure in his position within the family of God. And yet, because he is in the family of God, God does exhibit a fatherly displeasure for sin. It is the difference between having justification and having the joy of justification. A child awaiting a spanking in the basement is just as much a member of the family as he ever was. However, it can be said that he is not happy about being a member of the family (WCF 11.5).

The faith that receives the gift of this justification is itself a gift from God. “The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls (Heb. 10:39), is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts (2 Cor. 4:13; Eph. 1:17–19; 2:8), and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word (Rom. 10:14, 17), by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened (1 Pet. 2:2; Acts 20:32; Rom. 4:11; Luke 17:5; Rom. 1:16–17)”. (WCF 14.1).

The ordinary course of events is this: the Word is preached, and God uses that Word to transform a sinner’s heart by the agency of the Holy Spirit. As a result of this transformed heart, the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls. If they could have repented and believed with their old heart, they would not have needed a new one. But once this transformation is complete, the Word and resultant faith do not disappear. The Word, along with baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and prayer, works to increase and strengthen the faith of the believer. The work following conversion has much in common with the work of conversion.

“By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein (John 4:42; 1 Thess.

2:13; 1 John 5:10; Acts 24:14)” (WCF 14.2). The faith which is worked in us by the Spirit causes us to believe anything revealed in the Bible as true. This is done because the quickened individual sees the authority of God Himself in the Scriptures. However, although God is always the one speaking, He does not always say the same thing. In some passages, He threatens, causing the faithful to tremble. He commands, causing the faithful to seek the way of obedience. In other places, He promises, causing the faithful to trust in the promises for eternal life, as well as for the present life. But the center place is occupied with the Word, which brings us to accept, receive, and rest upon Christ alone for our justification, sanctification, and eternal life. All this is done under the terms of the covenant of grace, set forth in the Scriptures.

“This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong (Heb. 5:13–14; Rom. 4:19–20; Matt. 6:30; 8:10); may be often and many ways assailed, and weakened, but gets the victory (Luke 22:31–32; Eph. 6:16; 1 John 5:4–5); growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance, through Christ (Heb. 6:11–12; 10:22; Col. 2:2), who is both the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2)” (WCF 14.3). This saving faith is not to be understood as a standard unit of divine manufacture. Rather, it is like an organic plant. If it is alive, it will grow up into full assurance of faith at some point, whether in this life or in the life to come. But while in this life, the faith in one man may look quite different from the faith in another man. Faith admits of degrees and may be weak or strong, great or small, triumphant or cautious. But regardless, genuine faith gets the victory.

And of course, true faith is not possible apart from repentance. “Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace” (WCF 15.1). Ministers of Christ are not just to preach faith in Christ; they must also preach repentance unto life. But they are not only to preach repentance; they are to do so as an evangelical grace, that is, repentance as a gift from God. Repentance is not something we do to earn anything from God, and yet “it is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30–31)” (WCF 15.3). Repentance is necessary to salvation but must never be thought of as the cause of it. Apples are necessary to apple trees, but apples never cause anything to become an apple tree. No man was ever saved apart from repentance, but re-

penitance is not the reason God saves him—it is one of the instruments of salvation.

## The Importance of the Church

Modern evangelicals sometimes do not understand the importance of the Church. This was not the case for the Westminster theologians. “Unto this catholic visible Church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual thereunto (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11–13; Matt. 28:19–20; Isa. 59:21)” (WCF 25.3). Within the visible Church, Christ ministers by various means of His appointment. He has granted the ministry of God to the Church, the oracles of God to the Church, and the ordinances of God to the Church. The reason He has done so is so that the saints could be gathered and perfected in the context of His household throughout the course of their lives. This Church will remain unto the end of the world, doing this essential work. Christ, through His covenantal presence and through His Spirit, makes all these gifts effectual to their appointed end. The Lord’s Supper is effectual because Christ makes it so. The preaching of the Word is effectual because Christ makes it so.

A perfectionistic approach to the visible or historical Church is not biblical (WCF 25.4). The catholic, or universal, visible Church does not always present the same degree of visibility. And particular churches, members of the catholic Church, exhibit this same tendency. They are more or less pure, depending on how the gospel is taught and embraced there, depending on how the ordinances are practiced, and depending on the purity of worship in their service of God.

No perfect church exists in this fallen world. All churches are fallible and prone to error and compromise. This does not necessarily alter their status as churches of Christ. Left unchecked, however, the mixture and error does threaten their status as churches of Christ, because it is possible for a particular church to degenerate to the point where apostasy occurs (WCF 25.5). In Romans 11, the apostle Paul warns the Gentile churches that they may fall through covenantal presumption in just the same way that the Jews fell. Particular churches can be removed from the olive tree. However, the olive tree itself will always stand.

This is why we can say that there will always be a Church on earth to worship God according to His will. The olive tree will never be chopped down, and one day she will fill the earth with her fruit. But this does not mean that particular branches cannot be pruned



In response to Pope Leo X selling indulgences to fund the building of St. Peter’s Basilica, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenburg. This eventually led to his excommunication and to the Protestant Reformation. Strife between Roman Catholic and Protestant continued a hundred years later, even as the Westminster Confession of Faith was being written.

from the tree. This is why we insist that the catholic Church was given a promise that she would never fall. The sacraments were given to the visible catholic

Church as signs and seals of God's kindness to us. Baptism is the first of the two sacraments.

"Baptism is a sacrament of the [N]ew [T]estament, ordained by Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19), not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church (1 Cor. 12:13); but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace (Rom. 4:11; Col. 2:11–12), of his ingrafting into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:5), of regeneration (Tit. 3:5), of remission of sins (Mark 1:4), and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life (Rom. 6:3–4). Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world (Matt. 28:19–20)" (WCF 28.1).

Baptism was ordained by Jesus Christ as a sacrament in the words of the Great Commission. He told His disciples that the mark of His disciples was to be baptism. Disciple the nations, He said, baptizing them. The signification of baptism is twofold, that is, it points in two directions. The first is the solemn recognition that the one baptized has been admitted into the visible Church of Christ. At the same time, the baptism also points away from the person to the objective meanings of baptism. And what does baptism mean? The one baptized has a sign and seal of the covenant of grace; the one baptized has been grafted into Christ, regeneration, forgiveness of sins, and the obligation to walk in newness of life.

Modern evangelicals differ on the propriety of infant baptism, but to the Westminster theologians, this doctrine was very important (WCF 28.4). In fact, the whole question of baptism was very important. "Although it be a great sin to condemn or neglect this ordinance (Luke 7:30; Exod. 4:24–26), yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it (Rom. 4:11; Acts 10:2, 4, 22, 31, 45, 47): or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated (Acts 8:13, 23)" (WCF 28.5). Neglect of baptism is a great sin, but it is not an unforgivable sin. We are to consider baptism and regeneration together, but we are not to treat this as an absolute. In other words, some who are not baptized will be saved, and not all who are baptized are saved.

The Westminster divines had a similarly high view of the Lord's Supper. "Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein He was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be ob-

served in His Church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death; the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto Him; and, to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body (1 Cor. 11:23–26; 10:16–17, 21; 12:13)" (WCF 29.1).

The Lord Jesus established this sacrament the night He was betrayed. It is very rich in meaning and is to be commemorated in the Church until the end of the world. For most contemporary evangelicals, the meaning of the Supper is limited to the first aspect mentioned here—and the understanding is accurate as far as it goes, but the import of the Supper goes far beyond a mere memorial. It means:

1. A memorial of Christ's self-sacrifice;
2. A sealing of all the benefits of Christ's death unto true believers;
3. A spiritual nourishment of all true believers who partake;
4. A covenant renewal on the part of those who partake;
5. A bond from Him of the fact that He is our God and we are His people;
6. A communion with our fellow believers, fellow members of the body of Christ.

Grace, however, does not run into us through the Supper the way water runs through a garden hose. The Westminster theologians emphasized receiving the elements of the Supper in a worthy manner. As we do, God blesses us with Christ Himself. "Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament (1 Cor. 11:28), do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally but spiritually, receive and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses (1 Cor. 10:16)" (WCF 29.7).

Those who partake of the sacrament really feed upon Christ. But in order to truly feed upon Christ, it is not necessary for the bread and wine to be changed into the physical body and blood of Christ. (The Ro-

man Catholic Church teaches that the bread and wine are transformed into the physical body and blood of Jesus. This doctrine is called Transubstantiation.) We feed upon Christ by faith (which is not the same as saying we pretend to feed upon Him). We feed spiritually through the bread and wine presented to our outward senses. Christ is presented to us in the sacrament. We see Him there by faith and not by sight. Christ presents Himself to the faith of believers in the same manner that the physical elements present themselves to our hands and mouths.

—Douglas Wilson

### For Further Reading

Hodge, A.A. *The Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958.

Wilson, Douglas. *Easy Chairs, Hard Words*. Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 1991.

## SESSION I: PRELUDE

### A Question to Consider

What does it mean to really know what the Bible says?

The ability to summarize what you have read is always a good test of whether or not you were paying attention when you were reading. If you were to read Genesis, and then someone asked you, “What was it about?” you should be able to summarize it without taking out your Bible and reading Genesis aloud to the questioner. And that summary is a “systematic” treatment of the book. In the same way, the Westminster Confession is a summary of some of the grand themes of the Bible. So (in summary), if you really understand something, you will be able to summarize it. The Westminster Confession does this with the teaching of the Bible.

From the General Information above answer the following questions:

1. What was happening in England when the Westminster Confession was being drafted?

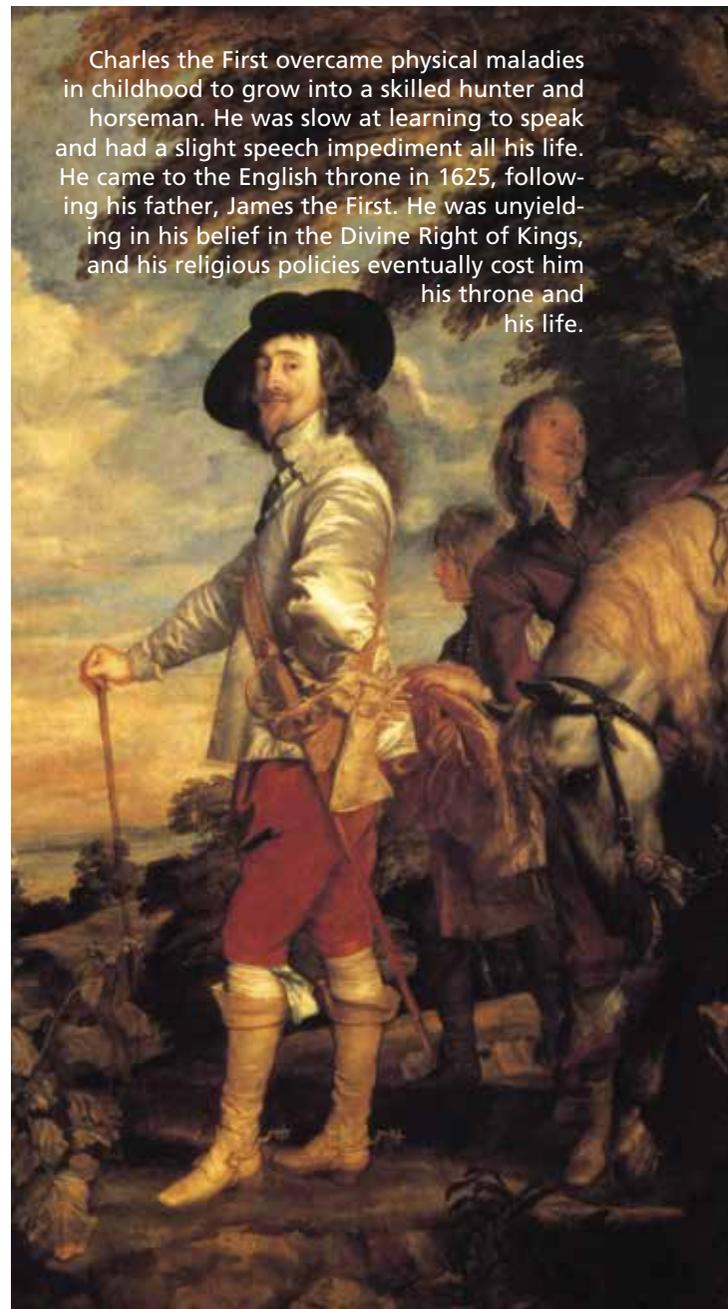
The English Civil War was in progress.

2. What were the parties or factions represented in the Westminster Assembly?

The two main factions present were the Presbyterians and the independents. The Anglicans were invited but did not come.

3. Why is the triune nature of God so important?

If we understand God in a Unitarian way, then we lose all possibility of salvation—of God becoming man. In addition, we have no way of making sense of all the “diversity within one universe” that we see around us.



Charles the First overcame physical maladies in childhood to grow into a skilled hunter and horseman. He was slow at learning to speak and had a slight speech impediment all his life. He came to the English throne in 1625, following his father, James the First. He was unyielding in his belief in the Divine Right of Kings, and his religious policies eventually cost him his throne and his life.

4. When Jesus became a man, who was becoming man?

The Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Logos, the Word of God.

5. What is the relationship of repentance and faith to salvation?

Our salvation is based on the work of Christ, plus nothing. The instruments that God gives to us so that we might appropriate this salvation are repentance and faith.

6. What are the two sacraments of the Church?

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the two sacraments of the Church.

7. What does it mean to receive the sacraments worthily?

It means receiving them in evangelical faith.

8. What is meant by the "visible catholic church"?

According to the Westminster Confession, this refers to the institutional Church, where the sacraments are faithfully practiced and the gospel faithfully preached.

### Optional Activity

Pick three paragraphs from the Westminster Confession of Faith. Copy the title of the paragraphs (what they are about) and then copy all the proof texts. Put your copy of the Confession away (but not your Bible)

and try to write your own confessional statement on those topics. Use your Bible and the references from the Confession. When you are done, compare what you have written to what they have written. Are they similar? Very different? Why?

The purpose behind this exercise is to show the student two things: First, it is easy when reading a document like the Westminster Confession to have your eyes glaze over, not respecting how much love and labor went into it. Trying to write just one paragraph should give the students a new respect for the labor of the Assembly. To enlarge their respect even more, assign the student's three-year-old brother the role of acting like a messenger from Parliament riding in just when the paragraph is done, demanding changes.

The second purpose is to show the student the value of serious Bible study, coupled with the exercise of summarizing what he has learned.



**READING ASSIGNMENT:**  
Chapters 1-5



*"When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin, and by his grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so as that, by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil." —WCF 9.4*

## SESSION II: DISCUSSION

### A Question to Consider

Who is God, and how do we know who He is?

God is, first of all, a Spirit—though we need to define exactly what we mean by this. He is not a part of the physical world, nor is He dependent on it in any way. Perhaps the most helpful distinction is not “God is Spirit, and we are material and spiritual” but rather “God is the Creator, and we (along with many spirits) are the creation.” This is the most basic distinction of all, and it truly establishes God’s character and authority, while avoiding problems that might ensue if God, angels and human souls could all be lumped into a common category of “spirit.” As we have learned from reading about pagan religions, there is not much hope in a god who is himself part of the world in which we live—for then he, too, must be subject to it and to changes in it.

From here, we may begin to discuss God’s attributes, His power, knowledge, holiness, justice and mercy being the most basic.

But how do we know all this? We should be able to know this from knowledge of ourselves and of the world around us—we see the marks of the Creator in the creation. This is not enough, however; we must acknowledge the necessity of revelation in the Bible. And how do we know the Bible is the revelation of God? How do we know what books belong in the Bible and which don’t? At this point, the discussion should move into the more specific questions below.

*Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:*

#### *Text Analysis*

1. How does God reveal Himself? Compare/contrast the different ways.

There are three major ways: natural revelation (God’s works of creation and providence), the words spoken through prophets in time past (and not written down), and the written Scripture which we have today. The

latter two are often called “special revelation” in contrast to “natural revelation.” The light of nature is enough to convince people that there is a wise, good, and powerful God, but it lacks the full knowledge of salvation. Here Christians disagree: the Confession suggests that no one is saved without the knowledge contained in the Bible, but many Christians believe that God can save people who have no access to the Bible. The words of Romans 2:14–15, to the effect that Gentiles without the law could be “accused or else excused” by the light of their conscience, seem to oppose the Confession’s use of 1 Corinthians 1:21, 2:13–14. In any case, all orthodox Christians agree that preaching and spreading the Bible to all peoples of the earth is urgent and necessary, that natural revelation is vastly inferior to the special revelation of the Bible, and that there are not “many ways to God” which are equally valid. The Confession also takes a stand on special revelation outside the Bible—direct communication from God to man—by saying that such revelation has ceased following the apostles and that the Bible does not need to be augmented by further revelations. In other words, there will be no more prophets whose words we can staple into the backs of our Bibles (1.1).

2. How do we know that our Bible is the word of God?

Two evidences are the current and historic testimony of the Church and the qualities of the Bible itself (e.g., its glorious subject matter, self-consistency, life-changing power). However, we are only truly convinced that the Bible is the Word of God when the Holy Spirit works in us to bear witness to the Word. No amount of evidence will convince someone with a hard heart (1.4–5).

3. Is there any issue or question that Scripture does not address? If so, how do we confront those issues?

The answer to the first question is “yes and no.” No, in the sense that the Bible contains everything we need to know to be saved and to walk in a godly way in this life, as

individuals and together as a church. All the basic principles are there. However, obviously not every issue we will face is explicitly addressed in Scripture—it doesn't directly talk about what a church building should look like, or whether we must obey speed limits, or what we should think about stem-cell research. However, we can extend the basics of Scripture to such specific cases using common sense—what the Confession calls deduction by “good and necessary consequence”—and such valid extensions are part of the “whole counsel of God” (1.6).

4. Is the Bible's message clear? How do we interpret it? Do we need years of advanced education to understand it?

While the overall message is clear, some parts of it are less clear than others. However, the most important things are stated clearly at least once somewhere in Scripture, so that anyone with ordinary understanding can learn what is necessary for salvation, faith, and life. Of course, advanced studies will repay the learner with greater riches of understanding, but they are unnecessary for salvation. We interpret the Bible by letting the clearest passages enlighten us about the less clear passages—“Scripture interprets Scripture” (1.9).

5. Look at the Confession's description of God (chap. 2). Why is it necessary that the true God have each attribute, and what consequences does each attribute have for our daily lives and actions?

God is unique and true, so there is no chaos or polytheism. He is infinite and spiritual, so He is above and apart from the Creation, able to control and direct it, unaffected by its disasters or changes. He is not controlled by passions, thus preserving order and righteousness. He is eternal and immutable, so we can depend on Him throughout all times. He is almighty, so He has all power to help us. He is wise and all-knowing, so we know that all things will work out for the best. He is holy and just, so He will always do right and will destroy wickedness. He is free and self-sufficient, under constraints from no one and nothing outside Himself, so we know He

is the only one we should worship, and His actions depend only on His own attributes. He is loving, merciful, gracious, and forgiving, so we know we as imperfect beings may have hope. He has all life and glory, so we may be confident He can bestow these on us as well. Finally, He is Triune. This is important because other attributes depend on it. If God were solitary and unitary, how could He love or communicate? He would be dependent on the creation to fulfill and exercise His own attributes. It also important because it shows us that ultimately the One and the Many, unity and diversity, can harmonize and balance (chap. 2).

6. Does the Confession seem to emphasize the oneness or three-ness of God more?

Orthodoxy must affirm both the oneness and three-ness of God, and the Confession clearly does this. However, it may seem, to some readers, to emphasize the unity of God more than His tri-unity, because it lists attributes in the context of the one God, spends only one sentence on the Trinity, and says, “In the unity of the Godhead there are three persons,” thus seeming to privilege the unity of God. But such a judgment would have to be made on the basis of placement and emphasis, not on the basis of anything the Confession clearly teaches or says (2.3).

### *Cultural Analysis*

1. Where do secularists and people of other religions look for ultimate truth? Compare them to Scripture. There are two options: an alternate “bible” or their own experiences. Other religions have their own bibles or versions of the Bible. We might show them to be faulty, e.g., through their internal contradictions, contradictions with God's revelation in nature and in us, bad effects in people's lives, sources in merely human authority and imagination. But at bottom, the question of one's basic source of truth is beyond proof and evidence—it requires faith. As the Confession says, only the work of the Holy Spirit can give people the conviction that the Scriptures are the true word of God.

Secularists look for truth from their own experiences and especially from scientific observation of the world around them. These fall short because of man's human limitations and proneness to error, as well as the fact that science deals only with things he can sense and measure—science, by definition, cannot tell him about anything spiritual. Without prior faith to guide and interpret observations, science will always be an incomplete and misleading source of knowledge that exalts the pride of people by making them think that they can discover ultimate truths using their own senses and reason.

2. How does secular culture attack the Bible?

It must at any cost prove that it is merely a human document, a product of its authors' imaginations, and not the word of God. It may try to point out internal inconsistencies or contradictions with secular interpretations of science. Or, it may simply be skeptical of its authority: "How do we know it is the word of God? Prove it." Defending the Bible is an important part of apologetics and must include a wide range of disciplines, from theology to history and archaeology to science.

3. What main god or gods does our modern culture worship? What are their attributes?

Our culture is pluralistic, which means we actively encourage and tolerate

## MARRIAGE

*Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed; and for preventing of uncleanness.*

*It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, who are able with judgment to give their consent. Yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord. And therefore such as profess the true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, papists, or other idolaters: neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies. —WCF 24.2–3*



many religions and beliefs. It can be argued, though, that our primary god is simply mankind—as an individual or as a group. We worship individuality, self-expression, and self-determination, and at the same time, our secular democracy effectively makes the majority into a god, served by lesser gods like Congress and the Supreme Court. Pluralism itself is an acknowledgment that the individual is the ultimate thing to be worshipped, because it holds that only individuals can decide who or what is worthy of worship. The attributes of this human god are all too well-known: tendency to corruption (mental, spiritual, and physical), fickleness, finitude, ignorance, lustfulness, destructiveness.

Another candidate is a bland civil god (the “God” of coins and politicians’ speeches and patriotic bumper stickers), who has no definite attributes at all. Another might be the almighty dollar, which is simply a deaf and dumb idol.

### *Biblical Analysis*

Consider these examples of “Scripture interpreting Scripture:” Genesis 16, 21 and Galatians 4:21–31; Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15; and Isaiah 13:1–10, Ezekiel 32:1–8 and Matthew 24:29. What might they teach us about Scripture and about interpretation?

These examples show various ways in which Scripture helps us interpret it. The Genesis/Galatians pair shows that the story of Hagar and Sarah is an allegory of those who are saved by grace and those who are enslaved by the law. It allows us to interpret the story of Abraham (and Israel as a whole) as one of redemption by grace alone. In the larger view, it confirms for us that God has worked by grace throughout history, not just in the New Covenant. The Hosea/Matthew pair shows us that Israel’s history, and many of the prophecies given about Israel, are fulfilled in Christ. It also shows us that Christ is to be seen as the New Israel and that the nation of Israel as a whole was a shadow or symbol of Christ. This allows us to apply it more broadly, so we can interpret other obscure or difficult passages about Israel as

foreshadowing Christ and being fulfilled in Him. Finally, some of the difficult symbolic passages in the New Testament (such as in Matthew 24) should not be understood in isolation but as building on earlier Old Testament prophecies that foretold God’s judgment on specific nations. In general, one of the main principles of biblical interpretation is that the meaning of the Old Testament is only unlocked by seeing it as a precursor to the Christian era. In addition, New Testament passages are built on an Old Testament foundation.

### SUMMA



*Write an essay or discuss this question, integrating what you have learned from the material above.*

If an unbeliever claims that you only believe that the Bible is true because your parents have told you that it is, how would you answer him? What if he claims that you only believe that the Bible is true because the Bible itself says that it is true—and this, your Spock-like, logical, atheist friend would say, is circular reasoning?

The answer to this challenge must be somewhat complex. First, the accusation, “You just believe it because your parents told you,” is quite clearly a logical fallacy known as the genetic fallacy (or, among C.S. Lewis fans, a “Bulverism”). To attack the purported source of a belief has no effect on the logic or soundness of the belief itself. The second accusation is slightly more difficult. However, the challenge must simply be turned back on the person who gave it: Yes, in a sense my belief in the Bible is circular reasoning, but circular reasoning is unavoidable for everyone in matters of ultimate importance, such as arguments about the true source of knowledge. You cannot logically “prove” your source of truth is true, because you must use that source in order to make the proof! So you might say to the atheist, “How do you know circular reasoning is bad?” He might say, “It’s illogical.” You would then reply, “And what is logical? Who says? And why are we obligated to follow this ‘logic’ of yours?” You will quickly

find that your challenger operates as much on faith as you do.

Beyond this counter-challenge, you should also defend the Bible using more common forms of argument such as those the Confession uses, e.g., the remarkable unity of the message of Scripture; its power in changing lives; the glory of its divine message. But you must also recognize that a person will only confess that the Bible is the Word of God by the influence and operation of the Holy Spirit. Arguments alone cannot save sinners.



**READING ASSIGNMENT:**  
Chapters 6–8

## SESSION III: DISCUSSION

Chapters 6–8

### A Question to Consider

How does God create and sustain His relationships with individuals and with humankind?

The question is rather open-ended, so the best way to tackle it may be simply to recount the history of God’s dealings with us. We may begin with the relationship of creation—Adam was a “son of God” merely because God created him. So there is the natural authority of the Creator over the created, and the natural dependence of the created upon the Creator, all of which doesn’t depend a bit on the will or desire of the created. Notice, too, that God’s creation of Adam was gracious—existence is the ultimate undeserved gift. Following the creation, God also could have left Adam alone, but again He graciously condescended to reveal Himself to Adam and form a bond with him. So, based on this fundamental relationship of creation, God made a covenant with Adam that Adam should obey God (by not touching the fruit of the one tree) and God would in return bless Adam.

After the Fall, everything about the relationship between God and man was

changed. Man was now sinful in the sight of a just and holy God. Sacrifice was now required. Since the initial trust and communion were broken, covenants had to be sealed with blood—reminders of the death brought about by the Fall, the consequences of breaking covenant. Israel was put under the “schoolmaster” of law and priesthood, and the people were distanced from the Holy Place. This foreshadowed the ultimate Intercessor who would finally join us to God again.

In the New Covenant, Christ came to fulfill His office of Mediator. The Old Testament saints looked forward to His work, and we look backward, but He has been the Mediator for all believers and for all time.

In a nutshell, God relates to us with covenants, or solemn bonds. In addition, God communicates with us through the Son, Who is the God-man, the only One capable of bridging the gap.

*Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:*

### *Text Analysis*

1. Why did God allow the human race to fall into sin?

In order to more greatly manifest His glory in redemption (6.1).

2. What were the effects of the Fall?

Adam and Eve, and the whole human race with them, lost their original righteousness, fell out of fellowship with God, became dead in sins, and were corrupted in body and soul (6.2–4).

3. According to the Confession, what are the two major covenants God has made?

Careful—they’re not the Old and New Covenants! Those, according to the Confession, are just different administrations of the one Covenant of Grace. The only major covenant next to this was the Covenant of Works, which the Confession states governed God’s relationship with Adam and Eve before the Fall. It is worth noting that although most Reformed theologians accept this idea of the “Covenant of Works,” others

question its usefulness and point out that grace and favor were key in God's relationship with Adam even before the Fall (7.2–5).

4. What is the role of Christ in God's relationship with man?

Many theologians summarize Christ's role as "prophet, priest, and king"—Christ declares God's message, brings unholy men to a holy God, and rules over the world and especially His Church. The Confession recognizes this but emphasizes that all of Christ's roles can be summed up in His person as Mediator—

the One in whom God and man connect and commune. As Redeemer, Head of the Church, Heir of the world, and Judge of all men, Christ puts into action and accomplishes the Father's plan of salvation (8.1).

5. Why must Christ be both God and man? How is His double nature not a contradiction?

Chapter 8.2–3 clarifies that He must partake of both natures in order to be a true Mediator between the two. Extending beyond the Confession, we might also say that He needed to be man in order to be

born of a woman and born under the law, so that He could redeem mankind. Yet He could not partake of our fallen nature, and He needed the power to obey the law fully and satisfy the justice of God. For these reasons He must be both God and man.

6. What did Christ accomplish with His earthly life, death, and resurrection?

As chapter 8.8 states, He redeems, intercedes for, reveals to, empowers, and governs His people, leading them to their inheritance and overcoming His enemies. He satisfied God's justice to do so, and His resurrection defeated death (8.4–5).

7. Who is saved by Christ's death and resurrection?

He saves the elect only (8.6).



The switch from wine to grape juice in the communion cup has its origins not in the Bible, but in the temperance movement of the mid-nineteenth century. In 1869, a physician and dentist named Dr. Thomas Bramwell Welch successfully pasteurized Concord grape juice to produce an "unfermented sacramental wine" for his church in Vineland, N.J. Thus began the processed fruit juice industry and a drastic change in the Lord's Supper for the first time in history.

### *Cultural Analysis*

1. How do other religions and our secular culture describe and explain sin and guilt? Do they teach that people are basically good or basically evil? That people, on their own, can be good?

Most religions have an idea of sin and guilt. In some, e.g., Islam, the sin is against a personal God. In others, such as Buddhism, sin becomes negative actions which produce, in an impersonal fashion, negative results (this is the idea of karma). Our secular culture is at war with the idea of "sin." It claims that there is no ultimate right or wrong, and since it is atheistic, there is no one to sin against, except other people. And with nothing above people, who or what is to determine what counts as "sin?" Instead of sin, we have "anti-social behaviors" or lists of psychological problems. We want to make sin into a medical issue, not a spiritual issue. Our popular culture also continually preaches about the basic or deep-down goodness in everyone; we emphasize everyone's innate self-worth. Our unbelieving school systems are founded on the idea that if people can only be taught what is right, they will choose to do it. Our movies constantly proclaim this faith that people can overcome their tendency to evil on their own.

2. How do other religions, such as Islam and Buddhism, try to relate their gods to man? How do secular gods (such as the secular democratic state) relate to their worshippers? Are the relationships based on works or grace?

In Islam, Allah is distant from the world and communicates through angels and prophets, but there is no mediator who can bridge the gap between creator and creature. In most forms of Buddhism, the gods are deemphasized in favor of an ethical code and, indeed, are nearly as powerless as humans against the natural world. Buddhism and modern "New-Agey" pantheism especially blur the distinction between god and man, making all enlightened people in some sense "divine." The secular democracy is supposedly controlled by the voters and relates to them

through impersonal bureaucratic structures. Nearly all other religions, including secular ones, are based on works and not on grace. Buddhism emphasizes a code of conduct and thought that leads to enlightenment; Islam emphasizes complete submission to Allah as the way to salvation; and modern secularism promotes civic duty as the way to utopia.

3. Many liberal Christians believe that Christ's life and death "save" us because He gave us an example of how to live rightly. What is wrong with this view?

This view denies the deity of Christ, the reality of God's justice, and the need for people to be redeemed. It assumes that we, once shown how to live rightly, will be willing and able to do so. Furthermore, this view is a form of works righteousness, and it focuses on this world only, all but ignoring eternal salvation.

### *Biblical Analysis*

1. Examine the following passages: Jeremiah 31:33-34; Romans 4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Ephesians 2:15-16; Galatians 3:8-12; Colossians 2:17; and Hebrews 11:13. How does the Old Covenant differ from the New regarding law, grace, revelation and salvation? Explain how they can be different "administrations" of the same Covenant of Grace.

The Old and New Covenants are obviously much different in many outward ways: the Old had numerous sacrifices, a temple, and various ceremonial laws. The Jeremiah passage explains that much of what was external in the Old will be internal in the New; the Colossians passage indicates that the Old is a shadow and the New the substance; and the Hebrews passage emphasizes that the forms of the old worship have passed away. The Galatians passage emphasizes that law leads to condemnation, but grace to salvation, and the Ephesians passage shows us that the Gentile/Jew distinction is torn down in the New Covenant. All of this could lead us to consider the differences between Old and New to be more important than the similarities, except for the key passages in

Romans and 1 Corinthians. There we learn that Abraham (and by extension all Israel) lived and were saved by faith alone—the same way we are. We also learn that people in the Old Covenant partook of Christ, just as we do. This is strong evidence for a single Covenant of Grace with different externals, and with precursors and shadows replaced by realities, just as the building of one house involves the plans being replaced by actual walls, ceilings, windows, and doors. Though revelation increased in the New, the function of law and grace and the reality of salvation by faith have been consistent the whole time.

### SUMMA



*Write an essay or discuss this question, integrating what you have learned from the material above.*

Many in our culture have the idea that they can find their own path to God, and that there are “many paths to God” from which to choose. If someone claims this, how could you respond to him?

First, those who claim this do not have a serious enough view of sin. When we fell as a race, it was not just one bad deed done by one man and woman; it was a complete Fall from our former state of innocence and freedom. Corruption and evil infect all parts of our selves and lives now, in one way or another. Further, we lost the power to choose good on our own. Not only are we condemned by God’s justice from day one, but we continually make ourselves worthy of it every day we live without His grace. The Fall means that no one can find his own path to God.

Furthermore, the distance between God and us is so vast that we, as finite creatures, could never bridge it, even if we were still innocent and free. God must come down to our level, reveal Himself to us, show us the way to Him, and then provide that way. We need His power and grace, and above all, we need a Mediator to bridge the chasm. This is only found in Christ—there are not “many paths to God.” Christ said that He is the way, the truth, and the life—no one comes to the Father except by Him.



### READING ASSIGNMENT: Chapters 9–10

## SESSION IV: WRITING

Chapters 9–10

### A Question to Consider

Do people have free will?

When confronted with the question, many people would immediately respond with a very confident and final yes or no, and only later in the discussion would they discover that they had completely different definitions of free will. So the heart of the question is the definition of the key term. What do we mean by free will? And about whom are we talking when we say people?

Clearly, no Bible-believing Christian can affirm free will in the sense of “the ability of the autonomous self to choose any given action, good or evil, apart from or in spite of a governing fate or providence.” This is an extreme version. A more realistic definition for Christians might read “the ability to choose one’s actions, and thus have full responsibility for them, within the context of God’s governing and sovereign will.”

However, we also need to be careful about which people have what kinds of free will. First, the ability to choose that Adam and Eve had in the Garden is vastly different from the abilities of all their descendants, for the Fall impaired all human will. Secondly, the freedom that a believer has is vastly greater than that which an unbeliever has. The Bible says that unbelievers are still in bondage to sin, while believers have been freed from it and empowered by God to do good, even though they still struggle with remaining corruption.

We must also reconcile all these levels of free will with the sovereignty of God. God’s ultimate will and decree must be affirmed alongside any affirmation of our will.

### *Free Will and Sovereignty of God*

Using Scripture and all the things you have learned from the Confession so far, answer the following questions in an essay of 750–1000 words: How do we relate and reconcile our free will with the sovereignty and determination of God? Define *free will* and *predestination*, and be sure to talk about free will in the context of pre-Fall, unregenerate, regenerate and glorified man. If you have time, review the Arminian position on free will and God's sovereignty, write a short essay (500 words) from that perspective and then write your main essay as a response to it. If you need a jump-start, examine these key proof texts from the Confession: Eph. 1:11; Acts 2:23; Acts 4:27-28; Prov. 16:33; 1 Kings 22:28-34; Gen. 50:20; Is. 10:7; Rom. 9:11–18, Matt. 17:12, James 1:14, Eccles. 7:29, Gen. 1:26, Deut. 30:19, Rom. 8:7, Eph. 2:1, John 6:44, John 8:36, Gal. 5:17, Rom. 6:18, and Rom. 7:15.

As in any discussion, we must approach the issue of predestination and free will by defining our terms. Free will could be defined as the ability of a person to choose whatever he desires, without being forced by anything outside himself. This allows a view of free will which still takes sin into account—someone's own sin might turn his will from doing good, but it is still an internal influence, not external. Predestination could be defined as the decree of God which ordains everything that happens in history, including the choices of individuals, and especially their choices for or against salvation.

Let us, then, examine the basic biblical evidence. It seems abundantly clear from Scripture that God ordains the choices of individuals, even their choices regarding repentance and faith. Ephesians 1:11 states that we have obtained the inheritance of salvation because we were "predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." This is not because God foresaw our own faith; He predestines to salvation based on His purposes alone, not our works (Rom. 9:11–18). In Acts 2:23 and 4:27–28, we see individuals' choices working within God's preordained plan. We see the same thing—men's intentions being

subordinated to God's plan—in the following passages: Gen. 50:20; 1 Kings 22; and Isaiah 10:7. We need simply to accept these passages as they are, without trying to explain them away. God is clearly in control of all things, and His plan includes people's choices.

We must recognize, however, that the Bible also recognizes free will, as does the Confession (9.1). We are created in God's image, so we must have some form of His free will (Gen. 1:26). In Deuteronomy 30:19, God clearly tells the Israelites that they must choose obedience—and why would He say that if they had no choice? And in Ecclesiastes 7:29, we see that our sin is the result of our own choosing to "seek out many devices." Christ says that the people who killed John the Baptist did so because they did "whatever they wished" (Matt. 17:12). Furthermore, James tells us that we sin, not because God forces us to, but because our own desires carry us to sin (Jas. 1:14). This is an important point. However "free" our will is, it is always enslaved by our inherent sinfulness, which we did not choose (Rom. 8:7; John 6:44).

This leads us to the next point. It is important to distinguish between the working of free will in pre-Fall, unregenerate, regenerate, and glorified human beings. Each group has a different sort of free will. Adam originally had free will, including the ability to choose righteousness (Eccles. 7:29; WCF 4.2, 9.2). We also know that unregenerate man is in bondage to sin, and this bondage includes his will (Rom. 8:7; WCF 6.2–4, 9.3). Regenerate man is free from sin, yet still battles remaining corruption, including corruption of the will (Rom. 7:15; Gal. 5:17; WCF 6.5, 9.4). Only those who are glorified are able to freely and continually choose righteousness (Eph. 4:13; WCF 9.5).

Christians, then, must question the idea that people (short of glory) can ever be free, since they are always bound by ruling sin or struggling with remaining sin. The question of whether Adam had free will is a separate one, though it is generally agreed that he was freer than any other subsequent creature. In

any case, it is important for us to emphasize the reality of truly free will, as both Scripture and the Westminster Confession do.

Reconciling free will and predestination is a difficult task, but this doesn't mean we can merely throw up our hands and call it a mystery. We have established that both are necessary, so how can they work together? If God has decreed all things, and if we are enslaved to sin, how can our actions be free? If our actions are not free, how can God blame us for sin? And if our actions are free, how can God be a powerful God? What's the use of praying to a God who can be thwarted by any one of the six billion people on the planet today, not to mention angels and spirits? If we are to keep both the responsibility of humans and the God-ness of God, we must accept both free will and predestination, because throwing out one or the other would lead to absurdity.

Another way of thinking about it is that our will is limited because we are limited beings. Because we are finite, we have limited desires, knowledge, and experience. These limitations restrict our ability to make choices. So in this sense, only God has a truly free will. And since God creates us with our limitations, He has, by setting our limits and experience, "determined" how we will make choices, without forcing us at all. The only alternative to this limitation or determination would be to avoid existence altogether.

Yet another approach is to think of human will as a "secondary cause" that God uses in accomplishing His will. Just as He governs the natural world through "laws of nature," so He governs the human world through human choices. His will and our will need not be mutually exclusive.

Finally, we could use an analogy: God as author and us as characters of His story. A good author writes his story so that the characters are free and not "forced" into some artificial plan. Of course, the author has a plan, but the greater plan works in perfect harmony with the values and goals and choices of the characters.



**READING ASSIGNMENT:**  
Chapters 11-13

## SESSION V: RECITATION

Chapters 11-13

### Comprehension Questions

*Answer the following questions for factual recall:*

1. Review Chapter 10. What makes sinners change their lives and begin to put faith in Christ? On what basis does God choose the elect?

It is God's effectual calling that first draws the elect toward salvation and enables them to put their faith in Christ. God chooses these elect people not for any foreseen choice or attitude in them, but only according to His own purposes and for His own glory (chap. 10).

2. Are we justified by our faith alone? Does our faith justify us?

Yes, we are justified by faith in the sense that faith is God's instrument in justifying us. We must be careful not to take pride in our own faith, even if given by God, as the ground of our justification. Only the mercy and grace of God and the work of Christ are the grounds of our justification. It is God who justifies, not our faith. In addition, though we are justified by faith alone, justifying faith is never alone—it is accompanied by love and good works (11.1-2).

3. How does salvation display both grace and justice? Christ's righteousness and death perfectly satisfied God's justice, and yet God's sending of Christ for us and His imputation of Christ's righteousness to us is all free grace (11.3).

4. Can someone be "un-justified"?

No. He is still obligated to obey God and to repent of continuing sin, but he can never fall from his justification—remember, it is God who justifies, and He does not do so on the basis of our own faith or works. Only the elect are justified in this sense (11.5).

5. How did faith and justification change from the Old to the New Testament?

They did not change. Old Testament saints were saved by faith and justified just as we are, yet they looked forward to Christ while we look back to Christ (11.6; see also 8.6).

6. What does it mean to be “adopted” by God? How is it different from justification? Use your own words.

We might think of justification as the legal paperwork that is done in order to make us children of God. Once we are adopted as children, we enjoy the benefits of children: God gives us freedom and privilege, cares and provides for us, allows us to communicate with Him at any time, secures us in His love, and promises the ultimate inheritance of eternal life and glory. Justification and adoption can be distinguished, but they are inseparable. Adoption is our real relationship with God; justification establishes that relationship (chap. 12).

7. What is sanctification? Are Christians *sanctified* by good works? Explain. (See not only chapter 13, but also 14.2 and 16.)

Sanctification is the process by which we gradually defeat the remaining sin in our lives and gradually become stronger in faith and in good works. However, we are not sanctified by good works in the sense that our works automatically sanctify or that God gives the reward of sanctification to those who have been enabled to be righteous on their own. Works may be an instrument of sanctification but are not its grounds. Sanctification is also of faith and of grace. We are sanctified “through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection” (13.1); we are supplied by the Spirit of Christ (13.3); faith is involved as much here as in justification (14.2); the operations of good works do not include sanctification (16.2); the ability to do good works is from God alone (16.3); even the best works are mixed with corruption and imperfections and thus could never sanctify us (16.4–5).

8. When are we fully sanctified?

Only in the final, glorified state (13.2).



**READING ASSIGNMENT:**  
Chapters 14–18

## SESSION VI: DISCUSSION

Chapters 14–18

### A Question to Consider

What are repentance and faith, and what are their roles in salvation and in the Christian life?

Repentance is recognizing your sin as sin, realizing its seriousness, being disgusted by it, and resolving to forsake it completely. Faith is confident belief in God’s character and actions, trusting that He will redeem, justify, sanctify, and glorify through Christ those who believe Him; this faith results in a changed life in service to God.

Repentance comes at the very beginning of a person’s road to salvation, for no one can be saved until he recognizes his need to be saved, and no one can recognize this unless he sees his own sinfulness.

Faith is the instrument of our salvation, not the ground of our salvation. We are saved through our faith, not because of our faith. Both faith and repentance are the gift of God.

Finally, both repentance and faith must continue throughout the Christian life; they are not limited to the moment of salvation. We must continually repent of the remaining sin in our lives, and we must continually trust in Christ for His grace as we try to follow Him more closely every day.

*Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:*

### Text Analysis

1. From where does faith come?

It is the gracious gift of God, usually coming through preaching and strengthened by preaching and the sacraments (14.1).

2. What exactly is involved in “having faith?”

Part of it is just believing certain truths about God, but as James tells us, even the demons do that. Faith becomes action, changing our lives. It is basically “accepting, receiving, and resting on Christ alone” for salvation. This is a personal trust, not just a mental acknowledgment of abstract truths (14.2).



3. How are people moved to repentance?  
 By a gracious act of God, they see both the danger of condemnation and the filthiness of sin in comparison to righteousness (15.2).

4. Does salvation depend on true repentance?  
 Salvation depends on the work of Christ alone. However, repentance, like faith, is a necessary instrument in salvation (15.3).

5. To whom must we confess our sin?  
 If it is a private sin or a sin against God, we are called to repent of it only to God. If it is a sin against one or more people, then we must repent to them. And any sin committed in public requires public repentance (15.6).

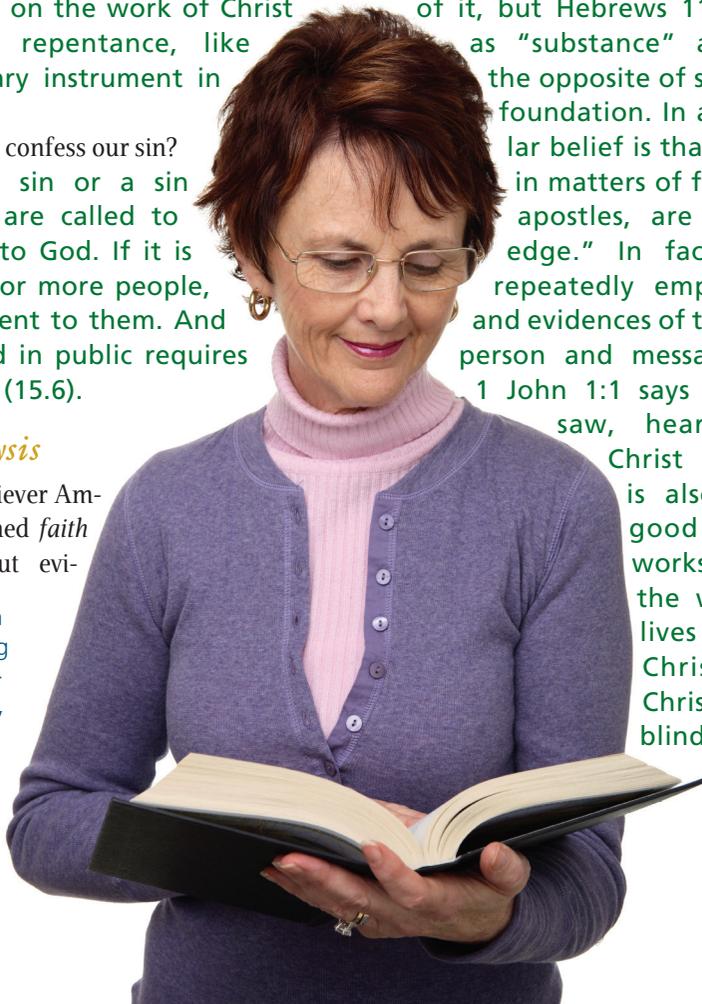
*Cultural Analysis*

1. The cynical unbeliever Ambrose Bierce defined *faith* as “Belief without evi-

The current debates in the church, concerning abortion, homosexuality and women’s roles, would not have even reached the floor to be debated by the Westminster divines.

dence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel,” and many secularists today would agree with him. How does that differ from Christian faith?

People like Bierce equate faith with “blind belief” in the absence of evidence or in spite of it, but Hebrews 11:1 describes faith as “substance” and “evidence”—the opposite of something without foundation. In addition, the secular belief is that those who speak in matters of faith, including the apostles, are “without knowledge.” In fact, the Scriptures repeatedly emphasize the signs and evidences of the truth of Christ’s person and message—for example, 1 John 1:1 says that the apostles saw, heard and touched Christ themselves. Faith is also proved by the good and powerful works of Christians in the world and by the lives changed by the Christian message. Christian faith is not blind and does not disregard evidence. Finally, all people



depend upon faith—see the next question.

2. Is the world divided between those who depend on faith and those who do not? Explain.

No—everyone has faith. The secular scientist has faith in his own limited senses and reason, believing that through these he can discover the nature of all reality and all truth. Everyone takes on faith the real existence of the world and other people, that they are not just illusions. No philosopher, however atheistic, can create a system that is not in some way based on an unverifiable belief. The question is not “faith or no faith?” but “faith in what or whom?”

### *Biblical Analysis*

1. Read the following passages: Romans 1:17, 9:11; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:4–5, 14; Ephesians 2:4–9; Revelation 20:12; Matthew 16:27; Hebrews 6:1, 10:24; and James 2:14–26. Using only the Bible for references (not the Confession), answer this accusation: “The Bible contradicts itself. It says we are justified by faith, and it also says we are justified by works.”

Let’s start with the idea that we cannot be justified by works. This is clear from Romans 1:17 (the just shall live by faith) and 9:11 (God’s election does not depend on works, but on His own good purpose). It is also very clear from 2 Timothy 1:9, Titus 2:4–5, and Ephesians 2:4–9. Recall that the Confession says we should use the clearest passages of Scripture to interpret the less clear. The most problematic are passages like James 2:14–26 (“faith without works is dead”), as well as Matthew 16:27 and Rev. 20:12, which show God judging people by their works. The solution is simply that faith and works are always together, but it is faith alone that is the instrument of justification. When James says we are justified also by works, he clearly means, from the context, that faith and works are always found together in action, while Paul, in his epistles, is talking about the strictly theological basis of justification. We also see that James uses the phrase “faith alone” to be merely an abstract assent to God’s truth (like that of

demons), while Paul uses “faith alone” to mean saving faith. In sum, Paul says, “God does not at all look at what we have done when He saves us; He uses our faith alone to save us—and part of that salvation is the gift of good works;” James says, “I agree: practically speaking, faith and works are always together.” James uses the analogy of the body and soul—the soul is clearly the true “person,” but it cannot live, move, or express itself without the body.

We must remember, too, that biblical writers did not necessarily use the word *justification* in the same sense that modern theologians do—Paul may be using it purely in a theological sense concerning the specific point when we are saved, and James may be using it in the sense of “God’s lifelong saving work in us.” The Matthew and Revelation passages must be understood in the light of other passages, so we remember that God does judge the wicked by their own works, and He judges the righteous by the works of Christ, which He has imputed (or considered transferred, for purposes of judgment) to the believer. In addition, we must recall that all good works are given graciously by God for us to perform.

2. Read the following passages: Luke 8:13; John 10:28–29; 1 John 2:19, 3:9; Romans 8:34–39, 11:22; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 2:18–19; Hebrews 6:4–6, 10:14. Using these and possibly other passages, answer the following question: “Can Christians lose their salvation?”

Many passages state clearly that we cannot: John 10:28–29; 1 John 3:9 and Romans 8:38–39. Other passages imply that believers can fall away: Luke 8:13; Romans 11:22; 1 Timothy 4:1 and Hebrews 6:4–6. Most of these can be explained by distinguishing between external Christians (non-elect covenant members) and the elect. We may thus find resolution in passages like 1 John 2:19, which states that those who fall were never truly of the faith, and 2 Timothy 2:18–19, which contrasts those who fall away with those who are eternally “sealed” with God’s firm foundation. The most problem-

atic passage is Hebrews 6, for it clearly talks about people who have been “enlightened,” “tasted” salvation, and “shared in the Holy Spirit.” However, this can also be explained as referring to the real benefits of being an external covenant member without sharing in true regeneration (note that these people are “tasters” instead of being filled with the Spirit). Another explanation is that the author of Hebrews here is talking about Jews who are looking back to the forms of the Old Covenant, not Christians in general who are looking back to a life of sin. In addition, a strong argument against the loss of true salvation is that if a true, regenerate Christian can lose his or her salvation, this makes salvation depend upon the faith or works of the person instead of the grace of God (2 Tim. 1:9)—a denial of the true gospel!

### SUMMA



*Write an essay or discuss this question, integrating what you have learned from the material above.*

Since the rise of Christianity, one of the great tensions in Western culture has been framed as “faith versus reason.” How do faith and reason fit together? This is an enormous subject, and there are many possible answers. What follows is only one possible answer to this question.

Before anything else we must recognize, as noted earlier, that faith is not something that some people depend on, while others get along without it. All people need faith to support their worldviews, whether they are Christians, Buddhists, New-Agers, or atheists. Questions of ultimate truth and authority always rest on faith of some kind. Therefore, one cannot appeal to “reason” as a valid ground of knowledge without having faith that human reason and experience, unaided, are a reliable way of discovering truth.

Look at it another way: reason is a machine, a way of logically deducing certain truths from other truths. But with what material does the machine work? From where do those first truths come? Our senses? How can we believe our senses? Reason is not a way to truth; it merely organizes and expands on

beliefs (true or not) that are already present in our minds.

Reason needs faith. Without faith, we are still in our trespasses and sins, and remember that sin corrupts every part of us, including our reason. Alone and unaided, our reason will always bring us to faulty conclusions. When we trust in Christ, He regenerates us and begins the process of repairing us, sanctifying our spirits and minds. Some want to pretend that reason is an “objective” way of finding the truth, but reason is fallen.

Yet reason is also necessary. We need reason to understand God’s commands and apply them in our lives. God is reason; He is ultimate consistency. Faith provides us with the starting point of all truth: a personal, trusting relationship with the eternal God. Starting from here, we are able to use our reason rightly to obey God, love our neighbor, and exercise dominion over the earth.



**READING ASSIGNMENT:**  
Chapters 19–24

## SESSION VII: DISCUSSION

Chapters 19–24

### A Question to Consider

How does our obedience to God’s word in daily life relate to our eternal salvation? How should we apply God’s Word to practical aspects of our lives as individuals, church members, and citizens?

Christians have historically had enough trouble agreeing on what the Bible says, much less how we should apply it in specific situations! Furthermore, Christians disagree about the nature of this obedience itself—does it help save us? If not, what is its role in our lives as Christians?

This first question is an important one. The Bible is very clear that we are not saved by good works, and yet it is just as clear that good works are necessary in the Christian life. As we explore this question, we should reach a balanced position that resolves the

dilemma: As part of our salvation, God always gives us good works to do; in doing them, we are being saved. We do good works by grace and by faith; God's grace works through our faith to motivate us to good works. Thus we help bring His will to the earth. (Review chapter 16 for more on good works.)

Now, beyond just "good works," how do we obey God as we live together as Christians—from what movies we watch and books we read, to how we structure and run our churches, to how we vote? The Scripture is often not explicit on these points; we need to discover principles and work out applications on our own. In our individual lives, we should know that we are freed from sin to righteousness. In our church lives, we must set up the church to avoid abuses of power, and we must actively participate in it. As citizens, we must proclaim Christ's lordship over the public square and yet be careful not to trust in politics or to confuse the separate roles of government and church.

*Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:*

### *Text Analysis*

1. What are the types of law, and which apply to us? What is the purpose of this law in the Covenant of Grace?

The general types of law given in Scripture (specifically, the Old Testament) are moral, ceremonial, and judicial. Only the moral law (that is, the Ten Commandments) is to be obeyed; the ceremonial was fulfilled by Christ and is no longer practiced by the Church, and the judicial was specific to the Jewish nation when God gave it to them. Nevertheless, the judicial law is still useful for determining "general equity." The purposes of the law are to remind us of our sin and drive us to Christ's grace, to provide a standard of right living within the context of grace, to enable us to express our thanks to God for salvation and to live out our faith (19.2–5).

2. What are Christians liberated *from*? What are

they liberated *to*?

Christians are liberated from bondage to sin and into the service of God and others in righteousness (chap. 20).

3. When and why are we obligated to follow human commands and traditions?

We may never be obliged to follow human commands and traditions which contradict or add to God's commands, as if they were divine and universally binding commandments. However, governments and churches do have real authority. If we bind ourselves by membership into a club, for example, then we are bound to obey its rules (we promised to by becoming members), but our obligation flows from our self-imposed membership and not from a universal, conscience-binding duty. In the same way, we are commanded to obey legitimate authorities, even on matters not treated explicitly in Scripture (speed limits, for example, or church parking lot rules), all the while recognizing that these authorities are under the greater authority of God and His word (20.4; see also 22.6–7 and 23.4).

4. According to the Confession, must every aspect of worship be explicitly commanded in Scripture? (This is called "the regulative principle" of worship.) Do you agree with the Confession? What does it mean for something to be "explicitly commanded"?

Yes, the Confession does subscribe to the regulative principle in 21.1, saying that worship practices are "limited" to what is "prescribed" by the Bible. Exactly how this limiting or prescribing works, however, is not clear. Specific examples of bad worship mentioned in the Confession are the use of divine images and the veneration of saints and angels (21.1–2), so it seems that this statement is primarily directed toward the more flagrant abuses of Roman Catholicism. But these abuses are clearly prohibited in Scripture, so it is unclear why the regulative principle is strictly necessary to exclude them from worship. It almost seems that the Westminster Assembly wanted to remove all hints of Catholicism rather than establish a

positive doctrine of liturgy.

Whether one agrees with the Confession here depends upon how one chooses to interpret the limiting and prescribing action of Scripture. Must we have a command, or is an example good enough? And since New Testament instruction on liturgy is scattered at best, how should Old Testament liturgies inform our own worship today, if at all? The Confession seems to choose certain features of Old Testament worship (such as religious oaths and vows and special days of thanksgiving) while neglecting to mention others (e.g., instrumental music, dance, processions, complex art and architecture, special garments). The issue is rather complex, and the Confession leaves room for varying interpretations of the regulative principle. Its intentions are sound—we should search the Scripture alone for wisdom about how to worship God rightly, not consulting our own imaginings, and remembering with reverence God's judgment upon the "strange fire" of Nadab and Abihu. We should certainly insist that worship must be in accord with Scripture.

5. Suppose you have a friend who says, "I love Sundays—after church I can just relax and have the whole afternoon to myself." According to the Confession, is he keeping the Sabbath? Why or why not?

No. The Confession states that the Sabbath is for worship and for deeds of necessity and mercy—not for selfishly indulging one's own pleasure. The Confession thus takes a strict Sabbatarian view, as opposed to those who treat Sundays just like Saturdays (except with church in the morning) or those who see the Sabbath as an occasion for weekly celebration in the form of feasting and fellowship with family and other saints. Such celebration seems inconsistent with the Confession's specific interpretation of the Sabbath (21.7–8).

6. When, if ever, are we obligated to take an oath? A vow?

The Confession tries to steer a middle course between frivolous swearing and the radical Christian view which says that no vows

or oaths are ever to be taken. It states that there are occasions for oaths and vows, namely when required by church or civil government in matters of great "weight or moment." We are not bound by vows to do something sinful or something that would hinder our obedience or for something so great or difficult that there is no promise we will be able to fulfill it (chap. 22).

### *Cultural Analysis*

1. Suppose you knew someone who said, "I'm a free Christian, so I can watch whatever movies, listen to whatever music, and wear whatever clothes I want. I don't have to follow speed limits or pay taxes. I don't have to tithe ten percent either or follow the church's parking guidelines." Using the Confession (and Scripture, as necessary), explain to this person why he's wrong about Christian liberty.

Though this person is wrong about each of his points (see Phil. 4:8; Rom. 13:1; Lev. 27:30; Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 16:1–2; 1 Tim. 5:17), it is his general attitude about Christian liberty which is the root of the problem. We are freed from bondage to sin so that we may be free to serve God and others in righteousness. We are not to use liberty as an excuse to indulge our own desires (1 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 5:13). This person may pretend to revere the Bible by claiming to be bound only by its explicit commands, but in reality he is ignoring the whole point of the Bible, not to mention specific passages that say he should surround himself with righteousness, obey the civil authorities, give generously and respect the elders' rules for the governance of his local church. He is also perhaps confusing obligations of conscience and obligations to lesser authorities.

2. Describe Americans' attitudes toward work and rest, and compare them to the biblical idea of the Christian Sabbath.

Americans, as a whole, are obsessed with work and worldly success. This is usually mixed with an equally powerful desire for money and leisure. So we bounce between stressful work lives and lazy, self-indulgent leisure times. This selfish and destructive

lifestyle needs the grace of the Sabbath, with its worship, rest, and communion with the saints.

### *Biblical Analysis*

1. From Scripture, answer the question, “Should worship be founded only on explicit commandments in Scripture?” Consider the following passages: Deuteronomy 12:32; Leviticus 10:1–3; Ecclesiastes 5:1–2; Matthew 15:9; Colossians 2:20–23; Hebrews 12:28. Consider also the fact that David used music and song in worship, which was not specified in the Law (see 1 Chronicles 16:4–6, 25:1), and in Esther a new religious festival was instituted (Esther 9:16–32).

Of primary concern are the passages that state that we should not add to or detract from the law of God (like Deut. 12:32) and the Nadab and Abihu passage (Lev. 10:1–3). Other supplementary passages include those that enjoin special reverence and humility in worship as opposed to everyday life (Eccles. 5:1–2; Heb. 12:28) and those that condemn dependence on the commandments of men instead of (or added to?) the law of God (Matt. 15:9; Col. 2:20–23). The Nadab and Abihu passage is especially supportive of the regulative principle, but even it is not clear enough to be beyond all doubt. There is little context about what exactly the men were doing and how it was profane. It was merely “unauthorized fire” which “the Lord had not commanded”—some translations say “contrary to the commandment of the Lord.” In addition, this occurred in the Old Testament, under the ceremonial law of Israel, and those who use this passage have the burden of proof regarding how it applies to the Church.

Those who argue against the strict regulative principle point to scriptural examples of godly people adapting and applying God’s commands regarding worship, such as David’s changes to Israel’s worship and Esther’s institution of a new, binding festival for the Jews (Purim). (For a book-length discussion of the Davidic changes to Israel’s liturgy, see *From Silence to Song* by Peter Leithart.) In addition,

the strict regulativists’ strongest proof comes from the Old Testament, and it is difficult to prove beyond doubt how these passages apply to the Church. One problem with this is that strict regulativists reject most aspects of Old Testament worship, such as instrumental music, processions, special garments, Christian holidays, dancing and religious art and architecture, yet they regard a strict interpretation of general Old Testament regulative commands as still binding. In addition, most strict regulativists do not practice some aspects of worship for which there are examples in the New Testament, such as the whole congregation taking turns preaching/edifying in church (1 Cor. 14:26–28).

All orthodox believers should agree that our worship must be founded solidly on Scripture. The main disagreements should be about how we should use Scripture to justify various worship practices.

2. Some Christians say we ought not promise, swear or take any kind of oath, even in a courtroom or for a church or government office. Make your own argument on this question, referring to Deuteronomy 10:20, Matthew 5:34–37, 2 Corinthians 1:23 and James 5:12.

Clearly, swearing was permitted and required in the Old Testament, but Jesus in Matthew 5 appears to be fulfilling Old Testament oath regulations in a similar way to the Old Testament adultery, murder, eye-for-eye and enemy-relations commandments. The New Testament teaching on oaths is difficult. Jesus appears to prohibit all swearing in Matthew 5, and this is repeated in James 5. However, on closer examination, we see that both these passages prohibit swearing by all created things; they do not prohibit swearing by God Himself. A stronger bit of evidence is that Paul himself takes an oath in God’s name in 2 Corinthians 1:23. The best interpretation seems to be that oaths should be taken only in rare and solemn circumstances and that we may not swear by any created thing, only in God’s name. In normal life and conversation, oaths should be unnecessary, especially among Christians.

## SUMMA



*Write an essay or discuss this question, integrating what you have learned from the material above.*

Some Christians have used Paul's statement that "we are not under law, but under grace" to say that in the New Covenant, Christians should follow only their own inner light from God and that the individual Christian may not be bound by any obligations to the authority of governments or churches. Refute this idea and explain the biblical view.

Paul's statement actually refers to the fact that we are no longer under the condemnation of the law, but that we are freed and empowered, by grace, to obey the law. We are still subject to the universal moral law of God, which is condensed in the Ten Commandments and condensed even further by Christ: Love God and love your neighbor. But "love" is meaningless without reference to a law that defines what love is. Further, the Bible clearly says that we are to be subject to both civil and ecclesiastical authorities, obeying their commands as long as we are not being forced to do something the Bible prohibits.

The view expressed above is an extreme view of individual Christian liberty. So, if we are to be biblical, we must ask, "Why is this person so eager to throw off all obligation and authority? For the purpose of better serving God and his neighbor?" In nearly all cases, the answer is no. Rather, this type of liberty is invoked so that the person may follow his own desires without interference from other saints. Our ultimate allegiance to Christ does not trump all worldly duties—for Christ Himself urged us to fulfill our earthly obligations!

Sometimes this extreme individualist view is directed against ordered worship in the Church: "Worship should be spontaneous and free; all organized worship is dead!" In this case, we must apply a form of the regulative principle and encourage such people that they are not to follow God after their own lights but in the ways that He has com-

manded. We may differ about how to interpret and apply His commands regarding worship, but we must acknowledge that we are not the final judges of how to live our lives, not only as individuals and church members, but also as citizens.



## READING ASSIGNMENT:

Chapters 27–29 (25 and 26 will be discussed in Session IX)

## SESSION VIII: WRITING

### A Question to Consider

What are the sacraments?

The language of the Confession is deceptively simple: they are "signs and seals." But what are signs and seals, and of what are the sacraments signs and seals? The most common sign is that of language itself—how do words relate to the things they represent? This is a very helpful way to begin thinking about signs. We might think of seals as specific types of signs that perform a special function: to confirm and guarantee a promise. There is much more here—see the answer to the writing assignment below for more details. The sacraments point to God's grace and salvation through Christ, as well as to the reality of the communion of saints as Christ's body.

Another question that preoccupied the Reformers was, "How many sacraments are there?" The Catholics had seven, but nearly all Protestants recognize only two: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Finally, what do the sacraments do? They communicate God's grace and blessing to us and provide clear, objective boundaries for membership in the Church. They are also a way of expression: by giving them to us, God expresses His love and promises toward us, and by participating in them, we express our faith and trust in Him. This is a start—the writing assignment below should bring out more details.

## Sacraments

One of the most important and controversial issues of the Reformation was the proper definition of the sacraments. On one extreme the sacraments become mere decorations to the gospel, and on the other extreme they become almost automatic, magical sources of spiritual blessing. Those on the *decorative* sacraments extreme think of the bread and wine as a simple memorial where they use the bread and wine, or the elements, to think about Christ's work. They use the elements in the same way you might use a trinket that has special sentimental meaning for you—i.e., when you see it you think of the friend that gave it to you. On the other end of the spectrum, those who believe transubstantiation practically worship the bread and wine, because they were believed to have become the actual body and blood of Christ.

*In an essay of 600–800 words, explain the sacraments in a biblical way, steering between these two extremes. If you need a starting point, consider the following questions:*

How would you define *sacrament* in your own words?

What is a *sign* in the context of sacraments?

What is a *seal*?

Are the sacraments instruments of grace and spiritual blessing?

What do the sacraments *do*?

Does baptism make a person a Christian?

Is the Lord's Supper essentially a memorial of His death?

Are the bread and wine the body and blood of Christ? If not, what are they?

What do these passages mean: Matthew 26:27–28; John 3:5; Romans 4:11, 6:3; Colossians 2:12; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 11:24–26, 12:13; Galatians 3:27; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21?

Sacraments are holy rituals commanded by God; they point to Christ as our Savior and Head, representing Him to us in a physical way, and they are guarantees of God's gracious intentions for us. The Westminster Confession defines them as "signs and seals"—so it may be helpful to explain what these mean (this terminology comes from Rom. 4:11). A sign is anything that points to or stands for any other thing. *The sacra-*

*ments are thus visible signs of spiritual realities* Signs can also be active, accomplishing things in reality beyond the level of the signs: for example, the vows of the bride and groom and the words of the pastor pronouncing them married or the words of a judge pronouncing a prisoner guilty. These are signs that change reality in physical and spiritual ways. We are physical beings, and we cannot alter reality in these ways without signs. We should not look down on signs because they are not themselves the reality; rather, we could not express, communicate, or receive the realities without the signs. And, as Augustine argued, the Son is the Sign of the Father, but this does not diminish that Sign's reality or divinity.

A seal could be seen as a type of sign which confirms or guarantees or accomplishes the thing that it signifies. Rings and a kiss are the seals of the marriage ceremony, because they confirm the vows with a physical action and symbol. The seal of an official document confirms and guarantees its authenticity, authority, and effectiveness. There is much more that could be said about signs and seals, but this should suffice for a basic understanding.

Sacraments perform a number of functions for individuals and the Church. In general, they are a means of God strengthening us with His grace (1 Cor. 10:16). We receive God's mark in baptism, at the same time acknowledging our filthy sinfulness and need of redemption, symbolically sharing in Christ's death and resurrection (Tit. 3:5; Rom. 6:4). Through our faith He uses that event to communicate the blessings of our salvation to us. We are strengthened when the Supper reminds us of Christ's sacrifice and of our total dependence on it (1 Cor. 11:24–25). In addition, we "partake of Christ's body" in that we are participating in the unity of the Church, proclaiming that we are supported by the Head (1 Cor. 10:16–21). The Westminster Confession of Faith says that there is a real "spiritual relation" between the signs (baptism and communion) and the things signified

(the washing away of our sins and our participation in Christ's death and resurrection). When we have faith and the Spirit is at work, there is a true connection between the signs and reality, so that God uses the instruments of these signs to save and nourish us.

In a more external sense, baptism proclaims to the world that we now bear the name of Christ and joins us to the historical, visible, universal Church of God (Matt. 28:19). In a similar way, the Lord's Supper is a very external and physical dividing line between those who are identified with Christ and those who are not (1 Cor. 10:21). It also binds the saints together in unity as they all partake of Christ's one body, thus becoming His body, the Church.

So, baptism "makes you a Christian" in the sense that it is a public and objective statement that the person is taking on the name of Christ, being incorporated into His body, the Church, and receiving the general blessings of being in covenant with Him. However, in the popular evangelical use of the term "Christian" as "truly regenerate person," this statement would be incorrect. Baptism does not regenerate your heart and make you a believer who is secure in the salvation offered by Christ in the gospel. Furthermore, to say that the Lord's Supper is "merely" a memorial is incorrect in Reformed thinking according to the Confession. The Supper is a memorial that is also a sign and seal of salvation and of God's spiritual gifts to us. It does not automatically convey such things, but by faith, it is the instrument that God uses to convey these blessings to us. In addition, the statement is incorrect because the Lord's Supper also signifies the unity and communion of the saints together, not just Jesus' death. Finally, to say that the bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ is clearly false if "are" is taken in the physical sense of Roman Catholic transubstantiation. It is true in that the Supper "is" Christ's body and blood in the metaphorical sense, in the same sense that we can point to a picture and say, "That's my father." The picture "is" and "is not" your father, but it is a representation of him, and it communicates

the reality of your father to you.



**READING ASSIGNMENT:**  
Chapters 25–26, 30–33

## SESSION IX: RECITATION

Chapters 25–26, 30–33

### Comprehension Questions

*Answer the following questions for factual recall:*

1. How do the following categories intersect: church member (baptized), non-church member, Christian, elect, non-elect?

Church member (baptized): equals Christian, "Christian" here meaning anyone who may be identified externally and objectively as being called by the name of Christ and identified with His Church (Acts 11:26). Someone may also be a member of the visible Church in general (baptized) but not a member of any local church.

Non-church members can be "Christians" in the sense that they truly believe Christ and follow Him, but they are not baptized or members of a local church (same as "elect"). Such people should be rare. Or, it could be someone who is elect but has not yet become regenerate or been baptized. More generally, it is an elect person outside the Church.

Christian: most people think this term applies to anyone who is truly regenerate, but it is probably more accurate to apply it to church members (baptized people).

Elect: someone who, at the final judgment, will be saved. Usually a church member and recognized by others as a "Christian" because of his baptism and membership in the Church.

Non-elect: someone who, at the final judgment, will not be saved. May be a non-church member, but may also be a Christian in the objective sense (a baptized church member) (25.1–2; 28.1, 5).

2. Explain why you cannot be a good Christian if you neglect the Church, using both chapters 25 and 26. First, in 25.2, we see that the church is given

the sacraments and ministry of God, and to reject such a blessing for our own good is at the very least foolish and ungrateful. Next, we are clearly commanded in Scripture to support one another spiritually and with physical necessities, and the Church is the God-given means for doing so (26.1–2). So neglect of the Church is neglecting to love our neighbor as ourselves.

3. Why is church discipline (or *censure*) necessary? Use your own words.

Its purposes are to bring the offender back to the Church and to Christ, to protect the rest of the Church from the offender's sin, to give proper respect to Christ and His name, to not give outsiders an occasion to accuse the Church of hypocrisy and to protect the Church as a whole from the wrath of God (30.3).

4. What are the responsibilities of church councils? Why do you think it is important to have church governments above local churches?

They decide matters which are above the concerns of any specific local church, such as defining heresy and orthodoxy in controversies of doctrine, deciding which matters are conscience-binding and which can be given leeway within the scope of Christian liberty, providing unity and agreement regarding liturgy and the workings of church government, and deciding cases which involve the leadership of local churches. They are important to preserve unity, which is commanded in Scripture, while still giving local churches some degree of freedom for diverse beliefs and practices. In addition, it is essential to have a higher authority to decide matters that involve misbehavior of local pastors and elders—otherwise, to whom can the local church turn? In addition, the more that Christians are unified, the more they can edify each other and the greater their power to evangelize and improve the world and help individual churches (as we see Paul do when he takes up collections for some churches to help others) (chap. 31).

5. From where does the authority of synods and councils come? When may they be disregarded? This authority comes from Scripture and

from the people whom they serve, being delegated to them. Synods and councils may be disregarded only when their commands contradict the clear teaching of Scripture or attempt to bind the conscience with something not in Scripture (chap. 31).

6. Is it enough for Christians to believe in the immortality of the soul?

No; we must also affirm the resurrection of the body (chap. 32).

7. Who will be resurrected on the last day?

All people—some to judgment and some to eternal life (chap. 32).

8. How is the nature of God revealed in the last judgment?

His justice is revealed against the wicked and His grace and mercy in the saved (33.2).

9. Can (or should) we predict when Christ will return?

No; for He has told us that we cannot know, in order to make us more watchful and careful concerning our walk with Him (33.3).

## SESSION X: ACTIVITY

### A Twenty-First Century Westminster Assembly

Role-play a modern assembly of Christians attempting to draft an outline for a new confession of faith. If you are in a classroom setting, divide up into groups of six to eight students. If you are in a home-school setting, involve parents or siblings. Working with others teaches an important lesson that the writers of the Confession had to learn, viz., any confession made by a group is based on the art of compromise. Your assignment is *not* to write a full confession, which could take many weeks or months, but simply to deal with the basic questions involved in writing such a document. Each group will need to wrestle with the following issues and questions in order to produce a well-thought-out document:

1. Are confessions and creeds permitted and/or needed? Write three or four paragraphs articulating the role of Scripture and of confessions, defending the use of confessions, explaining the source of their authority and describing the proper process by which they should be drafted.

We acknowledge that creeds and confessions are human works, with an authority that is secondary to the word of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Any confession is only binding insofar as it conforms to a reasonable interpretation of the Scriptures. We know that such summaries of the faith are permitted by God because we see several examples of them in Scripture. The Ten Commandments are quite clearly a summary of all the essential Old Testament law, as well as the “Shema” of Deuteronomy 6:4. Christ confirms this summary of the Law in Matthew 22:34–40. In addition, there are other passages which summarize the historical and spiritual truths of the gospel, much in the same way that the Apostles’ Creed does: 1 Cor. 15:3–7, 1 Tim. 3:16 and 2 Tim. 2:11–13.

The secondary authority of creeds and confessions may lead one to question their usefulness. Why do we need anything in addition to Scripture, since Scripture alone is sufficient and authoritative? The answer is that sincere and orthodox Christians disagree about how to interpret many aspects of Scripture and how to apply it to new situations. Thus confessions can clarify specific points of doctrine, but they also can provide a broad interpretive framework for Scripture. Christ’s summary of the Law as “Love God and your neighbor” is not just a theological statement; it has implications for how we interpret the whole Old Testament. So Christians need confessions in order to clarify their differences and to help define what basic orthodoxy is.

Confessions do have their limitations beyond the fact that their authority is secondary. The major limitation is that they do not express God’s truth with the richness and detail that Scripture does. They also do not use the forms of expression that Scripture uses—confessions are generally declarative, organized doctrinal statements, while Scripture is mostly history, law, proverb, poetry, symbolic visions, and prophecy.

Creeds and confessions should generally

be drafted under the broad authority of the Church, not in the name of isolated individuals or congregations. Generally speaking, in drafting a confession, the Church should proceed as it would in any other case involving great theological decisions. It should apply to as broad a segment of the Church as possible, and all those affected by it should be represented. Agreement should not be a simple majority; it should depend on almost overwhelming consensus. In addition, the drafters of confessions should provide Scripture proofs and supportive reasoning to back up confessional statements.

2. For what purpose and situation are you drafting your confession? Establish this and put it in writing before you begin. Possible examples of purposes and situations are (choose one):
  - An attempt to establish basic orthodoxy or find agreement among all Trinitarian Christians (the main groups being Roman Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox)

Our confession is an attempt to unite all orthodox Christians under a common confession of faith. We want to emphasize the beliefs that we hold in common against the real heresies of our time. We believe that this will aid cooperation among all true Christians as we strive toward consensus about the essentials of the faith and about which of our differences we must accept and tolerate. We will emphasize the following distinctives of orthodoxy: the authority and inerrancy of Scripture; the deity of Christ and doctrine of the Trinity; the sinfulness of mankind and our need for salvation; the death and resurrection of Christ as the ground of salvation; the necessity of baptism and the Lord’s Supper; the importance of the church; and the resurrection and final judgment with the return of Christ.

- An attempt to find agreement among all Protestants, or all the Reformed

This confession will attempt to unite all Protestants so that we may more easily cooperate with each other and tolerate our differences, while at the same time show-

ing clearly the errors of Roman Catholicism. We will emphasize our commitment to basic orthodoxy (see above) and will emphasize salvation by grace through faith alone; the supreme authority of Scripture over all human commands and traditions; the true operation of the sacraments; and the proper representative government of the Church. (If the confession seeks to unite the Reformed, a good start is the doctrines of the Canons of Dort, or “five points of Calvinism.”)

- A confession to provide standards of faith and practice for a denomination or local church

This confession is an attempt to provide a standard of faith and practice for our particular denomination. We recognize the need to conform to broader standards, such as the basic Christian creeds, and that some of our distinctives are secondary doctrines, on which sincere and true Christians may disagree. Nevertheless, this statement shall be the authoritative standard of doctrine for those who would lead in our denomination. We subscribe to the following creeds and confessions: Apostles’, Nicene, and Definition of Chalcedon. In addition, we subscribe to the later Canons of Dort, Belgic Confession, and Westminster Confession. In addition, we will add our own clarifications to and minor differences with certain points of these later confessions.

- A confession to unite and provide direction and guidelines for a Christian nonprofit group or an interdenominational Christian school

This confession will be intended for a Christian service group that will perform various sorts of community service in our town. It will be under the oversight of a board consisting of elders chosen from several local congregations. We will agree on the basics of orthodoxy (see above), and yet our statement of faith will be directed more toward action and less toward refining theology. For example, we will emphasize such things as guidelines for ministering to believers and unbelievers and our belief that we must minister always to body, mind, and spirit.

- If you want to choose a situation/purpose other than one of the above, ask your teacher to approve it before continuing.
3. Why make a new confession? Aren’t existing confessions and creeds good enough? If you believe that no new confession is necessary, you may select which existing creeds or confessions you would choose instead. However, you should also still play the role and try to come up with reasons to make a new one.

There are many reasons why a modern confession is needed. The first is simply that it has been a long time since the Church has met in a truly ecumenical council and decided on a unifying statement of the faith, which at the same time does not compromise the true gospel. Since the 1500s, the Church has been very divided, and though each group is often good at defining its own form of the faith, the Church as a whole has been unable to speak on many issues. Furthermore, many new issues have arisen since the great creeds and confessions were made (see the next question for some examples).

4. How has the world (and the Church) changed since the seventeenth century, and how should this be reflected in a new confession? Which of these changes and new issues are relevant to your purpose and the type of confession you are drafting? For example, you will probably want to include short sections on some or all of the following issues in your confessions. The first one is an actual example of how the Church has done this task recently. The answer in this example is the Preface to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy drafted by evangelical leaders in 1978:

- The inerrancy of the Bible.

*The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God’s written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.*

*The following Statement affirms this inerrancy of Scripture afresh, making clear our understanding of it and warning against its denial. We are persuaded that to deny it is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God's own Word that marks true Christian faith. We see it as our timely duty to make this affirmation in the face of current lapses from the truth of inerrancy among our fellow Christians and misunderstanding of this doctrine in the world at large.*

*This Statement consists of three parts: a Summary Statement, Articles of Affirmation and Denial, and an accompanying Exposition. It has been prepared in the course of a three-day consultation in Chicago.*

*Those who have signed the Summary Statement and the Articles wish to affirm their own conviction as to the inerrancy of Scripture and to encourage and challenge one another and all Christians to growing appreciation and understanding of this doctrine. We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight. Yet we rejoice in the deepening of our own convictions through our discussions together, and we pray that the Statement we have signed may be used to the glory of our God toward a new reformation of the Church in its faith, life, and mission.*

*We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we propose by God's grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.*

*We invite response to this Statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak. We claim no personal infallibility for the witness we bear, and for any help that enables*

*us to strengthen this testimony to God's Word we shall be grateful.<sup>3</sup>*

- The definition of basic orthodoxy and the evaluation of various sects and denominations, ranging from Pentecostalism and Catholicism to Christian liberalism, Mormonism, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and Christian Science.

The basic boundaries of orthodoxy must be the supreme authority and sufficiency of Scripture alone; the doctrine of the Trinity; Christ's life, death and resurrection as the ground of our salvation; salvation by grace through faith; and the reality of Christ's return and the resurrection of the dead. Basic orthodoxy should be defined by the early creeds, and any teaching which changes or denies those doctrines must be declared heresy.

- A statement on abortion

Some Christians have sought to permit abortion under certain circumstances, such as early in the pregnancy, or in cases of rape or incest, or in cases where the mother's life is in danger. The Church's stance on the issue historically has been complex as well. For example, based on ancient beliefs that life did not begin until the mother could feel the child move in the womb, some church leaders declared abortion before such movement to be less serious than abortion after it. Of course, we now have a much clearer view of how a child develops, and we can trace the continuous growth of life from conception onward, with no clear point of "ensoulment," in which theologians such as Thomas Aquinas believed. Furthermore, several Scriptures indicate that life begins at conception: Ex. 21:22–25; Job 10:8–12; Ps. 139:13–16; Luke 1:35–36, 39–44. A dubious interpretation of the Exodus passage ("miscarriage" instead of "born prematurely") has been used in support of looser restrictions on abortion, but the argument is shaky at best.

The Christian view, in short, is that life begins at conception and must be protected at conception. In the very rare cases when the

life of the mother is clearly at stake, however, a sincere Christian might argue to leave the decision to the family, provided that every-thing possible is done to save both lives.

- A statement on homosexuality

The Scriptures clearly prohibit homosexual-ity, not only by positively showing God's plan of heterosexuality (Gen. 1:27–28) but also through specific negative commands (Lev. 18:22, 20:13; Rom. 1:28; 1 Cor. 6:9). Though most of the Old Testament law is no longer applicable today, the grounding of hetero-sexuality in creation, Old Testament law, and New Testament ethics confirms that it is a binding moral law. Christians may disagree about how the civil government should legis-late concerning homosexuality, but it is clear that it has no place in the Church. However, we must also affirm that those guilty of homo-sexual sin must be treated with love, as should any other sinner, and we must earnestly seek for their repentance and salvation.

- A statement on the roles of women in the church

The Bible's teaching on this subject can be complex and confusing sometimes, but an overall consensus is possible. Passages we must take into account: women leaders and prophetesses in the Old Testament (Judg. 4–5; 2 Kings 22:14–19); women's roles in Prov. 31 and a woman as the symbol of wisdom in Prov. 8; Jesus' relationships with women (John 4:7–5:30; Luke 10:38–42; Luke 8:1–3; Matt. 28:9–10); the fact that men and women are equal before Christ (Gal. 3:28); passages that teach submission of a woman to her husband (Eph. 5:22–24); women should be "silent in church" (1 Cor. 14:34–35; 1 Tim. 2:11–15); women should pray and prophesy (in church?) with their heads covered (1 Cor. 11:3–9); passages that assume church leaders are all male (1 Tim. 3:2, 8; Tit. 1:6); and pas-sages that show women as deacons, proph-etesses, and teachers in the New Testament (Acts 18:24–26, 21:9; Rom. 16:1–3, 7 [note that some translations change "Junia" to "Junias"]; Phil. 4:2–3).

Clearly there is a place in the church for women, possibly in the role of "dea-coness." And we do have an example of a woman and her husband together teaching a man (Acts 18:24–26). However, we have no clear examples of women holding ruling or teaching offices in the church, and in fact, a couple of passages explicitly prohibit it. Furthermore, the "silence" in church can-not be absolute, because Paul tells women to pray and prophesy with their heads cov-ered, not to avoid praying and prophesying altogether. Finally, we should recognize at least that putting a married woman in a position of leadership over the church (which would include her husband) subverts the structure of their marriage as ordained by God. Also, Galatians 3:28 is about salva-tion and not about the workings of church leadership. In sum, it is clear that men are called to lead the Church, and women are encouraged to participate in that leadership in a complementary fashion, but not in an egalitarian fashion.

5. How will you organize your confession? Why does organization matter?

Organization makes subtle statements about theology. For example, a confession that begins with the nature of mankind and the created world and then moves to the nature of God and Scripture would seem to privi-lege reason and natural revelation over God and Scripture. It implies that our search for God starts within us and that we can seek God in our own strength. Confessions that begin with Scripture and the nature of God emphasize that we cannot seek God without His prior gracious revelation to us.

Each group should appoint a scribe and turn in a log of its answers to these questions and the reasoning behind them. Do not merely turn in an imitation of the Westminster Confession or other single existing confession. The point of the activity is to encourage original and creative thought about the content, orga-nization, and rhetoric of confessions.

## OPTIONAL SESSION A: ACTIVITY

### Drafting a Confession

As a supplement to Session X, your group may go further and actually draft a short confession or an outline of a longer confession which reveals which topics you will deal with and how they are organized. For example, the Westminster Confession could be outlined in this way (the major topic headings are not specified in the Confession, and some of the lower headings are modified to be more informative and detailed):

- Revelation
- Nature vs. Scripture
- The contents of the Bible
- The authority of the Bible
- Interpretation and application of the Bible
- The Nature of God
- Attributes, character and triune nature
- Eternal decree
- Personal Salvation . . .

For a written confession, aim for about 1500 words. For an outline to a longer confession, aim for about two pages, single-spaced. Again, the point here is not to produce a miniature or imitation of the Westminster Confession (or other Reformed confession), but to be creatively orthodox.

#### Example: A Broad Protestant Confession

- I. The Nature of God
  - A. The Trinity
    1. Why God must be triune
    2. Definition of the Trinity
    3. The role of God the Father
    4. The role of God the Spirit
    5. The role of God the Son
  - B. The attributes of the One-Three God: e.g., beauty, power, knowledge, wisdom, justice, holiness, mercy, graciousness, playfulness, inscrutability.
- II. Revelation
  - A. Scripture
    1. Definition
    2. Authority
    3. Inerrancy
    4. Interpretation

- B. Natural revelation
  1. Definition
  2. Limitations
  3. Science and Scripture

#### III. The Nature of Man

- A. Created upright
- B. Now a sinner in need of salvation
- C. Dependence on God
- D. Common grace
- E. As both individual and relational being, in sin and salvation

#### IV. The Nature of Salvation

- A. Definition: Salvation can be seen in many ways:
  1. Redemption
  2. Justification
  3. Sanctification
  4. Adoption
  5. New/eternal life
  6. Restored communion (reconciliation)
  7. Empowerment to righteousness
  8. Freedom
- B. Means and instruments of salvation
  1. Predestination
  2. Calling
  3. By grace through faith
- C. Evidences and effects of salvation
- D. Salvation spreads from individuals to relationships, societies, cultures and governments

#### V. The Church . . .

#### VI. Christianity and Society . . .

## OPTIONAL SESSION B: WRITING

### Comparing Confessions

In an essay of about 1500 words, compare and contrast (with special regard to organization, choice of topics, content, and purpose) the Westminster Confession with one or several of the following confessions or creeds:

1. The Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Definition of Chalcedon, Canons of the Council of Orange and Athanasian Creed (as a group they can be called "the early creeds")

These are very universal and broad statements which define basic orthodoxy, not just for Reformed churches in one part of the world. Perhaps the Westminster Confession of Faith is intended to be a similar standard of orthodoxy (making any who disagree with it heretics), but a case can be made that it cannot fulfill that role. For one thing, it goes beyond the types of creeds found in Scripture itself, all of which are similar to the Apostles' Creed in scope and content. For another, it acknowledges that councils can err and that Scripture is unclear in parts, so it seems that any creed which goes beyond restating basic scriptural formulas (e.g., believe in Christ, salvation by grace, the resurrection) cannot have the same level of broad authority as the Apostles' Creed.

In any case, the above creeds serve a very different purpose than the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Apostles' Creed restates basic Christian belief from Scripture, without elaboration or detail; the others affirm the deity and humanity of Christ and the Trinity (Nicene, Chalcedon, Athanasian), and the nature of sin and the fallen will, with its implications for grace, works, and salvation (Orange). These statements are all much narrower in scope than is the Westminster Confession and tend to be more focused in specific controversies than in stating the whole faith in detail, as the Westminster Confession does.

2. The Augsburg Confession

This is the first detailed Reformed confession, written in 1530. It continues to be a foundational confession of Lutheran churches. Its organization is very different from that of the Westminster Confession; it begins with a quick overview of the nature of God, sin, Christ and justification (1–4) before launching into a long explanation of the Church and sacraments (5–15). It quickly disposes of civil government and the final judgment (16–17), before going on to soteriology—free will, sin, good works and various abuses of Catholicism (18–28). Especially emphasized is faith versus works, and notably absent is a doctrine of predestination. It is clear that this confession is even more focused and defined by its anti-Catholicism than is the Westminster Confession, which (because of the maturity and relative stability of Protestantism by the 1640s) provides a more mature and positive vision for the Protestant church.

3. The Belgic Confession

This confession was written in 1561 to defend Protestants in the Netherlands from Catholic persecution by explaining how their doctrine is orthodox according to Scripture. It follows an organization similar to that of the Westminster Confession of Faith: Scripture and the nature of God, creation and providence, sin and salvation, church and sacrament, magistrates, and the last judgment. Like other Reformed confessions, particularly the early ones, its emphasis is on distinguishing itself from Roman Catholicism. It therefore goes into great detail concerning the "true church," the nature of the sacraments, and the roles of faith and works—these are the great themes of the Reformation. It also spends more time on the Trinity and the nature of Christ than does the Westminster Confession.

4. The Second Helvetic Confession

This is an early Reformed confession written by Heinrich Bullinger in 1566. It has many things in common with the Westminster Confession, particularly its general organization (Scripture first, then the nature

of God, creation and providence, sin and personal salvation, the church and sacraments, and the civil magistrate). Like the Augsburg Confession, it is more clearly anti-Catholic than is the Westminster Confession, devoting several sections to refuting specific Catholic doctrines. In addition, this confession develops the doctrine of predestination and is more precise about the Trinity. It also concerns itself more with specific sects and movements of its time (and many before its time), such as the Schwenkfeldians and Jacobites. It specifically mentions and affirms previous creeds and confessions. It is less concerned with Scripture proofs than is the Westminster Confession, though it is much longer and more detailed.

#### 5. The Thirty-Nine Articles

Written in 1571 to define the English church against the Roman Catholic church and some of the continental reformers, this document was intended to highlight the basic beliefs and distinctives of the Anglican church rather than provide a full, detailed confession (in contrast to the Westminster Confession). It is basic in its doctrines and does not go into much detail. It seems most concerned with denying Roman Catholicism and also standing against the Anabaptists (e.g., articles 17 and 38). In addition, the original 1571 edition makes specific political moves, such as establishing the King of England as the head of the Anglican church (article 37). The document was revised in 1801 (by American Episcopalians) to remove some of this political and time-specific language.

#### 6. The Canons of Dordt

Written in 1618–1619 in specific response to the Arminian controversy, this document is foundational to clarifying and establishing the Reformed faith. It lays out five points of doctrine regarding election, redemption, sin, conversion, and perseverance—this is the source of the five points of Calvinism we remember (slightly reformulated, in different order) with the TULIP acronym: total depravity, unconditional election, limited

atonement, irresistible grace and perseverance. So this document is restricted in scope and focused on its contemporary situation. It is also very influential to later Reformed confessions as a condensed expression of Reformed distinctives.

#### 7. The Confession of 1967

(United Presbyterian Church)

This modern confession strikes a very different note than do those of the Reformation, not only in its organization and content, but also in its tone. It begins by affirming that Scripture is the only true standard and that all creeds and confessions can err, though they are helpful. It also confesses that creeds must confront issues of their times and states that in its current time, the message of “reconciliation” is particularly needed. Therefore, the confession is organized around this theme in three parts: defining God’s work of reconciliation; describing the Church’s ministry of reconciliation in the world; and articulating hope of final reconciliation. The confession recasts traditional theological issues in terms of reconciliation—e.g., Christ’s person and work, the meaning of sin, the meaning of Scripture, the work of salvation, the purpose of the church and sacraments. It also treats modern issues such as racism, international relations, weapons of mass destruction, fear of overpopulation, and concern for the environment.

This confession is notable for its tone, which strives to be extremely sensitive. It avoids absolute, judgmental language and emphasizes God’s love while downplaying His wrath. It preaches “openness and respect” for other religions and treads closely to pluralism as it places Christianity alongside other world religions. It also may be seen to be damaging to the authority of Scripture by emphasizing that the Scripture is a product of the various cultures and authors that wrote it down, thus opening it up to profound reinterpretation. There are many other differences with the Westminster Confession here, but this is a good start.

### 8. The Lausanne Covenant

This is a fairly recent (1974) evangelical statement that is not technically a confession (though it functions in much the same way); rather, it is a commitment or “covenant,” as its name shows. This decision is an example of the modern emphasis on the church in action rather than on the theological foundation of the church—for this document was meant to unify various Protestant churches for the purpose of missions and evangelism, not primarily for the purpose of establishing common doctrine and orthodoxy (though it does that to some extent). It lays a solid foundation on the nature and plan of God, the authority of Scripture, and the nature of Christ, though it neglects a detailed theological treatment of the nature of salvation. Its theology is basic and mostly sound, repeating the truths of the early Christian creeds. It emphasizes how

decentralized Protestant evangelism should work in the world. Clearly, the whole orientation of this document is radically different from that of earlier confessions, emphasizing action rather than theology and creating a broad tent of orthodoxy rather than detailing doctrinal specifics. No doubt action is important now, as it always has been, but action always proceeds from creedal belief.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 The Lord Protector was a title used by those who held the position of Regent while an English Monarch was too young to rule. After the beheading of Charles I, Oliver Cromwell took this title and led England during the Interregnum, or the English Republic. This time occurred between the beheading of Charles I and the Restoration of Charles II, December 1653 through May 1659. Oliver Cromwell and his son Richard both held the title.
- 2 Lewis, C.S. *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954. 37.
- 3 A complete copy of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy may be found by clicking Link 1 for this chapter at [www.VeritasPress.com/OmniLinks](http://www.VeritasPress.com/OmniLinks).

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