

Making a Good Profession

A Handbook for Church Membership

by

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Welcome! This class is for all who may be interested in membership in this congregation. Taking the course does not commit anyone to membership, although I urge everyone who attends to seriously consider it.

We will cover the following five topics:

- i. Confessing the Authority of the Bible over both Faith and Life
- ii. Confessing the Triune God of the Bible and the Incarnation of God the Son
- iii. Confessing a Personal Trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour
- iv. Confessing Submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ
- v. Confessing Submission to the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth

These topics follow the outline of the Vows of Communicant Membership on pg. 3 because it is my hope that the course will enable those who desire to become members to take the membership vows with good understanding and a clear conscience before God and His people.

****These membership vows are the most important vows you will ever make—they are more important than even your wedding vows; for they are the vows of your soul and heart by which you profess yourself to love Jesus as your Lord and Saviour and to belong to the Bride of Christ Himself. Therefore let all who love the Saviour take these vows with joy and sobriety; but let none take these vows whose heart is not in loving surrender to Christ as Lord.**

A profession of faith is important because, though it is a *personal* matter when one is born again, it is not a *private* matter. Becoming a Christian is being united to Christ's Body, which, though it is spiritual, has a visible representation on earth over which He is Head, in which He rules, and upon which He bestows His choicest blessings. Salvation therefore obligates one to a public profession (2Cor 4.13), a public owning of Christ's grace and work within the community which bears His name.

You may find that some of the material covered will be familiar to you, but as Peter once wrote (2Pet 1.12-13), there is great value in reviewing the core doctrines of our Christian faith, for we are prone to wander from them more easily since they are familiar to us.

For Christ & His Church,

Pastor La Belle

The Vows of Communicant Membership at PCCC

- A. Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?

- B. Do you believe in one living and true God in whom eternally there are three distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—who are the same in being and eternal in power and glory, and that Jesus Christ is God the Son, come in the flesh?

- C. Do you confess that because of your sinfulness, you abhor and humble yourself before God, repent of your sin, and trust for salvation, not in yourself, but in Jesus Christ alone?

- D. Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Sovereign Lord, and do you promise, that in reliance upon the grace of God you will: serve Him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?

- E. Do you promise to participate faithfully in this church's worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline, even if you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life?

Introduction: Why should you join the visible church of Christ?

- I. What is the church?
 - A. The church is a congregation. One individual person does not constitute a church or a congregation. Just consider the way in which the Bible refers to Christ's church, 1Pet 2.5; Jn 10.16; Eph 1.22-23; 1Pet 2.9; 1Th 2.12.
 - B. The Bible never refers to an individual Christian as the church, but always refers to Christians as part and members of the church, 1Cor 10.17; 12.13; Eph 4.4-6; Col 1.13; Ps 89.5.
 - C. The church is separated from the world and constitutes a separate unit, Dt 7.6; 2Cor 6.17; Isa 5.2; Acts 20.28; Heb 13.17; Mt 18.17; 1Cor 5.13
 - D. The church is united to itself as one body, one flock, one building, &c. They gather around one Lord, one truth, one faith, one baptism, being united by one Spirit unto one God.
 - E. The church does not spontaneously unite, but is constituted by the Lord Himself, Acts 2.47; Col 1.13; Jn 10.16. The means by which the Lord gathers His sheep is His preached Word, Jn 10.16; Js 1.18; Heb 3.1; Rom 10.14-17.
 - F. Thus the church of Christ is always centered upon and gathers around the preached Word of Christ. The divine luster of the church makes it attractive to many in the world, who then gather among them, though not true in heart. These are wolves in sheep's clothing, tares planted among the wheat, foolish virgins among the wise, and will eventually either uproot themselves or be uprooted by God in judgment. For the Lord God is the keeper of His own vineyard, Isa 5.
 1. This is how whole churches and denominations can become polluted or heretical. The wolves have outnumbered the sheep and overtaken the pulpit.
 2. Yet, there will always be a true church on earth, Mt 16.18; 28.20; 1Cor 15.25-26.
 - G. In the landscape of so many false churches, how may we know the true church of Christ? What are the marks of His church?
 1. The primary and most distinguishing mark is purity of doctrine, doctrine consistent with the Word of God, Eph 2.19-21; 1Tim 3.15; Jude 3; 2Jn 9-10; Jn 8.31-32
 2. Proper administration of the sacraments, Mt 28.18-20; 1Cor 11.23-29.
 3. Proper use of the keys of the kingdom (church discipline), Mt 18.17; 1Cor 5.13; 2Th 3.14.
- II. Is it the duty of every Christian to become a member of Christ's visible church? —See **Appendix 1** for the article Is Church Membership Biblical?
 - A. Church membership is assumed in the entire Scriptures. Every NT public letter assumes an audience joined together by a common faith, profession, and commitment. There's not a single unconnected believer in all of Scripture. Every believer in Scripture is either expressly or implicitly a part of the whole church of God.
 1. The church is not a collection of individuals with personal relationships with Christ, but brethren joined to one Christ as one body, Acts 2.37-47, Dan 9.3-10; Eph 4.4-6
 2. In the OT, membership was acquired either by birth into the church or profession into the church, both of which are sealed by circumcision. In the NT, membership is acquired either by birth into the church or profession into the church, both of which are sealed by baptism.
 - B. When God saves a person, He always adds him to the visible church, Acts 10.1-4, 44-48; Isa 56.3; Acts 2.47; Mt 28.19
 - C. This is consistent with the nature of God's children, who recognize their relationship to Christ's church and His brethren, Gal 4.31; 1Jn 2.19; 3.14.
 - D. There is no ordinary possibility of salvation outside the visible church, 2Cor 6.16-18; 1Jn 2.19
 - E. Both baptism and the Lord's Supper lose their meaning outside a visible church, 1Cor 10.16-17.
 - F. It is commanded that we assemble and congregate as Christ's church, Heb 10.24-25
 - G. The "one another" commands cannot be fully obeyed without an acknowledged membership, 1Jn 4.21.
 - H. The Elders cannot be held responsible for an undefined flock, Acts 20.28; Heb 13.17; 1Pet 5.2.
 - I. The flock cannot submit to an undefined leadership, Heb 13.17.

Vow 1 — Confessing the Authority of the Bible over both Faith and Life

Question 1: *Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?*

***The rationale behind this vow is twofold: 1) the OPC is a denomination in which the Scriptures are not only foundational to faith and practice, but front and center in all the church's worship and ministry. The Scriptures are preached as the inspired Word of God, authoritative over all of life; they are taught as God's absolute truth fully sufficient for every question in life; and they are utilized in counseling as divine light for every path. The OPC aims to command nothing of you but what Scripture commands and to forbid nothing to you but what Scripture forbids; 2) the Bible reveals only one way of being reconciled to God (i.e. through Jesus Christ) and explicitly declares all other ways of salvation to be false and damning. —This first vow asks if you hold the Scriptures in the highest esteem as the inspired, infallible, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God, which, by implication, is also asking for your personal submission to the authority of Scripture over your life. It further asks if you agree that the Bible's doctrine of salvation is the only possible way for a sinner to be saved.*

I. What is the Bible?

A. It is the Word of God to man:

1. 2Tim 3.16—God inspired the Bible, which literally means, God ‘breathed out’ Scripture.
2. 2Pet 1.19-21—Though written by men, it is literally the Word of God because God so guided them by His Spirit to ensure that every written word was *His Word*.

B. As God's own Word, it necessarily bears the qualities of His authorship

1. It is absolute truth
 - a) Jn 8.43-47; Jn 17.17; 1Thes 2.13
 - b) WCF 1.4, “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.”
 - c) As truth, the Bible tells us the truth about ourselves, our world, our God, all of which are so piercing, convicting, and damning. And it is for these reasons that man is so opposed to the Bible, because it appears to be his enemy, or at least it appears to present God as his enemy.
 - d) But is it not better to be told the truth about our health by a Doctor who can heal us than to be lied to about our health by a Doctor who will profit off our demise? Think of God as the Doctor who tells us what we don't want to hear but absolutely need to hear: the truth, and realize that it is out of pure mercy and love that God tells us the truth because He desires that we will turn to Him and be saved, Rom 3.10-25; Mt 11.28.
2. It is perfect and without error
 - a) Heb 6.18; Ps 89.35; Jn 15.26; 16.13
3. It is fully sufficient for all the needs of both faith and life, 2Tim 3.16-17; Pss 19.7-11; 119.9.
 - a) Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) 1.6, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”
4. It is complete and will never be added unto

- a) Dt 29.29; Heb 1.1-3
- b) It is composed of the 66 books of the Protestant Holy Bible and no more.
- 5. It is self-attesting and self-authenticating.
 - a) These are unique qualities which necessarily grow out of the character of its Author. For who can prove God to be God but God, and who can attest God's Word or authenticate God's Word but God Himself? Thus, the Bible attests to and authenticates itself. There is no authority greater than God's written Word.
 - b) Therefore we either receive it as the Word of God by faith or we reject it outright by unbelief or the demand for external verification and proof.
- 6. It is uniquely amazing as a book.
 - a) It is compiled of 66 books written over 1400 years by over 40 different authors from all walks of life, with no contradictions, but rather bears a perfect harmony of thought, intent, perspective, message, all which evidence its divine authorship.
 - b) The Holy Spirit bears the testimony of the Bible's divine authorship to our hearts when He saves us, 1Cor 2.12-14; Isa 59.21, Jn 16.13. He also continues to bear this testimony to us as we continue to read it throughout our Christian lives. As a work of the Spirit in our hearts, we are convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Bible is the Word of God and that we hear God speaking to our lives and hearts through every word of it, Jn 10.3-5.
 - (1) WCF 1.5, "We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, *our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.*"
- 7. It is authoritative over both what we believe and how we live. It speaks with authority over both head, heart, and hand. Our entire life is under the scope of the Bible's message.
 - a) As the Word of God, it is absolute truth for all peoples and ages. It defies the notions that truth is relative or that there is no absolute truth in the world. In the Bible God speaks truly, authoritatively, and finally. Those who heed it will be saved, while those who discard it or treat it with any other response than sincere faith and humble submission will one day feel the truth of what they refuse to believe today.
 - b) The Bible is therefore first a word of invitation to sinners that they repent and be saved; only afterwards is it a word of judgement to those who reject it. In other words, we need to see the Bible as God's message of salvation to lost sinners and not God's book of hatred and judgment to a world on a joy-ride.
- C. We must therefore not presume to judge the Bible nor read our message into it. As it is God's Word to us, we must receive it as it is (1Thes 2.13), give absolute obedience to it, and take it as face value.
 - 1. God does not ask us to approve of His revelation, sit as judge over it, or validate it; rather, as our Sovereign God and Creator, He is declaring His will and revealing Himself to us. We must therefore subject ourselves to His Lordship & care if we would be saved by His grace and mercy.

II. What, then, is the Bible's doctrine of salvation?

- A. 1) that man is lost under the guilt, power, and judgment of sin and in need of a Saviour outside of himself, Gen 3.1-10; Rom 3.10-20; Jer 17.9; 1Cor 1.20-21
- B. 2) that God has provided a Saviour for sinners in none other than His Son Jesus Christ, Lk 24.25-27, 44-47; 1Jn 3.8b; Jn 3.16; 14.6; ; Mt 11.27-28
 - 1. That's why there's no other way to be saved except through faith in Jesus Christ because He's God's only provision for our salvation. The 'mother promise' of Scripture, Gen 3.15, finds its fulfillment in Christ, Mt 1.21; Rom 6.23
 - 2. Many teach that there are many ways to God, but the Bible teaches us that there is only one. If we reject Christ as our Saviour, then we will be lost forever, Jn 3.36; Heb 10.26-27; Acts 4.12; Acts 17.30-31; Rom 3.9-31
- C. 3) that all other attempts at salvation are the products of men's imagination. As it is God alone whom we have offended, so it is God alone who can forgive us. *That* He will do so, and *how* He will do so, are both revealed in His Book and in no other place.
 - 1. It is only in the Bible that the gospel of grace is revealed. Man cannot come to this revelation on his own. Natural revelation testifies to man of God so that every man is without excuse for not worshipping Him, Rom 1.19-20. Natural revelation is therefore sufficient to condemn but insufficient to save.
 - 2. Thus the necessity of the revelation of the gospel in the Scriptures.
- D. 4) that Christianity stands *alone*. There is no other religion by which a man can be reconciled with God.
 - 1. Every other religion is man's saving himself, man's attempt to build a ladder of good works to Heaven, man's attempt to pacify God, man's attempt to deliver himself from guilt and earn Heaven, man reaching up.
 - 2. Christianity alone bears a message of God reaching down to save sinners, of a ladder lowered from Heaven to Earth in order that the Son of Man might come down to man, of God pacifying Himself, and of God graciously delivering man from sin and guilt and gifting eternal life to the penitent.
 - 3. No other religion has God coming to rescue man by dying to pay for his sins and rising from the dead on the third day to conquer his death. We must look to Jesus Christ if we would be saved; there is simply no other way.

Can you sincerely confess, from the heart, that you believe ¹the Bible, consisting of the Old and the New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and ²its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?

Vow 2 — Confessing the Triune God of the Bible and the Incarnation of God the Son

Question 2: *Do you believe in one living and true God in whom eternally there are three distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—who are the same in being and eternal in power and glory, and that Jesus Christ is God the Son, come in the flesh?*

The rationale behind this vow is that the Bible clearly reveals God as triune and Jesus Christ as the Second Person of that divine Trinity in the flesh, being uniquely fully God and fully man. Salvation is so entirely centered on a right knowledge of God and His Son as He is presented to us in the Bible (who He is and what He has done) that if a person has the wrong notion of God and Christ, he simply cannot be saved—no matter what else he may understand about the Bible. —This second vow asks if the God and Jesus you profess to know and believe in is the one true God and the one true Christ revealed in Scripture and if you believe in God as Scripture reveals Him to be.

- I. God reveals Himself to man both in creation (Ps 19.1-6) and in His Word (Ps 19.7-11).
 - A. The knowledge gained through creation is true knowledge but it is not a saving knowledge. It does not reveal the grace, mercy, and love of God which makes provision for man's salvation, but only reveals God's holiness, power, and hatred of sin.
 - B. Therefore God was pleased to reveal His will to save sinners in the Bible. And this revelation necessitated that He reveal His triune nature, for it is as a triune God that He is able to save us.
 1. WCF 1.1, "Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. *Therefore* it pleased the Lord...to reveal himself, and to declare his will unto his church; and afterwards...to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary...."
- II. There is no other God but the One revealed in Scripture
 - A. All other gods are idols of men's imaginations, Ps 115.2-9; Isa 40.18-23; 41.21-24; 42.5, 8, 17; 44.24-25
 1. WCF 2.2, "He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them."
 - B. God alone created the heavens and the earth, Ps 96.4-5
 1. WCF 4.1, "It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness—in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good."
 - C. God is Three Persons and yet One God, a *tri-unity* or Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Mk 1.9-11; Mt 28.19; Jn 1.1-3; Jn 10.30, 1Cor 8.4-6; 2Cor 3.17; 2Cor 13.14; Gen 1.2; Eph 1.4, 7, 13; 1Pet 1.2
 - D. Thus, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are equally to be worshipped by angels and men as God, Phil 2.9-11; Heb 1.2-3, 6, 8; 2Cor 13.14; Rev 19.9-10
 - E. This doctrine of the trinity can only be known from the Bible, Isa 40.18; 1Cor 2.10-13, and recognizes one Divine Being, who has revealed Himself as three distinct and inseparable Persons.
 1. When we think of the three, we are brought to think of the One; and when we think of the One, we are brought to think of the three.

III. God the Son became incarnate in the womb of the virgin Mary

A. The Son of God took on our flesh, Jn 1.1-3, 14

1. Rather than laying aside His deity, Jesus added our humanity to His deity, thus veiling His deity during the days of His humiliation (though it shined forth at times in remarkable ways, e.g. Mt 8.26-27; 9.3-4), Phil 2.6-7; Heb 2.14-17; Jn 20.27-29; Mk 1.24
2. Thus, Jesus Christ is uniquely fully God and fully Man. This was necessary in order for Him to work out our salvation: only God could work our redemption, but only a Man could represent us in the work. Therefore God the Son took our humanity to Himself that He might be God our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Heb 2.14-17; Mt 20.28
3. WCF 8.2, “The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.”

B. Though fully man, with a truly human body and a reasonable human soul, yet Jesus Christ is perfectly and divinely sinless, Heb 4.14-15; 7.26

C. Jesus Christ is therefore God in the flesh, He by whom and through whom we know God truly, and without whom we can never know God savingly, Jn 1.18; Mt 11.27; Jn 14.8-11; Col 1.15-19; Heb 1.1-3, 8-12; Jn 14.6; Mt 11.28

Can you sincerely confess, from the heart, that you believe in the one living and true God in whom eternally there are three distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—who are the same in being and eternal in power and glory, and that Jesus Christ is God the Son, come in the flesh?

Vow 3 — Confessing a personal trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour

Question 3: *Do you confess that because of your sinfulness, you abhor and humble yourself before God, repent of your sin, and trust for salvation, not in yourself, but in Jesus Christ alone?*

The rationale behind this vow is that saving faith is more than mere head knowledge about the Saviour. Merely acknowledging that the Bible's doctrine of salvation by Christ alone is true and that Jesus is the only God-Man-Saviour, does not save a person. The devil acknowledges as much (Js 2.19; Mk 1.23-24). Saving faith involves trusting and embracing; it involves appropriating the knowledge of Christ by a personal confession of sin and sinfulness, a personal confession of moral bankruptcy, a personal confession of need for salvation in Jesus, and a personal trusting in Jesus Christ alone to save you. — This vow asks if you have personally acted upon the truth you believe regarding salvation in Jesus Christ and have trusted in and embraced Him as your personal Saviour.

I. How did sin come into the world?

A. Man was created good, Gen 1.26-31

1. WCF 4.2, “After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it: and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change.”

B. The covenant of works was revealed to man, Gen 2.15-17

1. WCF 4.2, “Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.”

C. But man, of his own will, fell from his created estate into an estate of sin and misery, Gen 3.6

1. WCF 6.1-2, “Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit.... By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.”

D. This fall of our first parents, who stood before God as representatives of the entire human race, plunged all their posterity into God-less, helpless, and hopeless ruin, Rom 5.12-14; 3.10-12; Eph 2.1-3

1. WCF 6.3-4, “They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.”

E. As sinners, all men by nature stand before God as guilty covenant-breakers under His just wrath in need of salvation by a Redeemer, Eph 2.1

1. WCF 6.6, “Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.”

F. As sinners, man cannot and therefore will not come to God on his own for salvation, Eph 2.1; Jn 6.65. Our salvation therefore necessitates a sovereign work of God, Eph 1.3-14

G. Did the fall take God by surprise? No, Eph 1.4; 1Pet 1.18-20

1. WCF 6.1, “Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin, God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.”

II. How does God **provide** for our salvation?

- A. By means of a Covenant of Grace made with us in Jesus Christ, Jn 17.1-3; 6.37-40; cf. Gen 3.15.
- B. WCF 7.3, “Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.”

III. How does God **work** our salvation? Jesus Christ *accomplishes* our redemption entirely on His own.

- A. WCF 8.1, “It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Savior of his church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world: unto whom he did from all eternity give a people, to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.”
- B. WCF 8.3-5, “[This] office [of Mediator] he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by his Father, who put all power and judgment into his hand, and gave him commandment to execute the same. This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; which that he might discharge, he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfill it; endured most grievous torments immediately in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body; was crucified, and died, was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day he arose from the dead, with the same body in which he suffered, with which also he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of his Father, making intercession, and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world. The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.”
- C. Jesus the Second Adam came to do what the First Adam failed to do, Rom 5.17-21
- D. Jesus took on our humanity to save us, Heb 2.14-17; Jn 1.1-5, 9-14
- E. Jesus fulfilled the law as our Representative, thereby working out a perfect righteousness on our behalf, Rom 5.19; Gal 4.4-5
- F. Jesus bore the full penalty for our sins, Isa 53.1-6, 8-11; Phil 2.6-8
- G. Jesus is the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace for us, Heb 9.11-15
- H. Jesus rose from the dead, ascended into Heaven, and now intercedes for us as our Saviour, 1Cor 15.3-4, 16-18; Rom 8.34; Heb 4.14; 9.24

IV. How does God **apply** our salvation? By the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Christ.

- A. WCF 8.8, “To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same; making intercession for them, and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by his Word and Spirit; overcoming all their

enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner, and ways, as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.”

B. The Holy Spirit therefore *applies* redemption to us in the following manner:

1. He convicts us, showing us our sin, cursed estate, and need for a Saviour, Eph 2.1-3; Rom 8.7-8
2. He opens our blind eyes and deaf ears to hate our sinfulness and our sin and to see that Christ alone is the Saviour of sinners, Acts 16.30-31; 2Cor 5.21
3. He converts or regenerates us causing us to turn from our sin and fly to Christ, embracing Him as our Saviour, Tit 3.4-6; Eph 2.4-5; Acts 16.14-15
 - a) Giving us a new heart bent toward God, Ezk 36.26
 - b) Drawing us toward Christ in faith and away from sin in repentance, Jn 6.44-45; Phil 1.29; Acts 11.18, thereby enabling us to abhor ourselves (Job 42.5-6), humble ourselves before God (Isa 66.1-2; Lam 3.22; Mt 5.3-5; Lk 15.21; Prov 26.12), and believe on Christ alone for salvation, Gal 2.15-16; 3.10-11
4. He justifies us before God as righteous in Christ and for Christ’s sake, Rom 4.4-8; 5.1; 2Cor 5.21
 - a) Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) 33, “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”
5. He adopts us into God’s family, Jn 1.12; Rom 8.14-15
 - a) WSC 34, “Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.”
6. He sanctifies us, Eph 4.22-24; Phil 2.12-13; 1Thes 5.23-24
 - a) WSC 35, “Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”
7. He enables us to live every day by faith in Christ, Rom 1.17; Prov 3.5-6; Gal 2.20
 - a) WSC 86, “Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.”
8. He enables us live in daily repentance from our sins, Acts 26.19-20; Isa 1.16-17; Col 3.1-17
 - a) WSC 87, “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.”
9. He assures us of our salvation in Christ, 1Jn 2.3; Rom 8.15-17; 2Cor 1.21-22

V. Understanding the Faith and Repentance which the Holy Spirit works in us: it is a unified work of head, heart, and hand (i.e., of our mind, our affections, and our will)

A. Saving faith has three parts to it, involving head, heart, and hand—mind, affections, and will:

1. Knowing yourself to be the sinner God says you are and Christ the only Saviour
2. Feeling yourself to be a sinner before God and Christ to be an able Saviour
3. Turning from your sin unto Christ to save you, 1Thes 1.8-9. Thus saving faith is saving, not because it is faith, but because it is faith in the Saviour of sinners, Acts 4.12; 2Cor 5.21

B. Saving repentance likewise has three parts to it:

1. Admitting your sin, Ps 51.3
2. Being sorry for your sin, 2Cor 7.10; Ps 51.4. Godly sorrow is God-centered not man-centered
3. Turning from your sins to Christ, Eph 4.22-24

- C. Therefore to believe on Jesus for salvation is to feel your need of Him, believe He is able and willing to save you, and cast yourself unreservedly on His mercy and trust in Him alone for salvation.

Can you confess from the heart that because of your sinfulness, you abhor and humble yourself before God, repent of your sin, and trust for salvation, not in yourself, but in Jesus Christ alone?

N.B. The OPC stresses the sovereignty of God's grace in salvation—i.e. that God saves sinners—which is best illustrated by the so-called “Five Points of Calvinism.” now commonly known their acronym, TULIP. These five points can be succinctly summarized as follows:

- *Total depravity* (sovereign grace needed): man is so depraved and corrupted by sin in every part of his being that he is by nature incapable of doing any spiritual good and cannot effect any part of his salvation (Gen. 6:5);
- *Unconditional election* (sovereign grace conceived): from eternity past, God chose to save certain individuals irrevocably to everlasting life and glory in Christ Jesus without seeing any intrinsic goodness in them, and He ordained the means by which they would be saved (Rom. 9:15-16)
- *Limited atonement* (sovereign grace merited): while the death of Christ is sufficient to cover the sins of the world, its saving efficacy is intentionally limited to His elect sheep whose sins He bore and for whom He fully satisfied the justice of God. (John 17:9)
- *Irresistible grace* (sovereign grace applied): God irresistibly calls the elect to saving faith and salvation in Christ with such sovereign power that they can no longer resist His grace, but are made willing in the day of His power (Ps. 110:3; John 6:44-45); and,
- *Perseverance* (sovereign grace preserved): those whom God saves, He graciously preserves in the state of grace so that they will never be lost. They may be troubled by infirmities as they seek to make their calling and election sure, but they will persevere until the end, fighting the good fight of faith until the final victory shall be realized in the coming again of their Savior and Lord as Judge (John 10:28).

Vow 4 — Confessing Submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ

Question 4: *Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Sovereign Lord, and do you promise, that in reliance upon the grace of God you will: serve Him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?*

The rationale behind this vow is that the faith by which a person embraces Christ in salvation is never without the fruit of a new life. To trust in Christ for salvation is to be delivered from the bondage of darkness, blindness, and sin, and to become a new creature (2Cor 5.17); it is to be given a new heart and filled with the Spirit of holiness (Ezk 36.26-27); it is to be spiritually united as one with Christ Himself—which cannot but result in a new life (Gal 2.20). A new life in Christ as a Christian—traveled by steps and degrees—cannot but follow upon trusting in Christ for salvation. —This vow asks if you personally acknowledge Christ as your Sovereign Lord and therefore promise to live your whole life under His lordship, according to His commands, after His example, and by His grace.

- I. Acknowledging the Lordship of Jesus Christ over your own life
 - A. As Jesus, He is the Saviour and Deliverer, Mt 1.21
 - B. As Christ, He is the anointed Messiah of God sent to redeem us, Ps 2.2; Mt 16.16
 - C. As Sovereign Lord, He is God, the Master and King of all the earth, Mt 28.18; Eph 1.19-23; Rev 5.11-14
 - D. As *your* Sovereign Lord, you submit to Him as *your* King, 1Cor 6.20; 2Cor 6.16-71
- II. Making 5 promises to Jesus Christ as our Lord regarding our daily lives
 - A. These promises are made in complete reliance upon God's grace, Jn 15.5; 1Cor 15.10. These promises are made in confident reliance upon: God's covenant faithfulness and God's promises to bless the means of grace as we faithfully use them.
 1. We look to God to continue His sanctifying work in us, Phil 1.6; 2.13
 2. We look for fruit from our faithful use of the means of grace which God has appointed for us, Acts 2.42; 1Pet 2.1-2; Eph 4.11-16; 2Pet 1.3-4
 - B. We promise to serve Jesus with all that is in us, Mt 4.10; Mt 22.37-40; Rom 12.1
 - C. We promise to forsake the world, Mt 13.22; 1Jn 2.15-17; 1Jn 5.4-5; Rom 12.2
 - D. We promise to resist the devil, 1Pet 5.6-9; Jam 4.6-7;
 - E. We promise to mortify (put to death) our sinful nature, Lk 9.21-23; Mt 5.30; Rom 8.13; 13.14; 6.1-14; Gal 5.24; Eph 4.17-24; Col 3.1-14
 - F. We promise to lead a godly life, Jn 15.5, 8, 14-16; Eph 5.1
 1. But what a godly life looks like is not up to us. God has already outlined it for us in His Ten Commandments. Therefore we must see and use His Law as a rule for our conduct. (see the Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) treatment of the Law of God in Questions 91-148)
 - a) The First Commandment regulates God as the object of true worship
 - b) The Second regulates the manner of our worship of God
 - c) The Third regulates the attitude of our worship
 - d) The Fourth regulates the rhythm of our worship (see **Appendix 2** for the Session's Statement on Attending Both Services on the Lord's Day)
 - e) The Fifth commands reverence for all authority
 - f) The Sixth commands reverence for life
 - g) The Seventh commands reverence for marriage
 - h) The Eighth commands reverence for property

- i) The Ninth commands reverence for truth
- j) The Tenth commands reverence for providence
- 2. We must never forget that we obey God's commands not to *become* Christians but because we are Christians. Obedience is the *fruit* of saving faith, not the root.
 - a) WCF 19.6, "Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives; so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin, together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of his obedience. It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin: and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof: although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works. So as, a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and, not under grace."
 - b) WCF 19.7, "Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done."

III. Our growth in Christian obedience is progressive over our whole lives.

- A. WCF 13.1-3, "They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them: the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man; yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part; whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail; yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

- IV. **God calls believers to *be holy as He is holy* (1Pet 1:16). God's holiness testifies His purity, His moral perfection, His separateness from all outside of Him, and His complete absence of sin (Job 34:10; Isa 5:16; 40:18; Hab 1:13). For us, holiness means, *negatively*, to be separated from sin and, *positively*, to be consecrated to God and conformed to Christ. We believe that holiness of mind and heart and life must be cultivated in every sphere of life: in privacy with God, in the confidentiality of our homes, in the competitiveness of our occupation, in the pleasures of social friendships, in our interactions with unevangelized neighbors and the world's hungry and unemployed, as well as in Sunday worship. In short, holiness must fill the entire heart and cover the entire life (1Thes 5:23). **No one can acquire holiness by his own efforts. Nevertheless, believers are granted holiness in their status with God the moment they trust in Christ alone for salvation. Our holy standing with God

in Christ, however, does not imply that we have arrived at a wholly sanctified condition (1Cor 1:2). That is why the New Testament presents holiness as something believers *have in Christ* and something they must still *cultivate in the strength of Christ*. As believers, our *status* in holiness is conferred, but our *condition* in holiness must be pursued. Thus, in Christian living, we are called to be in life what we already are in principle by grace, in dependence on the Spirit. Cultivating holiness means *imitating* the character of the Father, *conforming* to the image of Christ, and *submitting* to the mind of the Spirit. To that end, we must use the means of grace (including diligent Bible study, worshipful attendance, joyous Sabbath-keeping, deepening prayer and earnest prayer meetings, vibrant family worship, habitual heartfelt singing, disciplined witnessing, faithful service, and principled stewardship), all the while reckoning ourselves as dead to the dominion of sin and as alive to God in Christ (Rom 6:11). **Several means of grace for cultivating the Christian life are provided below.

V. Helps to our ongoing growth in the Christian life

A. Read the Bible regularly

1. It is piercing and revealing Word, Heb 4.12
2. It is a Word of grace, Acts 20.32
3. It addresses every area of life, 2Tim 3.16-17
4. It is the soul's food and must be digested by meditation, Ps 1.2; Josh 1.8
5. Do you read the Bible regularly? You should have a plan by which you can read it cover to cover in a year.

B. Pray regularly

1. Ps 143.7-8; Rom 8.26-27
2. The Lord's Prayer is an infallible guide for our own prayers, Mt 6.6-13

C. Do daily family worship, Josh 24.15; Jer 10.25

1. Begin with a prayer for understanding and a receptive, believing heart; read a Bible passage followed by discussion; close with a prayer for the grace to repent of sin and apply what you learned.
2. Sing a psalm or hymn
3. Study and memorize the Westminster Shorter Catechism
4. Keep it simple; don't exasperate the little ones
5. Consistency is better than length
6. Don't let a single day go by without family worship. Your family needs it; it's not in vain; it's of inestimable value; it's a means of your children's coming to Christ for salvation.

D. Honor the Lord's Day

1. God's own pattern in the creation week sets the pattern and rhythm (6-1) for His people's weeks, Gen 1.27-2.3; Ex 20.11. The Sabbath is therefore not a Jewish Old Testament ordinance, but a creation ordinance for all peoples and all ages.
2. Christ's resurrection changed the day of rest from Saturday to Sunday. The Lord's Day (Sunday) is therefore the Christian Sabbath Day that should be honored according to the Fourth Commandment, Mt 28.1-2; Acts 20.7; 1Cor 16.1-2; Rev 1.10; cf. Dt 5.15

E. The Worship of the Lord's Day

1. The focus of the Lord's Day is to rest from our worldly labors in order to find and renew our spiritual rest in Christ and His gospel, Heb 10.23-25.
 - a) WCF 21.8, "This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only

- observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.”
2. God is worthy of our worship, Ps 95.1-7
 3. God comes to us in the means of grace (Preaching, Praying, Sacraments), Acts 2.41-42. The blessings bestowed on us on the Lord’s Day are not given on any other day and in any other place, Ps 87.2
 4. We show the world our loyalty and submission to Christ; we show our love for Christ to excel our love for all other things; we show our gratitude to Christ for His salvation.
 5. **Our culture challenges nothing so much as the Fourth Commandment as it urges us not to rest and not to worship but to give heed to only ourselves and what we want. Thus the Lord calls us to “remember” His Day; for we are pressed on all sides to forget it.
 6. Given the placement of the Fourth Commandment, we need to see that breaking the Sabbath is a more grievous sin than murder or adultery and is akin to idolatry and blasphemy. The more seriously we take this Commandment and seek to honor it, the more we will delight in God and His ways and grow in conformity to Christ our Lord and Saviour.
 7. The Fourth Commandment grounds the rest of the commandments. If we forsake the Lord’s Day and neglect the means of grace on that Day, then how do we expect to walk faithfully before the Lord at all? But if we plant our behaviour and practice firmly in a sincere and faithful honoring of the Lord’s Day, coming to worship Him, hear from Him, be forgiven by His grace and strengthened by His Word, and renew our vows and engagement to be the Lord’s, then we will have the grace and heart to walk faithfully before Him in all other areas of our life.
 8. And so it’s our attitude and relationship to the Lord’s Day that largely determines our attitude and relationship to the rest, since of all the commandments, the Fourth is the litmus test of our submission to Christ’s Lordship.
- F. Give to the Lord’s work, Dt 14.22. We are to support the work of the church with our tithes and offerings.
1. The Lord requires us to give, Mt 6.2
 2. The Lord takes note of our giving as done to and for Him, Mt 6.3-4
 3. Our giving is an act of worship, 1Cor 16.2
 4. The standard of what we give is the self-giving of Christ, 2Cor 8.9.
 5. We are to give according to our means, 2Cor 8.12; 1Cor 16.2
 6. Our giving to the Lord’s work has a direct relationship to the Lord’s blessing of us, 2Cor 9.6; Mt 6.4; Mal 3.8-12
 7. We must give cheerfully, freely, and for God’s glory, 2Cor 9.7-15
- G. **Live a life which reveals your relationship to Christ, Acts 4.13; Mk 8.38; Mt 10.32
1. Our lifestyle, habits, dress, speech, reading, entertainment, and hobbies should not contradict our profession of faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, Mt 6.31-33; Heb 11.13-16; Eph 5.1-21; 1Cor 10.31
 2. We should live both as those who are grateful for our salvation and heavenly home and as those who will give an account of ourselves, 2Pet 1.3-11; 3.10-14

Can you from the heart acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Sovereign Lord, and do you promise, that in reliance upon the grace of God you will: serve Him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?

Vow 5 — Confessing Submission to the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth

Question 5: *Do you promise to participate faithfully in this church's worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline, even if you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life?*

The rationale behind this vow is fourfold: 1) when God saves a person He unites him to Christ and thereby joins him as a member to the Body of Christ. Every Christian is therefore by nature spiritually connected to Christ's church; 2) Christ's church has a visible face to it on earth in that He gathers His people together in a worshiping community; 3) Christ rules His visible church from Heaven by means of ordained officers, whom He uses as stewards of the means of grace; & 4) God commands all whom He saves to join the visible church, worship in the visible church, and submit, in the Lord, to the officers of the visible church. —This vow asks if you promise to faithfully participate in this local church as a member and to willingly submit in the Lord to its ordained leadership and government, even if you should be found in sin and become subject to the church's discipline.

I. The Purposes of the Church

- A. To glorify God, Eph 3.20-21
- B. To worship God, Ps 40.2-3; Isa 1.11, 14-15; Heb 12.28-29
- C. To preach and teach the Word, 1Tim 4.13-16
- D. To assemble those whom Christ has joined to Himself, Heb 10.25
- E. To build up the saints by the ministry of the Word, Eph 4.11-16
- F. To bear witness to the world, Mt 5.14-16
- G. To live in light of Christ's coming, 2Pet 3.8-14
- H. To live in distinction from the world, 2Cor 6.14-7.1
- I. *Thus*, the Church does not have a political or social agenda, but operates with a theological agenda: the worship and honor of God and the proclamation of His gospel.

II. The Structure of the Church, Phil 1.1; 2Tim 3; Eph 4.11-16

- A. Christ is the only law-giving Head, Eph 1.21-23; 1Cor 5.4-5
- B. But Christ exercises His authority as Head through the appointment of officers as undershepherds
 - 1. Elders: Acts 20.17, 28-31; Tit 1.5-9; 1Tim 5.17; 1Pet 5.1-4
 - 2. Deacons: Acts 6.1-6; 1Tim 3.8-13
 - 3. Therefore presbyterianism is the biblical form of church government: Acts 14.21-23; 15.4-6, 22-23, 30-31; 16.4-5
- C. Church officers are required to exercise necessary discipline within Christ's Church as part of their oversight, Heb 13.17; Acts 20.28. ****Church discipline is essentially that aspect of shepherding by which the church officers hold members of Christ's Church accountable to biblical standards for their conduct.**
 - 1. The reasons for discipline:
 - a) Christ's command, Mt 18.15-20
 - b) The Apostles' charge, 1Tim 5.19-22; Tit 1.9-13; 3.10-11
 - 2. The purposes of discipline:
 - a) To honor Christ's name, 1Cor 5.7
 - b) To purify Christ's church, 1Cor 5.4-8, 11-13
 - c) To reclaim the offender, 2Thes 3.14-15; Ps 141.5
 - d) To deter others from sin, 1Tim 5.20, Acts 5.1-11

3. The range of discipline
 - a) Admonition, 1Thes 5.14
 - b) Suspension from the Lord's Table
 - c) Divesting from office (in the case of an officer)
 - d) Excommunication, 1Cor 5.1-3
 - e) Erasure from the rolls of membership

III. This vow is a promise to do three things:

A. Participate faithfully in this church's worship and service

1. Understanding the **worship** at PCCC

- a) Regulated by the Word, Dt 4.9-20; 12.32; Lev 10.1-5
- b) Worship at PCCC is God-centered, gospel-focused, and Word-based. The greatest emphasis in our worship services is the preaching of the Word of God, 1Tim 4.13-16
- c) Monthly Lord's Supper for members in good standing in a Christian church
- d) We desire the children to be in worship as much as possible, Dt 4.9-10
- e) As our music is to be a support to the ministry of the Word, the music ministry at PCCC is utilized in such a way that it is neither a distraction from or in competition with the preaching of the Word.
 - (1) We believe in congregational singing as opposed to individual or choral singing, Ps 95.1-2; Col 3.15-17
 - (a) Singing as a congregation in worship enforces our unity as a church and helps to bring us to the throne of grace and the Word of God together as a body.
 - (b) Therefore the congregation is "the choir"
 - (2) We believe the musical accompaniment should be simple and plain and yet reverent and helpful to our singing
 - (a) The focus is on God and not on human performance or achievement
 - (3) We worship God with the use of hymns and psalms
 - (a) This gives the priority to theological accurateness and reverential tunes over what kind of music might appeal to our senses
 - (b) This lets the theology of God govern our emotions about God
 - (c) The medium is the message: what you attract a person *with* is what you attract them *to*.
 - i) ****Thus we do not seek to attract people with our music ministry. Rather, the music ministry supports the preaching ministry because God declares in Rom 10.17 that faith in Christ will come by preaching about Christ.**
 - ii) ****Therefore we seek to attract listeners to Christ by the preaching and not by the music.**

2. Opportunities to **serve** at PCCC

- a) The Men's Fellowship and the Women's Fellowship meet monthly to provide opportunities for study, prayer, and fellowship.
- b) Tithing is a service not only to the pastor's family but to the entire work of the church.
- c) Our mission efforts support denominationally appointed missionaries
- d) Our annual Thank Offering goes to support the evangelistic and pastoral training work of our denomination.
- e) The GEMS and Cadets ministry are for our young people.
- f) The Deacon's Fund serves to provide for those in the congregation and community that have financial needs.

- g) The weekly prayer meeting provides an opportunity to intercede for others.
- h) The Tuesday Bible Study provides a Bible study during the day twice a month.
- i) The Sunday School ministry provides weekly biblical instruction for all ages
- j) Our two services on the Lord's Day enables us to keep the day holy by bookending the Lord's Day with a service in God's house.

B. Submit in the Lord to this church's government

- 1. "In the Lord" —your submission to the Elders is *not* in contradiction to but part of your submission to Christ. Thus, to rebel against the church's authority in the things of God is to rebel against God (cf. Eph 5.22; 6.1, 5-9)
- 2. The government of the church is a *ministerial* government administering the Lord's laws, not a magisterial government making up its own laws

C. Heed this church's discipline if and when you need correcting.

- 1. Formative discipline vs. corrective discipline; let the former prevent the latter.
- 2. When is corrective discipline necessary? When a person is delinquent in doctrine or life. We are held accountable for what we believe as well as for how we live.

D. See **Appendix 3** for Daniel Wray's article on Biblical Church Discipline.

IV. The Church is a Confessing Body

A. The importance of a *Confession of Faith* (See **Appendix 4** for A Doctrinal Summary of the Six Major Divisions of Reformed Theology)

- 1. The Westminster Confession of Faith
- 2. The Westminster Larger Catechism
- 3. The Westminster Shorter Catechism

B. The importance of a *Book of Church Order*

C. The importance of a *Directory for Public Worship*

V. Membership in Christ's Church

A. Membership in Christ's Church for adults requires a public profession of faith, 2Cor 4.13; 1Tim 6.12. The young children of believing parents are received as non-communicant members by virtue of their birth to their believing parents.

B. Membership in Christ's Church requires submission to Christ's Lordship as it is expressed and administered in His Church through His appointed officers, whom He holds responsible for the worship and souls entrusted to their care, Acts 20.28, Heb 13.17; Mt 10.40

VI. Understanding the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper

A. See WCF 27-29

- 1. The sacraments were given to the visible Church and Kingdom of Christ on earth and are to be restricted to those who profess faith (and their children in the case of baptism)
- 2. The sacraments were instituted by Christ to remind us of His death and our participation by faith in it
- 3. The sacraments *signify* Christ's saving work for us
- 4. The sacraments *seal* Christ's covenant promises to us
- 5. The sacraments involve the conjunction of a visible sign with the invisible thing it signifies
- 6. Our participation in a sacrament is a profession of our faith in the thing it signifies and seals

B. Baptism, Mt 28.18-19

- 1. The sacrament of initiation and membership into Christ's Church
- 2. Administered only once

3. For professing adults converted into Christ's church without having been baptized in their youth, Acts 2.38
4. For the children of professing adults who are thereby brought into the covenant community as noncommunicant members and have a right to the sign and seal of the covenant, Acts 2.39; 1Cor 7.14

C. The Lord's Supper, 1Cor 11.23-29

1. The sacrament of nourishment upon Christ as a Church
2. Administered monthly
3. For professing adult members of Christ's church
4. Not for the children of adult members since they cannot "remember the Lord's death," "examine themselves," or "discern the Lord's body" in the Supper

VII. The history and distinctiveness of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

A. The importance of our heritage, Ps 22.27-31; 78.1-8; Heb 12.1-3

B. See **Appendix 5** for Kuiper's address on the OPC.

C. Missions: Worldwide Outreach

1. Home Missions
2. Foreign Missions
3. Christian Education

D. Websites

1. Our denomination: opc.org
2. Our church: presbyterianchurchofcapecod.com
3. Our preaching and teaching: presbyterianchurchofcapecod.sermons.io
4. Live streaming audio of all our services: presbyterianchurchofcapecod.sermons.io/live

Can you from the heart promise to participate faithfully in this church's worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline, even if you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life?

What's next?

1. Schedule an appointment to meet with the Session if you wish to become a member. The Session will ask you questions about your relationship with Christ, your assurance of salvation, your understanding of the Church and Church membership, and about your understanding of the Vows of Membership.
2. Your public profession of faith will be held on the next available Lord's Day.
3. **See **Appendix 6** for a Personal Statement of Faith by B. B. Warfield

Appendix 1

Is Church Membership Biblical?

Ryan M. McGraw and Ryan Speck

Introduction

How many membership cards are you carrying currently? Do you have a library membership, a grocery store “preferred customer” card, a gym membership, and perhaps others? We have so many memberships that we can become weary of them, which leads some people to groan when the church, which is a spiritual institution, requires official membership. Thus, it is increasingly common for Christians to question whether church membership is a biblical practice.

As Bereans, Christians ask rightly, “Is church membership biblical?” No one can cite chapter and verse to prove a multi-step process for joining the church and being counted on her rolls. So, then, why do some churches insist on an official process to join their membership, while others do not? The biblical answer to this question is not direct, but indirect. Just as a canvas provides a necessary backdrop for a work of art, so the Bible assumes the necessity of formal church membership in order to fulfill the commands and to apply the promises of Scripture with regard to the church.

We define formal membership as a covenant bond made by a public vow by which a person commits him or herself to a local body of believers, under the authority of a well-defined group of church leaders. This results in an official record of members who belong to a local church. We will demonstrate the requirement for formal church membership by proving from Scripture that the church is a visible community, that every Christian must be a member of this community, and that such membership necessitates vows and rolls.

I. The Foundations of Church Membership: The Church as a Community

1. The Analogy of Citizenship

Throughout Scripture, God describes his people as a city or a nation: a gathered, defined group of people living together (e.g., Pss. 46; 48; 87; Matt. 21:43; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 12:22–24; Rev. 21). He depicts heaven itself as the City of God (Rev. 21:2) and Christians as “citizens” of a heavenly city (Phil. 3:20; Heb. 11:10). While foreigners may reside in a city or nation, citizens alone constitute its true membership. They have birth certificates, pay taxes, and obtain passports and other licenses. In other words, they have recognized privileges and responsibilities that non-citizens do not and should not have. The nature of any society includes official citizens belonging to it by open and clear declaration.

When someone is caught in a criminal act, one of the first points in processing his case is to determine whether or not he is a citizen of that society. In the United States of America, arrested citizens must be read their rights and treated with a measure of respect and dignity. The laws of other countries may affect the treatment of those who are not citizens.

Official status as a citizen and the rights and privileges that attend this status are not peculiar to any country or time. This principle was true in biblical times as well. The Apostle Paul, for example, appealed to his Roman citizenship for similar rights and privileges (e.g., Acts 22:29). When Paul referred to citizenship in the kingdom of God (e.g., Phil. 3:20), he understood citizenship much as we do today. Being a citizen entails having official, publicly recognized membership in a community. This status brings particular rights and privileges within that community. To be a citizen of a country is to be an official member of its society, a subject of its laws, and a beneficiary of its government. As citizens of the kingdom of God, Christians enjoy all the rights and privileges of living under Christ's rule and government.

Even Christ recorded the names of his citizens in his book (Rev. 13:8; 21:27). As it is in every other respect, the church militant (on earth) is a dim reflection of the church triumphant (in glory). Paul prized his citizenship in heaven at great personal cost. He declared it publicly through his open commitment to Christ (Acts 9:18–20; 13:1; 15:2; etc.). Did he not join with God's people in a public and official manner in the presence of many witnesses? Timothy, his friend and fellow minister, did the same (1 Tim. 6:12). We have the documents to prove it (his writings and what others wrote about him). Since he used this language of citizenship to describe our status in the courts of heaven, would an official public commitment to the church on earth be out of place?

The church is both visible and invisible. In its visible aspect, we identify the members of the church through their profession of faith in Christ and obedience to him. In its invisible character, God alone knows who his elect are and who are truly born of the Spirit. The visible church is made in the image of the invisible church and, as such, reflects its character. Those who belong to the invisible church are citizens of a heavenly kingdom. Is it not appropriate for the members of this invisible society to express their citizenship by belonging to its visible and earthly expression?

Some consider "citizenship" to be a cold and lifeless concept. Is belonging to the "Kingdom of God" merely a matter of having the "right papers"? This was not the apostle's inspired opinion. He held citizenship in this kingdom as his highest privilege in life and in death. He understood that this citizenship entails being members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19), part of Christ's body (Col. 1:18), and belonging to the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). The citizens of this kingdom are the saving objects of the work of the triune God, into whose name they are baptized (Matt. 28:19).

Even in regard to earthly citizenship, the Roman centurion in Acts 22:28 told Paul that he had purchased his citizenship "with a great sum." If he set such great value on his Roman citizenship, how much more should we value our membership in the church, which is the kingdom of Christ? Our heavenly citizenship is analogous to the citizenship and memberships we sustain on this earth. In placing church membership in opposition to the nature of a warm loving society, Christians can unintentionally neglect the full teaching of God's Word. In Scripture, official, public, formal vows are not at variance with living, warm, organic fellowship with other believers and with true, heartfelt, spontaneous devotion to God. Citizenship necessarily involves records of citizens.

What nation has citizens with no official documentation? As the members of the invisible church are recorded in heaven, so should the members of the visible church be recorded on earth.^[1] Government is not possible without a record of citizenship. We must be members of the church even as we are members of other societies.

2. The Analogy of a Family

Membership in an earthly family is analogous to membership in the church. The Scriptures describe God's people (the church) as a family (e.g., Luke 8:21; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 5:25–28; Col. 3:20–21; Heb. 2:11; 1 John 3:1ff). Though families can be less loving and cohesive than they should be, they are definite units of people living together in close relations. These relations should, and often do, produce warm relationships. As such, they are the building blocks of society. Intimate love is God's intention within the family, which is his institution (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5; Eph. 5:31). Such love is also Christ's intention for his church. It is the love he has shown to the church (Eph. 5:23), and it is the love he intends for us to show to one another (1 John 4:11).

This description of the church as the family of God helps us understand (by analogy) what our personal conduct ought to be, both in the family and in the church. The husband should love his wife and give himself for her (Eph. 5:25), just as Christ did for the church. Wives must submit to their own husbands and respect them (Eph. 5:22, 33), just as the church loves and respects Christ. Children are obligated to obey their parents in the Lord (Eph. 6:1). Fathers must beware of provoking their children to wrath (Eph. 6:4). They do so by reflecting the just and wise government of the Lord as they (along with their wives) rear their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Being a member of a family is a legal matter. While it is popular to speak of “starting a family” when couples have children, according to Scripture, a family begins with and is constituted by a marriage covenant (Gen. 2:24; Mal. 2:14). The intimacy and unity that should exist between members of a family begins with a husband and wife joined together by covenant in the sight of God through vows. The marriage covenant is a legal contract, involving officially recorded and publicly taken vows (Ruth 4:10–11; Mal. 2:14; Matt. 21:1ff; Rev. 19:9).

This is true in civil society as well as in Scripture. Contractual agreements mean nothing legally unless they are established as a matter of public record with witnesses (Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16). For this reason, the Scriptures repeatedly affirm that a marriage can be dissolved only through a *certificate of divorce* (Deut. 24:1, 3; Isa. 50:1; Mark 10:4). The commitment a man and woman make to each other excludes all other people from the rights, privileges, and duties of that marriage. All others should know that these two people belong to one another; they are “off limits” to all outsiders. This is why we wear marriage rings—they commemorate publicly our marriage vows.

When we come to Christ, we become part of his church, which is his bride. Because we are born again by the Spirit's power, we are children of God and belong to his family. We are children of God through adoption by the Father, through marriage to Christ, and by being born of the Spirit. Moreover, much like our public commitments in marriage, he commands us to confess him before men (Matt. 10:32–33; Luke 12:8–9; Rom. 10:9–10).

Do public vows and official records make marriage a dry, cold, dusty relationship? On the contrary, publicly and officially declaring their love for and commitment to one another should deepen a couple's love. A couple with no public commitment to one another always has an uncertain and undefined relationship. They have no privileges and no binding responsibilities to one another. This is

often why men who will not commit to a woman in marriage often speak of not wanting to be “tied down” and why the women who are with them are often insecure.

We could argue similarly in relation to having children (who then receive birth certificates) and adopting children (another prominent theme in the Scriptures to describe God’s people). Official commitments do not contradict the free, vibrant, organic nature of Christianity. They are part and parcel with it throughout the Bible. We are related to the triune God and to one another, and we must dwell together as a loving family.

A Practical Observation

These biblical concepts apply to the “church-hopper” in our day: the person who jumps from church to church, never settling anywhere. When something happens that irritates him slightly, he jumps to another church. Does this reflect the importance that the triune God places upon the church? How can such a person be *vitaly connected* to God’s people in any meaningful sense of the term? To borrow an analogy from James, as death is separation of the spirit from the body, so those who claim to have the spirit of Christianity without expressing spiritual vitality in the body of the church act dead instead of alive. The spirit expresses life through the physical body. The members of the invisible church express their life through commitment to the visible church.

Have you experienced a time when you were, practically speaking, cut off from weekly and intimate fellowship with other believers? Perhaps you travelled to a foreign country. Perhaps you moved somewhere without a church nearby. If so, then was this not a difficult, waning time for you spiritually? Did you miss the sweet fellowship and mutual love and concern that you experienced with your brethren previously as a society, family, and body?

Such times drive the value of committed fellowship and true community home to our hearts. God established the community of believers for our good. It is necessary for our spiritual growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ. The nature of the church as a divinely ordained community does not prove the case for formal church membership, but it is the necessary backdrop for it. Defective views of church membership often reflect defective views of the church itself.

II. The Duty of Church Membership: We Must Join This Community

The biblical description of the church as a community implies that we should join this community. This is true for at least two reasons, both of which highlight the fact that, ordinarily, it is neither desirable nor possible to live the Christian life alone.

1. The Interdependence of Believers

The community of the church is vitally important because we need each other. The Apostle Paul drives this point home in 1 Corinthians 12:21. The eye cannot say to the hand that it does not need it. The head cannot say to the feet that it does not require them. It would be absurd to treat our physical bodies this way. Yet Paul indicates that this is precisely how Christians often treat the church. He wrote about the interdependence between Christians, not the independence of Christians. We are differing members of the same body.

We all have the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22ff) in greater or lesser measure. Yet the Spirit has gifted each of us in various ways in order to complement each other's faith and service. Some of us are called to be teachers and preachers. Some of us are specially equipped to administrate. Some are gifted for mercy ministries above others. Some have a remarkable ability to encourage others. Why has Christ distributed such gifts among his people? It is for the edifying of his body (Eph. 4:8ff). Our fellowship with one another is necessary in order to live the Christian life and to express the life of Christ's body.

The Simon and Garfunkel song, "I am a rock; I am an island," is not sound theology. No one can live well alone. People, made in the image of the triune God, need fellowship. God needs no one. The communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is a fellowship that accepts no supplement and requires no complement. Yet man is needy. He needs God. The God whom he needs and reflects is a being in communion. Part of man's renewal in God's image consists in his communion with God and with God's church. Man was created for fellowship with God and with others in submission to God. The two tables of the Ten Commandments reflect this order and relationship. The new man in Christ is part of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). The Christian is created for Christian fellowship, with God and with those who are in fellowship with God.

2. The Mutual Responsibilities of Believers

Believers not only need one another; they have duties to perform toward one another. The necessity of Christian fellowship and the responsibilities resulting from that fellowship are joined inseparably by God; let no man rend them asunder. If God created us to be a body of believers needing fellowship and equipped us to help one another in the faith, then we must exercise our gifts to bless fellow believers rather than for our private benefit. God commands us not to withhold from one another what the other needs. When you read Scripture, you find multiple "one-another" commands. Wayne Mack notes fifty-eight such commands.^[2] He writes:

All these commands are written in the present tense. This means we're to be constantly doing these things. The lives of every believer should be characterized by the fulfillment of these commands toward other believers. We're to be constantly devoted to one another, praying for one another, honoring one another, greeting one another, and motivating one another to love and good works. If this is true, then it also follows that we must be physically present with other people in order to do these things. . . . We cannot possibly fulfill these kinds of commands to every person in the world. We do not have the time or the resources to do it, no matter how much we would like to. We have to be selective about the people with whom we're going to work in fulfilling these commands.^[3]

We have the clear responsibility to love one another, but we have limited resources to do so as individuals. The gifts of the Spirit and the community of the church highlight the fact that we exercise Christian love concretely in relation to a specific group of people. God in his Word forbids us from living the Christian life without fellow Christians. He commands us to walk in fellowship with them.

Many believe that they can do all of these things without formal church membership. Some will say, "Can't we be a community without belonging officially to a church? Can't we fulfill these commands and needs outside of the church as an institution through para-church organizations? Should we not be free to fellowship with whatever group we want, whenever we want, without officially belonging to a specific church?" Many professing believers have no official relation to any church, but they regularly

attend or even minister in churches or in informal Christian groups. Some churches forbid membership and ordination. Do such people fail to fulfill Christ's commands to the church through his apostles?

The next section builds a case for formal membership in the local church from scriptural principles by drawing implications from the church as a community and the duties attached to communion with her.

III. The Form and Means of Church Membership: Membership Rolls and Membership Vows

In addition to what has already been said, at least three practical reasons solidify the need for membership rolls and formal membership vows: the relationship between church members and church officers, the process of church discipline, and the right of the congregation to elect her own officers. The preceding material highlighted the need for formal church membership in terms of the nature of the church and the duty to join her. Part two below shows the form membership should take.

1. The Relationship between Church Members and Church Officers

The relationship and responsibilities between church officers and church members necessitates formal church membership. From the beginning, God instituted various means of governance for his people. He made Adam Eve's head before the Fall (1 Tim. 2:11–13). Thus, God provided human leadership even in a perfect world with perfect people. A necessary implication of this fact is that human governance is not a necessary evil, but a necessary good. Even in a sin-cursed world, human governance continues to be a necessary good supplied by God to bless his people. Our Lord called Abraham to be the head of his household, who were the people of God at that time (Gen. 18:19). God provided priests, prophets, and kings to be over his people (Lev. 9; 1 Chron. 23:13; Amos 2:11; 1 Sam. 3:20; 16:13; etc.). He called apostles to lead the church under the New Testament (Matt. 10:1–8; Acts 1:24–25; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11). He set forth the eldership as a perpetual office in the church (1 Tim. 3:1–7; 5:17; Tit. 1:5–9; etc.). God has always made it clear that he intended men to be ruled by other men according to the authority structures of his choosing and his designation. In fact, Jesus gave church leaders as part of the gifts he purchased by his own blood for the good of his church (Eph. 4:8, 11–16). The church is the authority structure under which God has placed all Christians in order to bless them. God places Christians under church leaders for their benefit. Sometimes it is difficult to see how such men are a blessing to Christ's church. Most church leaders themselves are bewildered at times as to why God called them and how he could use them. Nonetheless, to the glory of his grace alone, he uses men with clay feet to help his people in various ways.

Regardless of how we understand the biblical form of church government, all should be able to affirm that the church is a body of believers under divinely sanctioned officers. For example, Acts 15 describes what is known as the Jerusalem Council. A troublesome teaching arose amongst God's people regarding circumcision and importing Jewish rites into the Gentile church. In response, the apostles and elders gathered together in Jerusalem to address the problem through the use of Scripture, debate, and prayer. The delegates sent to this council reflected the authority structure that God had appointed in the church through his Word. They were not leaders of parachurch organizations. They were extraordinary (apostles) and ordinary (elders) church officers. The elders were the elected leaders of local churches who led the people and under whose authority the people submitted themselves.^[4] The council arrived at its decision by appealing to Scripture rather than to apostolic authority, even

though the apostles were present. The decision was nonetheless ascribed to the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28). The apostles and elders sent this decision to local churches in many regions with the expectation that all follow their directions (Acts 16:4).

Hebrews 13:17 further highlights the mutual responsibilities God enjoins, both on church officers and on church members. The writer commands his audience to submit to those who rule over them on the grounds that such rulers must give an account to God for their souls. The Lord here assumes that there will be shepherds over his people. He holds those shepherds accountable for how they rule his people. How can they be responsible for a definite body of Christians if they cannot define the parameters of that body? Are they accountable for those souls who come and go as they please? Can such people obey the command of the text, when they have no commitment to the local body or to its officers? How can they fulfill these mutual responsibilities without formal commitments from both parties (vows) and membership rolls of some kind?

The Word of God does not denigrate authority. Men may abuse the power of church government through their sin, but this does not mean that the government that Christ instituted in his church is evil. This passage commands us to embrace this authority structure as part of our duty and love to God. When forced to choose between the two, we must obey God and not men (e.g., Acts 5:29). We must submit to our elders only insofar as they minister according to God's Word. Nonetheless, elders remain God's authority structure for his church today. The church ruled by elders is one means by which Christ exercises his authority, not merely through men in office, but through men in office ministering the Word of God.

If God has given an official authority structure to govern his church, then why do many Christians today believe that they can fulfill their responsibilities to the church with no tangible commitment to a local congregation and to her officers? Could it be, at least for some, that the objection is really against the divine mandate to submit to church authority? Could it be that the spirit of radical individualism that pervades our culture has jaded our view of church membership? How do you respond to the language of Hebrews 13:17, "obey" or "submit" to those who "rule over you"? How can you apply this without membership?

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted local authorities to rule over his bride. These governing authorities exercise spiritual power only. Church power is ministerial and declarative, not magisterial and legislative. Church power is not carnal or coercive; it is not by the sword. However, this does not mean that church officers do not exercise genuine authority under Christ their head.

In 1 Timothy, the Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to exercise his ministry faithfully (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:18). Among other things, Paul taught Timothy about the requirements of elders (1 Tim. 3). The language of overseer, ruler, and shepherd involves ruling over a particular body of believers. These elders govern local congregations. For example, in Acts 20:17 Paul assembled the elders of Ephesus. They were elders of this church and of no other. Throughout the Scriptures, elders govern local bodies of believers—just as it was in the synagogues (Matt. 5:22; Acts 13:15; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; etc.).

What if a group of church leaders from a church down the street came to your building and declared that your church service will start an hour later than usual next week? Would you submit to their decision? Or, do you not recognize clearly that such a declaration cannot have authority in your

church. Those leaders cannot make the decisions for your church; your leaders alone can. The same is true in every other realm of authority.

Without membership, you are no more committed to the church and to her officers than a man is to a woman to whom he is not married. How can a woman submit to a husband unless she has a husband? How can a man become a husband without a vow before God that constitutes a new family? Should every man, who happens to be a husband of a woman, be able to call every other wife to submit to him as a husband? Unless the woman vows to submit to the man, he has no such authority over her.

Likewise, in the local church, membership vows are necessary, in part, for you to promise to obey the command contained in Hebrews 13:17 (to submit to your specific, local “rulers”). Membership rolls are necessary to keep record of who has taken these vows and to know to whom the officers must keep their vows in service to God. Is it not possible that the strenuous objections to official church membership really stem from an unwillingness to submit to those God has called to be leaders of his people? Public vows and membership rolls are necessary in order to fulfill the responsibilities of church members to their officers (and vice versa).

2. Christ’s Discipline Process Outlined in Matthew 18:15–20 Reinforces the Need for Formal Church Membership

Christ told his disciples that they must deal with unrepentant sin in their brethren specifically and concretely. If such people do not hear us after private admonition and after brining one or two witnesses, then we must “tell it to the church.” Whether you regard this as an official church court or the membership at large, Christ assumes that the body of the church is both recognizable and definable.^[5] Our Lord makes no provision in this process for dealing with church-less Christians.

The primary reason why churches do not follow through with excommunications (in our experience) is that the unrepentant person stops coming to church. Many are accustomed to refer to this as a person “excommunicating himself.” Yet putting the offender out of the church is an act of the church, not an act of the offender. It is a public declaration that this person no longer has any public official relation to the church because his or her life and profession of Christ are no longer credible. How could the church do this if the person was not a member but only a casual attendee?

This is a negative corollary to the vows taken upon joining the church. If a person can come and go from the local congregation as that person pleases with no official commitment to that congregation, then how is it possible to obey Christ’s command to excommunicate the unrepentant? This places many in the absurd position of exercising this sanction only when the offender consents to the process. Yet do we not know by experience that such a scenario is rare? Defective views of excommunication go hand in hand with defective views of church membership. Without membership vows and membership rolls, we will inevitably reduce excommunication to an act of the individual rather than to an act of Christ through the church.

Putting someone out of the church for unrepentant sin is an exercise of the keys of the kingdom (Matt. 16:19). Membership rolls are necessary in order to exercise the power of the keys, which is through the ministry of God’s Word. However, this implies the oft-overlooked corollary that entrance into the church is an exercise of the keys of the kingdom just as much as exclusion from the church is. The authority symbolized by the imagery of keys is that of both opening and closing doors. While the

sword is the symbol of the state's authority (Rom. 13:4, a symbol of the death penalty), and the rod is the symbol of parental authority (Prov. 13:24; 22:15, a symbol of physical discipline), opening and closing is the symbol of the church's authority.

In Matthew 16:19, Jesus committed the keys to Peter (and spoke to Peter in the singular, "you"). However, in Matthew 18:18 (using the same language of "binding" and "loosing" as in Matthew 16:19), Jesus addressed the disciples in the plural ("y'all"). There is now a plurality of leaders who hold the authority to bind or loose, as symbolized in the keys. This group consists in the elders of the church. Admitting members to the church that have a credible and biblical profession of faith is a public declaration that their sins are remitted on account of their faith in Christ. This is a positive act of church discipline that should strengthen the faith of believers. It is also a commitment. Just as you enter the church through the ministerial application of the Word, so you must voluntarily place yourself under the exercise of the power of the keys. The only way to exercise discipline, both for edification and for correction, is for members to join the church through a public commitment and to be counted on her rolls.

3. Membership Rolls are Essential in the Election of Church Officers

The election of church officers is both a right and a privilege of church members. In Acts the congregation participated in the election of an apostle (Acts 1:21–23), the first deacons (Acts 6:3–6), and elders (Acts 14:23). It is impossible to elect officers justly without a well-defined membership in the local congregation. Membership rolls necessarily determine who has the right to vote for new officers. These membership rolls should consist of those who have promised their commitment to the local church. Such public commitments are what we call vows.

Without membership rolls constituted by vows, it is impossible to preserve the biblical right of church members to elect their own officers. Several problems arise, for example, when a church without membership attempts to elect a new minister. The church has two options. In the first, it is left at the mercy of whoever shows up on the day of the election, whether they attend the church regularly or not. In such cases, it is not uncommon for attendance to double or triple on the day on which elections are held. Yet what right do those who have made no commitment to the officers and members of that congregation have to elect the future officers of the congregation? If the church has no membership, then how does anyone present have a sure right to participate in electing officers? In fact, what if the much larger church down the street decided to swarm into your building and vote for your officers? How could you prevent them from doing so, unless you recognized that only members of your particular church could vote on your officers?

The alternative to allowing anyone present to vote is that the current leadership bypasses the election process entirely and chooses their own successors. The former option deprives church members of the right to elect a man who ministers regularly to them by making them subject to people who may not even attend the church regularly. The second option obliterates the New Testament example of the people electing their own officers and gives the current leadership tyrannical authority over the church. Membership rolls are necessary in order to protect the rights of God's people in the local church.

Conclusion

Have you become a member of a local congregation? Have you resisted having your name added to the rolls? How can you keep Christ's commands in relation to the local church without doing so? To which elders do you actively submit? Which congregation are you committed to? You cannot adequately express your membership in the church invisible without doing so through the church visible and local.

Have you resisted taking membership vows? Recognize that good vows only require you to promise to do what Scripture requires of you already. Must you not be subject to the discipline and government of the church? Should you not support the local church in its worship and work to the best of your ability? No local church is perfect and no church needs to be in order for you to join it. Join that church that best reflects your understanding of Scripture, honors Christ, and will feed your soul. Take your vows freely and without coercion. Take them wisely. Take them prayerfully and seriously. But, by all means, take them.

Everything that the triune God commands you to do is for your good. Will his promises fail you as you seek to honor him in his church? We should always be thankful that Christ did not call us to live the Christian life alone. He went to the cross alone. He tread the winepress of God's wrath alone. Yet he redeemed a community of sinners. The church is his body. Belonging to her is belonging to the Father's household. She is the temple of the Holy Spirit. In spite of the faults of the church militant on earth, she is inhabited by many who shall be part of the church triumphant in heaven.

Are you citizens of this heavenly kingdom? Then reflect your membership in this heavenly society by becoming members of the earthly society that reflects it. As William Perkins wrote, the church is "the suburbs of the city of God, and the gate of heaven; and therefore entrance must be made into heaven in and by the church."^[6] Let us dwell with her and in her so that we might be near to God through her.

Endnotes

[1] Gregory Reynolds, "Membership Rolls and the Book of Life," *Ordained Servant* 16 (2007): 39.

[2] Wayne Mack, *To Be or Not to Be a Church Member? That Is the Question!* (Merrick, NY: Calvary, 2004), 26. Consider: Rom. 12:16; Gal. 6:1–2; 1 Cor. 12:25–26; Heb. 3:13; 10:24; Col. 3:16; James 5:16.

[3] Mack, *Church Member*, 29

[4] In Acts 14:23, the Greek verb is χειροτονέω (*cheirotoneo*), which lexicons universally recognize to mean choose or elect, likely by raising the hand.

[5] "The church" here likely follows Jewish use in the Old Testament and the synagogue. This referred to the eldership as the governing body that represented the church.

[6] William Perkins, *A Warning Against the Idolatrie of the Last Times and an Instruction Touching Religious, or Divine Worship* (Cambridge: Printed by John Legat, 1601), 145.

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Appendix 2

Presbyterian Church of Cape Cod *—An Exhortation to Attend Both Services on the Lord's Day—* *A Statement from the Session*

We realize that there may be times when attendance is difficult. We all face the same struggles with tight schedules, unavoidably late nights, legitimate worries, time constraints, and etc. There are numerous things that so press upon us from every side that it is hard not to view the Lord's Day like every other day and cram in as much as possible. —That is why the Lord commands us to “remember the Sabbath Day” because the first thing we are prone to do is *forget* it. And when we forget it, we wind up doing as the Israelites did: as they please, and therefore we break the commandment of God.

We also realize that there will be times of sickness when you will be prevented from gathering together with the saints. Sickness is a part of the life we live on earth and it is lamentable when it prohibits us from being in God's House; but this will be our experience until the Lord lifts the veil on this world and redeems our bodies. But that is all the more reason for us to seek to take care of our bodies, providing them with proper nutrition and rest.

And we realize that there are times when you simply will not want to go to church. We all face the same battles. And given the life most of us lead it is understandable that we struggle in this way. We get so busy that the Lord's Day seems to be the only day we can finally stop for air and take care of things which have been put off all week. We feel like we need a break from life itself and all we want to do is stay in bed, relax, rest our tired bodies, read a book, watch a movie, and a host of other restful engagements.

However, notwithstanding all that, it is our privilege and duty as Christians to be in God's House. So with a view to encouraging the flock of God toward this duty, we the session provide you with five reasons why you should make every effort to attend both services on the Lord's Day. We do this in all humility, not exercising our authority in a “domineering” way (1 Peter 5.3), but rather as those who love you in the Lord, keep watch over your souls, and will have to give an account before the Lord for our oversight (Hebrews 13.17).

Firstly, because the Lord's Day is just that, *the Lord's Day*. When the Israelites were guilty of using the Lord's Day for their own pleasures, this was the very point God made in order to correct their thinking and behavior. In Isaiah 58.13-14 He urged His people to remember that the Sabbath was not *their* day for *their* own pleasure, but rather *His* Day, His *holy* day, a Day in which *He alone* was to be honored and delighted in.

These verses in Isaiah 58 are helpful because they show that wrong behavior *begins* in wrong thinking. The Israelites had come to see the Sabbath as not unlike every other day, as normal, mundane, and ordinary as the rest. And because this thinking went unchecked, it sprouted behavior in accord with itself. They began to use the Sabbath as a day for their pleasure, their own ways, and their own idle talk. It is not that their pleasure, ways, and talk are unimportant to God or should be unimportant to them, but rather that they do not belong on the Lord's Day. It is similar to what we tell our children at times, that the right thing done at the wrong time is the wrong thing.

So in order to correct wrong behavior, we must begin by changing our mind or adjusting our thinking from which that behavior springs. The apostle Paul made this point on several occasions. Romans 12.2 is probably the classic passage. He said, *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what*

is good and acceptable and perfect. In other words, transformation of behavior begins with a renewal of the mind, by adjusting the mind until it aligns with Scripture, by correcting the mind's thinking with the light of God's Word.

The Psalmist understood this. In Psalm 119.9 he said, *How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word*; and then in v.11, *I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you*; and in v.24, *Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors*; and in v.30, *I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me*; and finally, in vv.59-60, *When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies; I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments*.

The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Colossians 3.2-3: *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God*. And he goes on to show why having our thoughts on earthly things is dangerous: because dwelling on sinful things will lead to doing sinful things. Hence, dwelling on godly things will lead to doing godly things. That is why it is so important to be sure *that we think God's thoughts after Him* on the matter of the Lord's Day and a proper observance of it. Otherwise, we will naturally fall into observing it as *we think* it should be observed rather than the way He has commanded.

And what would God have us know about Sunday? Just this, that it is *His Day*. It is not *your Day* or *our Day*, but the *Lord's Day*. He has consecrated it and blessed it as a Day in which His people are to find their rest in Him, renew their love for Him, be refreshed by communion with Him, and honor Him. When we instead use it as a Day for our work, our rest, our errands, our recreation, our, our, our... then it shows that we have gone wrong at the very start with how we think about the Day of the Lord. We have adopted a worldly mindset which believes Sunday to be no different than any other day, which believes all days to be *our* days for *our* doings, which believes the Lord's Word on the matter is inconsequential and has no bearing on our behaviour.

May the Lord help us to see and delight in the Lord's Day *as* the Lord's Day.

Secondly, because the fourth vow of membership is a vow to live a godly life. The first vow asks whether or not we believe the Bible and its doctrine of salvation in Jesus Christ to be the only true doctrine of salvation. The third asks whether we trust in Jesus alone as our Saviour. The fourth asks whether we acknowledge Christ as our sovereign Lord, and whether by the grace of God, we will strive to live a godly life. And the fifth asks if we will submit in the Lord to the government of this church and, if necessary, heed its discipline.

It is the fourth vow to which we would draw your attention. It is the vow or promise to live a godly life. The vow spells out what this means and it will be seen more clearly if we look at it in the first person as you promised it before God on the day you became a professing member of Christ's church: *I acknowledge Jesus Christ as my sovereign Lord and I promise, in reliance on the grace of God, to serve Him with all that is in me, to forsake the world, to mortify my old nature, and to lead a godly life*. There are several things that could occupy our time here, but it is the last phrase which speaks directly to the promise to honor the Lord's Day as God commanded.

To lead a godly life preeminently involves seeking to obey the commands of our loving God. What a godly life is and looks like is not ours to decide, but God's—and He has decided it, and described it, in His law. And one of His commandments is that we *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy ... for it is a Sabbath to the Lord your God*. Therefore, by agreeing to the fourth vow, we are promising (in reliance upon the grace of God and not upon our own strength) to strive to obey this commandment because we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Sovereign Lord and delight to please Him (John 14.15; 15.8). This means we understand Him *to be* our King and submit to Him *as* our King. And it is as King that He is Sovereign over our time, our rest, our week, and our work.

He has declared that our week is to follow His own pattern set at Creation. We are to work for 6 days and rest for 1. He has decided that our time, Mondays thru Saturdays, is to be spent predominantly in labor (allowing of course for recreation), while our Sundays are to be spent *solely* in divine rest wherein we honor Him and manifest His *Lordship* over our life, as a perpetual reminder to ourself as well as a testimony to the world in which we live.

Also, He has declared that our work, as necessary and good as it is, is not to encroach upon His Day. Our work belongs to the days which He has given us for work, but His Day is to be distinct and distinguished by our leaving our work behind and looking to Him to work in us, which He does by the means of grace. It is His Day to shape and conform us to Christ's image, His Day to sanctify us and consecrate us as His very own possession, and His Day to draw us heavenward and recenter us on our relationship with Him.

And lastly, He has declared that we *rest* on His Day. This means the Lord's Day is our day to find and renew our rest in Him. It is a resting in His provision of the means of grace, it is a resting in Christ's righteousness to save, it is a resting in worship and prayer, it is a resting in Christian fellowship, and it is a resting in Christian service. And it is a trustful resting, trusting that such resting as he has designed for us and commanded of us is just what we need (more of this in the next point).

May the Lord cause us to remember our promise and find a renewed delight in leading the godly life to which He has called us, Deuteronomy 23.21; Ecclesiastes 5.4-5.

Thirdly, because we need the means of grace for the good of both our soul and our body. The means of grace refers to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, the administration of the Sacraments, and prayer (to which we should add the fellowship of the saints which takes place in God's House). These are *means* appointed by God for our growth in grace and Christlikeness. They were not devised by man, for we would not have been so wise; though they can be abused by man, for we are often fools; but they are means of grace nonetheless, for God has appointed them and, in spite of ourselves, He continues to use them as the primary means for our growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

The problem, however, is that we fail to believe these means *actually* work. We fail to believe that the preaching and teaching of the Word of God is what we really need (despite what God says in 1Thessalonians 2.13; 2Thessalonians 2.14-15; 1Timothy 4.7-8; 1Timothy 4.11-16; 1Timothy 6.3-4a; 2Timothy 3.15-17; 2Timothy 4.1-5).

We fail to believe that the sacraments are means by which we grow in grace, and yet God says that to partake of the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper is a participation in Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 10.16). It is the means by which the Spirit of God causes us to fellowship with and draw life from the very life of our resurrected Lord (cf. John 6.47-63).

And we fail to believe that corporate prayer is of any real use. And yet has not God said that *everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved* (Romans 10.13)? And what of 1John 5.14-15, *And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him.*

And finally, we fail to believe that the fellowship of the saints is all that helpful. Because of our pride, we would rather be alone and work things out by ourselves; we do not want to ask for help. But God knows what we need better than we do. 1Corinthians 12.18 says that *God has arranged the members in the body as He chose*. Romans 12.3 says that God has given each *a measure of faith*, and then in v.6 Paul charges us all, *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them*. And therefore Hebrews 10.24-25 commands us specifically *not to neglect to meet together* (for

worship) because it is in this context that we are called to *stir one another up to love and good works*. How can we stir one another up to love and good deeds if we neglect the sanctuary in which this is to take place?

The means of grace are divinely chosen and appointed means for our growth in grace and Christlikeness but also for our rest. Our bodies need to stop and rest and God says that the best way to refresh our spirits as well as our bodies is by properly observing His holy Day. This can be seen in that God required not only that the people rest from labor on the Sabbath, but even the animals (Exodus 20.8-10).

Whatever excuses keep us from God's House *dishonor* God, by putting those things before Him, and manifest a *distrust* in God, in that we believe that unless we do for ourselves we will be without, even though God has said *He will never leave us nor forsake us*, but abundantly *provide for all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus* (Hebrews 13.5; Philippians 4.19), and in that we do not believe the means of grace which He appointed for us to be necessary for our relationship with Him.

May the Lord give us rest and supply our every need as we honor Him on His Day, and may He cause our growth in grace as we trustingly utilize the means of grace which He has wisely appointed for the church of all ages.

Fourthly, because, as a child of God, we should increasingly *desire* to be in God's House; and where we do not, we must combat our lack of desire with the *obedience of faith* (Titus 2.14; Romans 1.1.5; 16.26). One of the disastrous consequences of neglecting to do what God requires of us is that we *grow in not wanting to do it*. God commands that we read, meditate upon, memorize, and hear His Word, and as newborn Christians, we do desire these very things. But when, for example, we stop reading God's Word, the *desire* to read lessens. And the more we heed that *lack of desire*, the more the desire to obey lessens, until finally, it is a smoldering wick, with all appearance of life snuffed out. In the same way, a neglect of the Lord's House causes our desire to attend to lessen. Therefore it is this growing lack of desire that we must combat.

Now there are many desires which might arise in our hearts on the morning of the Lord's Day to call us away from public worship. These things *threaten* our desire to be in the Lord's House, to be with His people, and to hear from His Word. Once we begin to allow these things to take hold in our mind and heart, going to church can seem like an imposition than the advantage that it is, and like a hindrance rather than the means of growth that it is. The Day has not changed; God's command of us has not changed; but we have changed, we have changed our thinking—which influences our desires, until it ultimately influences our behavior, and we stop going, first to this service, then that meeting, until our going is no longer a joy, but a duty, a drudgery in which we no longer find benefit, and with which God is not pleased.

Therefore, when we sense this lack of desire growing in us, we must combat it, and we must do so with all our God-given might as those who *have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires* (Galatians 5.24) and as those determined by the grace of God to *put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires* (Romans 13.14).

And the way to combat it is simply to *counter it* by a renewed obedience to God's commands. As Paul told Timothy in 2Timothy 2.22, *Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness*. Of course, it will be very hard at first, because desires are strong things. But we must persevere in holiness and obedience *walking worthy of the calling to which we have been called* (Ephesians 4.1) and *suffering the loss of all things, counting them as rubbish, in order that we might gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of our own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the*

righteousness from God that depends on faith (Philippians 3.8-9). For the way in which our desire *to attend* was weakened is the same way to weaken (and finally mortify) our desire *to be absent*. We must form a new habit, a holy habit, a habit of obedience, and this involves true repentance for our neglect, a renewed faith in God's ways as right, and an obedience to God's ways as a child (John 14.15). He'll take care of the rest.

May God work in our hearts by His Spirit, granting repentance where necessary and faith, and causing us not only to obey His will, but to desire to do so (Philippians 2.13).

And **fifthly**, because the Lord our God *commands* us to come and worship Him. This point has been skirted around several times already. The Lord commands that we remember the Sabbath day as *His holy Day*; that we honor *Him* and not ourselves; that we use the day as a day of worship.

In other words, it is our Christian *duty* to properly observe the Lord's Day. It is not an option for anyone who professes to belong to Christ and follow Christ. It is not something we are expected to do only when we feel like it, only when it is convenient, only when we have time, only when we can fit it in, or only when it makes sense to us. Neither is it something God *asks* of us, as if we should consider it or discuss it, rather, He *commands* it. As God, He has the right to command it, and as His children it is our privilege to obey and our duty to obey. That is why becoming a member of Christ's Church involves making a promise (in the 4th vow), in full reliance upon His enabling grace, to live a godly life, which includes properly observing the Sabbath as He has commanded in the Fourth Commandment, i.e. as a day of worship.

Therefore, besides the several arguments already set forth, the primary importance of and reason for being in God's house on Sunday lies in the fact that He commands it. The other meetings during the week (Prayer, Men's & Women's fellowship, etc.) are provided by the session in an effort to encourage and minister to those who are able to attend. But it is God who commands that He be worshipped on *His Day*. And how do we do that, but by obeying His command to rest the entire day from our labors and give ourselves unto Him (Nehemiah 13.15-22) and His command that we not forsake the assembling of the saints in His house (Heb 10.24-25) where He has chosen to speak His Word to us, conform us to Christ, instruct us in the Way, and protect us from being tossed about by error (Ephesians 4.11-16).

In conclusion, it is the Session's sincere conviction that we worship God properly on His Day by beginning and ending it in His house. The psalmist declares in Psalm 92.1-2 *It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night*, and in Psalm 141.2 *Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice*, and in Psalm 134.1 *Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who stand by night in the house of the LORD!*

May the Lord impress His Fourth Commandment upon our hearts and compel us by His Spirit desire it and to obey it (Philippians 2.13). for He has said, *I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery ... Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy ... for it is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.*

For Christ's sake,
Pastor James La Belle
Elder Arnie Johnson
Elder Jim Hobbs
Elder Matt Lee
Elder Joe Marcel

Appendix 3

Biblical Church Discipline

The Neglected Mark of the Christian Church

by Daniel E. Wray

Introduction

It is necessary in our hardened and apostate age for the church to be called back to the New Testament doctrine of church discipline. In our day, the church has become tolerant of sin even when it is found in her own people. This warrants the wrath of God upon the church's indifference to his holiness. The modern church seems more willing to ignore sin than to denounce it, and more ready to compromise God's law than to proclaim it. It is a mournful fact that many churches refuse to take sin seriously. We have no right to dialogue about sin. That was Eve's mistake. The tempter's suggestions should have been promptly rebuked; but instead, they were discussed (Genesis 3:1-5). That discussion was compromise and sin. The church cannot stand before her enemies while ignoring sin in her own ranks (cf. Joshua 7:1-26).

Today, the church faces a moral crisis within her own ranks. Her failure to take a strong stand against evil (even in her own midst), and her tendency to be more concerned about what is expedient than what is right, has robbed the church of biblical integrity and power. It is true that, historically, the church has sometimes erred in this matter of discipline, but today the problem is one of outright neglect. It would be difficult to show another area of Christian life which is more commonly ignored by the modern evangelical church than church discipline.

It is ironic that this rejection is often justified in the name of love. When the apostle John wrote that we should 'love one another', he also wrote: 'And this is love, that we walk after his commandments' (2 John 5:6). As we shall see, the exercise of church discipline is a command from the Lord of the church. When it is properly carried out, it is a profound display of Christian love. To put it another way, true Christian love dare not ignore the use of the various forms of discipline wherever they are applicable. Love necessarily challenges sin in ourselves and in our brethren. It is no more love for a Christian to watch a brother in Christ pursue a course of sin unchallenged than it is love for a parent to watch his child walk unhindered into disaster. If we look for God's blessing in our churches, it is essential that we conduct ourselves according to God's Word. He tells us how to conduct ourselves in 'the house of God' (1 Timothy 3:15). We must not look to the world for such guidance. If we are to practice Christian love, we must practice church discipline. On the other hand, it will do the church no good if we practice the proper forms of discipline without the spirit of love and humility which characterizes disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not intend to suggest that church discipline is a cure-all for the ills of the contemporary church; nor that discipline is the only or the chief way in which we ought to display our love for one another. Rather we advocate that this is part of the reform necessary in the church today. The way to reform in the church always lies along the road of biblical revelation. The purpose of this booklet, therefore, is simply to point the way back to the biblical practice of church discipline.

The following outline will make our approach plain: (1) *The Necessity and Purpose* of church discipline; this will answer the question, 'Why practice it?' (2) *The Modes* of church discipline; this will answer the question, 'How do we discipline?' (3) *The Proper Recipients* of church discipline; this will answer the question, 'Who should be disciplined?' (4) *Anticipated Objections* to church discipline and our answers to them.

I. The Necessity and Purpose of Church Discipline

Just as the church applies biblical principles in admitting persons to membership, so too must she apply biblical principles in the governing of the membership and, if necessary, in removal from membership. Jesus prescribed principles to follow which make all Christians to some extent responsible for each other's behavior, and he included disciplinary procedures (Matthew 18:15-17). It is in this context that he gave the church the responsibility to pronounce his forgiveness and his judgments. 'Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven' (Matthew 18:18). Of course, the ratification in heaven of what the church does on earth is contingent upon the church acting in obedience to Christ and his principles without hypocrisy or favoritism. As Matthew Poole puts it, this text is 'to assure stubborn and impenitent sinners that he would ratify what his church did, according to the rule he had given them to act by. It is therefore a terrible text to those who are justly and duly cut off from the communion of the church.' Poole wisely adds: 'The church is not by this text made infallible, nor is the holy God by it engaged to defend their errors.' The only fact to be established at this point, however, is simply that the Lord Jesus Christ *does* indeed intend his church to govern its members even to the extent of disciplinary measures when these become necessary. Let us not think that this is simply an optional power to act, for all of the Lord's instructions are given in the imperative. The church does not have the right to ignore persistent sinful behavior among its members. Our Lord has not left that option open to us.

The necessity and purpose of church discipline can be readily exhibited in six particulars:

1. To glorify God by obedience to his instructions for the maintenance of proper church government. God's Word makes it plain that he intends discipline of various types to be part of church life (Matthew 18:15-20; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:113; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 5:20; 6:3; Titus 1:13; 2:15; 3:10; Revelation 2:2,14,15,20). It is always glorifying to God when we obey his Word rather than cater for our own ease and expediency. Let us not be as those in Jeremiah's day, of whom it is written: 'The word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it' (Jeremiah 6:10).
2. To reclaim offenders. The goal in every type of discipline, whether it be gentle correction, admonition, rebuke, or excommunication, is always the restoration of the offender (Matthew 18:15; 1 Corinthians 5:5; Galatians 6:1). None of the biblical instructions in this matter *promise* that restoration will result. Nevertheless, God's wise directions as to how a sinner is to be brought to repentance are to be respected and obeyed. Thus, while we might be inclined simply to pray about the matter, God commands action to accompany our prayers. The apostle's instructions concerning an offender, 'count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother', (2 Thessalonians 3:15) set the tone for this grievous work. As Calvin observes: 'Although excommunication also punishes the man, it does so in such a way that, by forewarning him of his future condemnation, it may call him back to salvation' (*Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter 12, Section 10)
3. To maintain the purity of the church and her worship (1 Corinthians 5:6-8), and to avoid profaning the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:27). We shall never be able to keep the visible church in perfect purity since we are but fallible men. Our inability to achieve perfection in this matter, however, is no excuse for giving up the attempt. We must maintain the purity of Christ's visible church to the full extent of our knowledge and power. This is all the more evident once we recognize that false doctrine and bad conduct are infectious. If these are tolerated in the church all members will receive hurt (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:6).

4. To vindicate the integrity and honor of Christ and his religion by exhibiting fidelity to his principles (2 Corinthians 2:9,17). The church which refuses to exercise discipline can neither command the world's respect nor the confidence of its own members.
5. To deter others from sin (cf. 1 Timothy 5:20). By the faithful practice of discipline, 'vice is repressed and virtue nourished' (*The Scots Confession*, 1560, Chapter XVIII).
6. To prevent giving cause for God to set himself against a local church (see Revelation 2:14-25).

Since the church is bound to give full allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ, and this means to love him and keep his commandments (John 14:15,23,24; 15:10,14), it is evident that the church's honesty of heart is tested when confronted with the choice between obedience and disobedience in this matter of the discipline of its members. It is just as necessary for the church to exercise proper discipline as it is to preach the Word and properly administer the sacraments. This is why the *Belgic Confession* (1561), which grew out of Reformation soil, says: 'The marks by which the true Church is known, are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church.' (From Chapter XXIX. A similar statement can be found in Chapter XVIII of *The Scots Confession* [1560]).

II. Modes of Church Discipline

The modes or types of church discipline vary from the mild to the severe. The following are biblical:

1. Admonition--either private or public (Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:14,15; Titus 3:10,11). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'admonish' as 'to put (one) in mind *to do* a duty; to charge authoritatively, to exhort, to urge (always with a tacit reference to the danger or the penalty of failure).' The Scripture itself is a form of admonition (1 Corinthians 10:11). Christians ought to admonish and encourage one another, for example, to do good works and to attend the meetings of the church (Hebrews 10:24,25).
2. Reproof, rebuke, convince, convict (Matthew 18:15; Ephesians 5:11; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9,13; 2:15). The Greek word (*elencho*), which is used in the passages just cited, is a rich word which means '... to rebuke another with such effectual wielding of the victorious arms of the truth, as to bring him, if not always to a confession, yet at least to a conviction, of his sin ...' (R.C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 12). This word is also used of the Holy Spirit's work in John 16:8, and is found on the lips of the enthroned Christ in Revelation 3:19, where he says: 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.' Thus, proper rebuke is an act of love. The only proper guide in such matters is the Word of God written which we are told is 'profitable ... for reproof (2 Timothy 3:16).

It is important that all Christians practice loving admonition and rebuke in their relationships one with another. Many a Christian has been prevented from more serious misbehavior or error by the gentle rebuke of a brother in Christ. If Christians would conscientiously apply admonition and rebuke, there would be less need for excommunication.

Knowing this, the faithful Christian is eager to help turn sinners to repentance before excommunication becomes necessary. Furthermore, Christians will help one another 'grow up into him in all things' if they will obey the apostle's admonition to be 'speaking the truth in love' (Ephesians 4:15).

As each Christian gives thought to his responsibility here, let it always be remembered that the only proper source of admonitions and rebukes is the Word of God. This does not mean that we must always quote Scripture to one another, but it certainly does mean that the substance of all admonitions and rebukes must be soundly and clearly scriptural. We are not to offer one another human ideas; but rather, are to speak with the authority of 'Thus saith the Lord'. This should be done in humility, remembering that we ourselves are nothing but sinners saved by grace. Furthermore, repentance and faith constitute the way of salvation for all Christians; thus we attempt to lead the sinner on the same path which we ourselves must tread. We do not stand over them as superiors, but beside them as brothers (Galatians 6:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 3:15).

3. Excommunication. The descriptions given by our Lord Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul define this final form of discipline: '... if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican' (Matthew 18:17); 'But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat ... Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person' (1 Corinthians 5:11,13). Thus this most severe of the forms of discipline excludes the offender from the church and from all the privileges of membership. However, while the person must certainly be excluded from the Lord's Supper, he is not excluded from attendance upon the ministry of the Word preached and taught, for even nonbelievers are welcome to the public assemblies (1 Corinthians 14:23-25). That this form of discipline is unpleasant and a cause for mourning (1 Corinthians 5:2) none would doubt. Nevertheless, this practice has associated with it in the New Testament Christ's own direct sanction (Matthew 18:18,19). Paul claims this sanction when he writes concerning the Corinthians situation that the man is to be delivered to Satan (i.e. put back into the world which is Satan's domain), 'in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' and 'with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Corinthians 5:4). He could hardly state more clearly and decisively that our Lord Jesus himself is the authority behind all true excommunication.

It is not to be thought that excommunication is irreversible, for the person who repents of his sin and seeks God's cleansing and pardon is to be welcomed back into the fellowship of the church (2 Corinthians 2:6-8). Indeed, it is the responsibility of God's people to continue to pray for any persons thus removed from fellowship that God will bring them to repentance. On the other hand, so long as they remain unrepentant they remain excommunicated. We recognize, of course, that in this day and age the offender will often seek out another church to attend in order to avoid repenting and submitting to the church which loved him enough to discipline him. In such cases, the offender and the other church must answer to God. The disciplining church, if it has done its duty well, will be vindicated by the Lord in his own time. (cf. Objection 8, pages 20,21)

In view then of the severity of a sentence of excommunication, it must be asked what offences would warrant the use of this extreme censure. Our next point will address this very issue.

III. The Proper Recipients of Church Discipline

The church has both the responsibility and the authority to be involved with the doctrine and the conduct of its members. To belong to the church requires adherence to the doctrines and standards of conduct required in the Scriptures. True disciples of Christ are always under his discipline which he administers in many, ways, chiefly through the church and its duly appointed officers. The very Scriptures themselves are to be an instrument of discipline (2 Timothy 3:16), and should be taught 'with all authority' (Titus 2:15).

All breaches of the biblical standards of doctrine and behavior require some form of discipline. Thus, every believer needs to be disciplined, and 'whom the Lord loves, he disciplines' (Hebrews 12:6). This does not mean, however, that Christians may leave all disciplining to the Lord, thus forsaking their own responsibilities to one another. We do not have the right to overlook clear violations of Christian love, unity, law, and truth. Therefore, church discipline is necessary when:

1. Christian love is violated by serious private offences. Jesus prescribes the method of discipline in such cases in Matthew 18:15-18. Though such offences may begin in secret, they must ultimately result in public censure if the offender stubbornly refuses to repent. Such refusal to repent and be reconciled is a severe aggravation of the sin involved and a continual breach of Christian love.
2. Christian unity is violated by those who form divisive factions which destroy the peace of the church. Such persons must be watched, rebuked, and, if necessary, removed (Romans 16:17,18; Titus 3:10).
3. Christian law is violated by those living scandalous lives. Such are those who 'profess that they know God; but in works they deny him' (Titus 1:16). Biblical Christianity undeniably teaches a high standard of conduct and morality. The New Testament's ethical instructions are many- Matthew 15:19,20; Romans 13:8-14; Ephesians 4:25-6:8; Colossians 3:5--4:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-10; 2 Timothy 3:12--4:5; Titus 2:1-3:3-to mention only a few. Those who live in habitual violation of biblical morality, and refuse to repent when admonished and rebuked, must be removed from church membership (1 Corinthians 5).
4. Christian truth is violated by those who reject essential doctrines of the faith (1 Timothy 1:19,20; 6:3-5; 2 John 7-11). This does not mean that Christians should be censured for failing to understand and receive every doctrine revealed in the Bible, for all Christians are learning and growing. Rather, this refers to those who knowingly reject any of those doctrines which the church considers essential and fundamental. In the case of the pastors and elders of the church, the standard is more rigid, since they are especially responsible to teach and defend 'all the counsel of God' (Acts 20:27). Thus they are responsible to maintain all the doctrines of the Scripture (especially as embodied in their church's creed), and are liable to discipline if they fail to do so (1 Timothy 3:2,9; Titus 1:9; James 3:1).

In each case, the cause of further discipline is impenitence. The person who will not repent of his sin is not living like a Christian. Only the repentant sinner can be counted as holy in Christ, and only the holy in Christ have a place in the fellowship of the saints (i.e. holy ones), as members of Christ's church. Therefore, regardless of what the offender's sin(s) might be, it is ultimately his impenitence that must exclude him from the church. *Repentant* sinners, who 'bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance' (Matthew 3:8), are what the church is made of. This is why Martin Luther wrote in the first of his Ninety-Five Theses (1517); 'Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying "Repent ye, etc.," meant the whole life of the faithful to be an act of repentance.' There is no place for the impenitent, who are treasuring up 'wrath against the day of wrath' (Romans 2:5). Even the religious activities of the unrepentant are worthless and abominable to God (proverbs 15:8; 28:9; Amos 5:21-27; Malachi 2:11-14).

A Doctrinal Summary of the Six Major Divisions of Reformed Theology

The Doctrine of God

The Bible is, in the first place, God's revelation of Himself and of His will. It reveals that the Creator of the universe, who is the primary Author of the Bible, is a Triune God and eternally exists in three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three Persons are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. (John 1:1; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 John 5:7; 2 Cor. 13:14). It is especially in the Person of the Son, who is the Living Word of God (John 1:1), that the Father has revealed Himself to man (John 1:18; Heb. 1:1-3), and it is the explicit work of the Holy Spirit to glorify the Son (John 16:14).

The Doctrine of Man

The Bible provides us with God's view of man. It reveals to us that, at the beginning of time, God created man in the image of His eternal Son (Rom. 8:29), namely, with perfect knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. The chief purpose of man's creation and existence was to give glory to God with his entire being. Tragically, however, man rebelled against God and became a sinner, no longer answering the purpose for which he was created. Ever since man turned away from God, he is separated from God (spiritually dead), has a will entirely opposed to God, is the object of the wrath of God, and is unwilling and unable to be saved and restored to a relationship with God (Gen. 1:27; Isa. 43:7b, 21; Eccl. 7:29; Rom. 8:7; 3:10, 11).

The Doctrine of Christ

The Bible reveals God's remedy to bring about reconciliation between an offended God and sinful man. He gave His only begotten and eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Being very God and very man, Christ possesses the perfect qualities to be the supreme Mediator between God and man. His perfect obedience to the law of God as well as His total surrender to the punishment due to sin, He quenched the wrath of God and met all the requirements of God's justice by His death on Calvary's cross. As evidence of His Father's approval of His work as Mediator, Jesus arose from the dead and returned to the presence of His Father in heaven as the victorious and exalted Mediator. He has thereby fully opened the way for the relationship between God and man, broken by sin, to be completely restored (2 Cor. 5:17-21; 1 Tim. 2:5; Gal. 4:4-5; Rom. 5:1).

The Doctrine of Salvation

The Bible teaches that the will of sinful man is entirely opposed to God's will and that therefore man of his own volition will never seek reconciliation with God. That is why the work of the Holy Spirit is indispensable in the salvation of sinners. He alone can convince man of his sin and his need of Christ; He alone can cause man to surrender to God and work faith in Christ for salvation; He alone can preserve this salvation by dwelling in sinners. Since the salvation of sinners is the result of God's eternal initiative, God, by His Spirit, will effectively conquer the hearts of sinners and thus save His people from their sins (John 1:12, 13; 6:63a; 16:7-15; Gal. 1:15, 16a; Phil. 1:6; 2:13).

The Doctrine of the Church

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit, being a God of order, unites all those whom He saves into a body of believers called the church. It is within the context of the church that He causes His Word to be preached by men whom He has specifically called and qualified for this task. By means of the preaching of His Word, God is pleased to regenerate spiritually dead sinners and bestow upon them the gift of saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He also uses the preaching of the Word to strengthen the faith of His people, causing them to grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the church is the place where God dwells in the midst of His people by means of His Word and Spirit. It is where His people worship God, receive spiritual nourishment from His Word, serve Him, and have fellowship with Him (Ps. 122; 132:13-18; Ps. 133; Acts 2:47; Heb. 10:24-25).

The Doctrine of the Last Things

The Bible teaches us that this age will come to an end and that the Lord Jesus Christ will return personally, visibly, and bodily to judge all mankind. Those who by God's grace believe in Him and have served Him will be ushered into His everlasting presence to rejoice in His glory with unspeakable joy. All who have rejected God's Son in unbelief and preferred a life of sin over the service of God, however, will be separated from God's favor forever in hell. There they will suffer unspeakable and eternal agony, being the object of God's wrath upon sin (Matt. 25:31-46; Mark 13:26,27; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:8-10; 2 Tim. 4:1, Rev; 20:11-12).

Appendix 5

WHAT'S RIGHT WITH THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH?

R. B. Kuiper

I was asked to deliver an historical address on this occasion. It is clear that a sermon is not expected. It is also clear that, while in a general way my subject has been assigned, its formulation was left to me.

It occurred to me to speak on "Birth Pangs and Growing Pains." That subject has much in its favor. It surely would be true to fact. It might be judged, however, to be somewhat lacking in dignity. So I dismissed it.

For just a moment—no more than a moment—I thought of speaking on the question, "What's Wrong with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?" That theme would have proved easy to develop because much is wrong with our church, but it is exceedingly trite. Our enemies have worked overtime at it, and some of us have worked at it almost as hard. Besides, while a measure of introspection is good, and even necessary, for both an individual and a church, concentration on one's faults and weaknesses can be overdone. I have known persons who overdid it to the point of morbidity and even insanity. May God forbid that our church should head in that direction.

I have chosen rather to discuss the question, "What's Right with Our Church?" And since, as I said, this is to be an historical address, my precise theme is: "What Is Historically Right with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?"

A great many things are right with our church, so many that I cannot possibly enumerate all of them. It is a foregone conclusion that, when I have finished, some of you—perhaps all of you—will think of things that I might have said, and perhaps should have said, but did not actually say. I have two excuses to offer: first, I cannot think of everything; second, I cannot say everything I think.

The right things about our church that I propose to name may conveniently be brought under two heads:

1. Our Church Is Broad in the Good Sense of That Term
2. Our Church Is Narrow in the Good Sense of That Term

The question arises at once whether the term narrow can be used in a good sense and whether the term broad can be used in any but a good sense. Nowadays hardly anybody wants to be narrow; almost everybody wants to be broad. A great many folk regard narrowness as an unmitigated evil, broadness as an unqualified good. It occurs to me, however, that Jesus once spoke of a narrow way and a broad way, and said that the narrow way leads to life, the broad way to destruction. Surely, it follows that narrowness is not always an evil, nor is broadness always a good. And so I am on solid ground when I speak of both narrowness and broadness in the good sense of these terms.

A BROAD CHURCH

When saying that our church is broad in the good sense of that term, I have several things in mind. I shall select three.

It has been said that there are present in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church three traditions—the American Presbyterian tradition, the Scottish Presbyterian tradition, and the Dutch Reformed tradition. Who will deny the fact?

But when it is intimated that the presence of these three traditions in one denomination constitutes a liability to that denomination, I beg to differ sharply. I rather consider it a distinct potential asset. Does it not present the opportunity to combine all that is best in these three traditions? Surely, very few churches, if any, have ever had such an opportunity. I do not hesitate to call it golden.

May I remind you that Dr. Machen was responsible for the presence of these three traditions among us? He took a leading part in choosing, among others, a true-blue Scot and three men of Dutch ancestry for the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary. And it was he who not only invited these men into the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, but urged them, pleaded with them, to come in. Will you pardon a very brief personal reference? One of the last things Dr. Machen told me before his lips were sealed in death was that I should enter the Orthodox Presbyterian Church without delay. When the overwhelmingly sad news of his untimely decease reached me, I could no longer deny his wish.

And may I not remind you of the incomparably more significant fact that Calvinism is cosmopolitan? It cannot help being, for it is consistent Christianity, and Christ is the Savior of the world. Calvinism partakes of Christian universalism. The earliest history of Calvinism bears this out. In the Reformation period Lutheranism remained confined by and large to Germany and the Scandinavian countries, but Calvinism spread from Switzerland through France to the Low Countries, and across the channel to Great Britain, and at the same time it fanned out eastward through Germany to Hungary and Bohemia. Calvin himself was born, neither in Holland, nor Scotland, nor yet in America, but in France, and most of his labors he performed in Switzerland. Calvinism far transcends all national boundaries. It is supranational.

What then shall we do about these traditions? Shall we fight each for his own, and against the others? God forbid. Shall we tolerate one another's peculiarities? I suppose so, but that will not suffice for true unity. Nothing short of love will hold us together. Let me remind you of pagan Cicero's distinction between friendship and love. He defined friendship as a benevolent attitude toward those who are like us, love as a benevolent attitude toward those who differ from us. If that is a correct description of the love which flows from the common grace of God, what differences will not Christian love surmount?

Also, let us refuse to be traditionalists. Traditions may be valuable—some are and some are not—but traditionalism is an evil. Did not Jesus rebuke the scribes and Pharisees of his day for their traditionalism? Instead of clinging tenaciously to views and customs handed down to us by our elders, let us settle our differences in the light of the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Then we shall indeed be in a position to combine all that is best in our differing traditions, and thus our church will be greatly enriched.

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has repeatedly acknowledged the principle of Christian liberty and has thus manifested itself to be broad in the good sense of that term.

The mere mention of Christian liberty causes some of you to worry. You see smoke and smell liquor, and you wonder whether I may not be about to utter some awful indiscretion. Forget it. Christian liberty is something big. It is truly broad.

It has reference to doctrine. Within the Reformed faith there is an area which has room for differences of opinion. To be sure, this area has its boundaries, but its existence may not be denied. For instance, infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism have flourished alongside each other in the Reformed churches, and their respective adherents have usually found it possible to bear with one another. Much the same thing is true of premillennarianism, amillennialism, and supernaturalistic postmillennialism.

Does this mean that, after all, the Reformed churches have been willing to compromise a little with error—that they have been tolerant of error, provided error was not too serious? I say with all the emphasis at my command that it means nothing of the kind. All error is serious. To compromise with any degree of error is sin. I have heard it said that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church tolerates premillennarians. Although I am not myself a premillennarian, I resent that statement. If I were a premillennarian, I should not want to be tolerated in this church nor in any other. A stigma attaches to being tolerated. Would you know why premillennarians, amillennarians, and supernaturalistic postmillennarians stand and labor shoulder to shoulder in our church? The reason is very simple. It is not at all that we are willing to condone a mild type of heresy, but that, whatever our individual convictions may be, as a church we have not yet arrived at certainty that any one of these groups is a hundred per cent right. Our church is still seeking more light. Obviously this type of Christian liberty has nothing in common with doctrinal indifference.

Christian liberty also concerns the Christian life. There are practices concerning the propriety of which there have historically been differences of opinion among serious-minded Christians and, more specifically, among Reformed moralists. In the field of Reformed ethics, as in that of Reformed doctrine, there is an area in which there is room for differences. To be sure, this area too has its boundaries, but its existence must be recognized. I hardly need to name any practices that lie within that area. All of you are familiar with some, and no doubt every one of you engages in some. The difference among us is not that some of us engage in such practices while others abstain, but that some of us engage in some, others in other of such practices.

Does this mean that we are tolerant of so-called little sins? God forbid. Calvinism is not a whit less insistent on purity of life than on purity of doctrine. But in such matters as were alluded to, we of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church respect each other's consciences, refrain from judging one another, recognize that each of us stands or falls to his own master, take heed not to use our liberty for an occasion to the flesh, and aim so to live in love as not to offend anyone.

That, too, is broadness in the good sense of the term.

OUR MISSION

What is the function of the Christian church? Some say: to bring the gospel to the unsaved. Others reply: to build up its members in the faith. If you give either of these answers to the exclusion of the other, you are narrow in the evil sense of that term. If you give both answers, you may be credited with a measure of broadness in the good sense of that term.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has ever given both answers.

It is a sad but undeniable fact that some who helped found our church had little doctrinal background. The reason was that they came from the Presbyterian Church in the USA, which for many decades had almost completely neglected the indoctrination of its members. To be sure, they were not so blind as to fail to recognize the blatant heresy pervading that church. Yet their doctrinal eyesight was not keen. Awareness of this situation prompted Dr. Machen to say that it was the solemn duty of our church to educate a whole new generation of Christians. We have tried and are trying to perform this arduous task. Most of our preachers do much doctrinal preaching. All of them should. And, by the way, there is no good reason why doctrinal preaching should be dry as dust and abstract. There is every good reason why it should be thoroughly practical and scintillatingly interesting. In most of our churches there is not only a Sunday school, but systematic doctrinal instruction is given the children of the covenant in Catechism classes. That should be done in all of our churches. At least a few of our pastors conduct classes in doctrine for communicant members. The rest of our pastors should follow suit. As a denomination we are rapidly becoming conscious of the necessity of Christian day schools for our children. Several of such schools have already been established by voluntary associations of Orthodox Presbyterian parents, and more are in the immediate offing.

That our church is strong for missions is a matter of common knowledge. As was already pointed out, zeal for truly Presbyterian missions became the immediate occasion of the founding of our church. And ever since its founding it has conducted a full missionary program. I have no statistics available, and I am not greatly interested in statistics, for they are often misleading, but I seriously question whether there is a denomination on this continent, or for that matter on any continent, which for its size and its strength is more active in missions than is the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Right now we have mission fields on three continents: America, Asia and Africa. Small and weak though we are, utterly insignificant in the eyes of almost all other churches, we count the world as our field. During the recent war those of our ministers who served as chaplains in the armed forces—and many did—encircled the globe. We are bending every effort to hasten the day when the kingdom of this world will have become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, and when an innumerable multitude will sing, "Thou, O Lamb, wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation."

That again is broadness in the good sense—may I not say, in the best—of that term.

A NARROW CHURCH

When saying that our church is narrow in the good sense of that term, I have reference especially to the matter of doctrine. Was not the Orthodox Presbyterian Church conceived and born in doctrinal controversy? Doctrinal issues were the occasion of its origination.

Historically, our church has opposed doctrinal error. It has refused even to compromise with error. How Dr. Machen used to din into our ears the behest never to compromise with error. Compromising truth was to his mind equivalent to denying truth. He himself consistently refused to compromise even a little. A certain character has gone down in the history of our country as "the Great Compromiser." Dr. Machen may well go down in the history of our church as the great noncompromiser.

Positively expressed, our church has historically striven hard to exemplify the biblical description of Christ's church as "pillar and ground of truth." What is the meaning of that expression? What is the function of a pillar and of the ground? Obviously, to uphold things. Christ brought his church into being in order that it might uphold the truth. In this world so full of falsehood, that cannot be done without opposing error. Therefore our church has ever been militant in its defense and proclamation of the truth of God. It has declared the truth, both controversially and constructively. It has made the truth in all its whiteness stand out boldly against the black background of error.

In a word, our church is intolerant of error. Intolerance is frequently condemned as a grave sin, while tolerance is advocated as a great virtue. The fact is that the term tolerance is a neutral one. Whether tolerance is good or evil depends on that which is tolerated. To tolerate sin is an evil. To tolerate error is sin. But intolerance is usually regarded as evidence of narrowness. It may well be that. Only remember that intolerance of error is evidence of narrowness in the good sense of that term.

THE BIRTH OF THE OPC

Where did the Orthodox Presbyterian Church originate? You say that it originated at this very place, in the New Century Club of Philadelphia, on the eleventh day of June in the year of our Lord 1936. That is true in about the same sense in which it is true that the Protestant Reformation began on the thirty-first of October, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his famous ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg. But everybody knows that the roots of the Reformation lie far back of that date. It is equally clear that the roots of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church may be traced behind 1936. It is not amiss to say that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was conceived when the Presbyterian Church in the USA became tolerant of error. And that happened long ago. Let no one suppose that the church just named was relatively sound and pure until a decade or two before 1936. He who thinks that betrays an utter lack of historical sense. The decadence of a church is a process, usually very slow—almost imperceptibly slow—at first and then gradually accelerated. To name but one date, 1870 is significant in this connection. In that year the Old and New School Presbyterians were merged into one body, and that merger involved compromise with error.

The doctrinal decadence of the Presbyterian Church in the USA came to a head in 1924, when some twelve hundred leaders in that denomination affixed their names to the Auburn Affirmation. That infamous document denounced the infallibility of Holy Scripture as a "harmful" doctrine. It also stated as the conviction of the signers that it was unnecessary for a minister in the church to believe in the virgin birth of Christ, his bodily resurrection, or the miracles of the Bible generally. The precious doctrine that Christ's death on the cross was a sacrifice by which he expiated sin and satisfied divine justice was further decried as but one of many theories of the atonement and nonessential to the faith. The church was now divided into three parties: the Modernists on the one hand, the Conservatives on the other, and between them the middle-of-the-roaders or indifferentists. The last-named party was by far the most numerous, and more despicable even than the first.

It was inevitable that this doctrinal controversy in the church should affect its seminary at Princeton. And so in the twenties a battle royal was waged at that institution. It has been said that this battle concerned a mere matter of administration. Princeton Theological Seminary was controlled by two boards: a Board of Directors and a Board of Trustees. There were those who felt that in the interest of efficient administration these two boards should be merged: others thought otherwise. And that was all there was to it. A more misleading understatement is hardly imaginable. President J. Ross Stevenson had advocated an "inclusive" policy for the seminary. He wanted it to represent not only the conservative wing of the church, but the church as a whole. Now the Board of Directors, which had much to say about the constituency of the

faculty, was conservative, while the Board of Trustees was not. Clearly, it was in the interest of Stevenson's policy of inclusiveness that the former board should be swallowed up by the latter. Precisely that happened. In a word, the issue was a doctrinal one. The conservatives went down to defeat. Princeton Theological Seminary, that erstwhile bulwark of American orthodoxy, was taken over by modernists and indifferentists. Ichabod was written over its doors.

Thus it came to pass that in 1929 Westminster Theological Seminary was founded as the continuation of old Princeton. In a very real sense the seminary which had been put to death at Princeton was resurrected in Philadelphia. Westminster began with a faculty of seven men, four of whom had taught at Princeton. The four were Dr. Robert Dick Wilson, Dr. Oswald T. Allis, Dr. J. Gresham Machen, and Dr. Cornelius Van Til. This seminary contributed incalculably to the founding of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936.

For some time the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA had been under fire because of modernism in the board and among its missionaries. Pearl Buck, for instance, once served under this board as missionary in China. It was she who expressed the opinion that, if the bodily resurrection of our Lord should be definitely disproved, that would not matter, for the spiritual values of Christianity would persist just the same. When at last she resigned under conservative fire, the board accepted her resignation with regret. Complaints against the modernism of the Board were lodged with the courts of the church. However these complaints fell on deaf ears. Then conservatives in the church found themselves compelled to organize the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. This was in 1933.

Before long several members of this board were brought to trial. I do not exaggerate when I assert that their trials constituted one of the greatest travesties of justice in ecclesiastical history. In 1934 the church made the astounding declaration: "A church member or an individual church that will not give to promote the officially authorized missionary program of the Presbyterian Church, is in exactly the same position with reference to the Constitution of the Church as a church member or an individual church that would refuse to take part in the celebration of the Lord's Supper" (Manual of Presbyterian Law for Church Officers and Members, published by the Presbyterian Church in the USA in 1936, p. 115). On that made-to-order and much worse than flimsy ground the defendants were condemned. But never once were they permitted to say in their defense why they had organized the Independent Board. The issue was patently doctrinal, but every doctrinal reference was consistently ruled out by the court as irrelevant.

Here let me quote a significant statement by a Unitarian in the Boston Evening Transcript of April 6, 1935. The reference was to the trial of Dr. Machen, the president of the Independent Board, which trial had just been concluded and had resulted in an order for his suspension from the ministry. Said Albert C. Dieffenbach: "No matter what may be said in slovenly contempt about doctrines—that they do not count—the fact is that they are the only things at last that do count. It will always be so. Every great issue in religion throughout history has been in the realm of belief. The weakness, the incoherency and the ineffectualness of any church can be attributed to its lack of great rooted ideas and convictions to give ultimate meaning to the life of man." How grave an indictment by a Unitarian of an avowedly Presbyterian church! And how just!

Those members of the Independent Board who had been adjudged guilty by the lower courts of the church appealed to the 1936 General Assembly, which convened in Syracuse, N.Y. When their appeal was brushed aside lightly, it was clear as broad daylight that the time for drastic action had arrived. The Presbyterian Church in the USA had unmistakably come under the control of modernism and indifferentism. By accepting that control it had denied the truth. This situation demanded drastic action. Any action short of drastic would have betokened compromise and cowardice. On the eleventh day of June, 1936, The Presbyterian Church of America was founded, the church which today is known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

How clear that the beginnings of our church were doctrinal, It came into existence because of the doctrinal collapse of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. Basically, the one and only issue that gave rise to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was the issue of doctrine. Its founders were intolerant of doctrinal error. They were narrow in the good sense of that term.

DOCTRINAL CONTROVERSY

The whole story has not been told.

It cannot be doubted that some who united with our church in its early days expected it to be broadly evangelical. It seems not to have occurred to them that this church would insist on being specifically and strictly Reformed or Presbyterian. Nor did they realize that, in order to combat modernism effectively, it would have to be distinctively Reformed, for the reason that of all Christian systems of theology only Calvinism has consistently refused to compromise with naturalism, and hence Calvinism alone is in a position to assail modernism all along the line. It was nothing strange, therefore, that doctrinal differences already emerged at the Second General Assembly of our church in the fall of 1936.

That Assembly concerned itself with adopting the doctrinal standards of our church. Prominent among these standards, of course, is the Westminster Confession of Faith. But the question arose in what precise form the Confession was to be adopted. In the year 1903 the Presbyterian Church in the USA had, to put the case mildly, watered it down. Negotiations had been under way for union with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. A stumbling block was encountered. The Cumberlanders were Arminian in doctrine and therefore objected to the rigorous Calvinism of the Confession. In order to meet them, perhaps less than halfway but nonetheless part of the way, the Presbyterian Church in the USA adopted certain Arminianizing amendments to the Confession. At our Second General Assembly the question arose whether the Confession of Faith should be adopted with or without these amendments. The Assembly was sharply divided. Lengthy debate ensued, some of it a bit acrimonious. But finally Dr. Machen made a ringing and convincing speech against the Arminianizing amendments. This plea won the day.

A significant development must here be recorded. Little more than half a year later, at the 1937 General Assembly, practically all who had favored the retention of the 1903 amendments parted company with our church. The reason for their departure was avowedly another, and I do not wish to call their veracity into question; but that there were Arminian tendencies among them may be set down as an indisputable fact, and that these Arminian tendencies may have had some bearing on their departure must be recognized as at least a possibility.

Another doctrinal matter that received attention at the Second General Assembly was the dispensationalism of the Scofield Bible. While the Assembly issued no official doctrinal pronouncement on the subject, it is no exaggeration to say that modern dispensationalism—mind you, I did not say premillennialism—was discredited.

How clear that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in its early days was tremendously insistent on sound doctrine and firmly refused to compromise with doctrinal error. It was narrow in the good sense of that term.

In 1936 our church named itself The Presbyterian Church of America. Through the civil courts the Presbyterian Church in the USA compelled us to change our name. In 1939 a General Assembly was called for the sole purpose of choosing another name. After lengthy debate, our present name—the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—was adopted. How significant a name! Had our doctrinal consciousness been less than strong at the time, we could hardly have chosen it. And by choosing it, we committed ourselves to the strictest orthodoxy for the indefinite future. Failure at any time to live up to that name will make our church a laughingstock. To put it popularly, we stuck out our necks in 1939. I do not say that one should never stick his neck out, but surely, he should never do so without being ready to take the consequence, if need be, of having his head chopped off. As a church, we solemnly vowed in 1939 that we would be willing to be decapitated if we should not adhere strictly to sound doctrine, or should become indifferent to it. So long as we bear our present name, we shall remain committed to that vow.

Let me bring the matter up to date. For some two years now a doctrinal controversy has been in process in our church. It originated in the Presbytery of Philadelphia, and has since become denominational in scope. Now, don't worry. I am not going to say anything indiscreet. I shall not be so ungracious as to take advantage of my present opportunity to make propaganda for my own convictions on this subject, however strong those convictions may be and actually are. But I do want to make one statement. Our willingness to debate doctrine, and our unrelenting refusal to desist from doctrinal debate until truth and error have come

clearly to light are evidence that as a denomination we have not yet succumbed to the temptation of doctrinal indifference and have not yet ceased being narrow in the good sense of that term.

CONCLUSION

What is right with our church? Much in every way.

But may we never forget that we are what we are by the grace of God alone. All that we have, we have received. Let us then give all the glory to God and take none for ourselves. Soli Deo Gloria!

May we also remember that we have our God-given treasures in earthen vessels. How earthen we are! Then we shall put our trust for the future solely in the almighty Head and King of the church at the right hand of God.

Again, may we ever be mindful that much will be required of those to whom much has been committed. Our responsibility is exceedingly heavy.

I conclude with applying to our church the exhortation which he who walks among the seven golden candlesticks and holds the seven stars in his right hand addressed to the church of Philadelphia in Asia Minor, which, like ours, had little strength but had kept his word and had not denied his name: Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

R. B. Kuiper, the original professor of practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, delivered this address in 1946 (the two main parts of this address have been reversed). Reprinted with permission from the Presbyterian Guardian in New Horizons, March-April, 1991. —Copyright © 2010, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church. All Rights Reserved.

Appendix 6

A Personal Summary of the Reformed Faith

Benjamin B. Warfield

1. I believe that my one aim in life and death should be to glorify God and enjoy Him forever; and that God teaches me how to glorify and enjoy Him in His holy Word, that is, the Bible, which He has given by the infallible inspiration of His Holy Spirit in order that I may certainly know what I am to believe concerning Him and what duty He requires of me.
2. I believe that God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and incomparable in all that He is; one God but three persons, the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, my Creator, my Redeemer, and my Sanctifier; in whose power and wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and truth I may put my trust.
3. I believe that the heavens and the earth, and all that in them is, are the work of God's hands; and that all He has made He directs and governs in all their actions; so that they fulfill the end for which they were created, and I who trust in Him shall not be put to shame but may rest securely in the protection of His almighty love.
4. I believe that God created man after His own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and entered into a covenant of life with Him upon the sole condition of the obedience that was His due, so that it was by willfully sinning against God that man fell into the sin and misery in which I have been born.
5. I believe, that, being fallen in Adam, my first father, I am by nature a child of wrath, under the condemnation of God and corrupted in body and soul, prone to evil, and liable to eternal death; from which dreadful state I cannot be delivered save through the unmerited grace of God my Savior.
6. I believe that God has not left the world to perish in its sin, but out of the great love wherewith He has loved it, has from all eternity graciously chosen unto Himself a multitude which no man can number, to deliver them out of their sin and misery, and of them to build up again in the world His kingdom of righteousness; in which [kingdom] I may be assured I have my part, if I hold fast to Christ the Lord.
7. I believe that God has redeemed His people unto Himself through Jesus Christ our Lord; who, though He was and ever continues to be the eternal Son of God, was born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them that are under the law. I believe that He bore the penalty due to my sins in His own body on the tree, and fulfilled in His own person the obedience I owe to the righteousness of God, and now presents me to His Father as His purchased possession, to the praise of the glory of His grace forever; wherefore renouncing all merit of my own, I put all my trust only in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ my Redeemer.
8. I believe that Jesus Christ my Redeemer, who died for my offenses was raised again for my justification, and ascended into the heavens, where He sits at the right hand of the Father Almighty, continually making intercession for His people, and governing the whole world as

head over all things for His church: so that I need fear no evil and may surely know that nothing can snatch me out of His hands and nothing can separate me from His love.

9. I believe that the redemption wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ is effectually applied to all His people by the Holy Spirit, who works faith in me and thereby unites me to Christ, renews me in the whole man after the image of God, and enables me more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness; until, this gracious work having been completed in me, I shall be received into glory; in which great hope abiding, I must ever strive to perfect holiness in the fear of God.
10. I believe that God requires of me, under the gospel, first of all, out of a true sense of my sin and misery and apprehension of His mercy in Christ, I should turn with grief and hatred away from sin and receive and rest upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation; that, so being united to Him, I may receive pardon for my sins and be accepted as righteous in God's sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to me and received by faith alone: and thus only do I believe I may be received into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.
11. I believe having been pardoned and accepted for Christ's sake, it is further required of me that I walk in the Spirit whom He has purchased for me, and by whom love is shed abroad in my heart; fulfilling the obedience I owe to Christ my King; faithfully performing all the duties laid upon me by the holy law of God my heavenly Father; and ever reflecting in my life and conduct, the perfect example that has been set me by Christ Jesus my Leader, who died for me and granted to me His Holy Spirit so that I may do the good works which God has afore prepared that I should walk in them.
12. I believe that God has established His church in the world and endowed it with the ministry of the Word and the holy ordinances of Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and prayer; in order that through these means, the riches of His grace in the gospel may be made known to the world, and, by the blessing of Christ and the working of His Spirit in them that by faith receive them, the benefits of redemption may be communicated to His people; wherefore also it is required of me that I attend on these means of grace with diligence, preparation, and prayer, so that through them I may be instructed and strengthened in faith, and in holiness of life and in love; and that I use my best endeavors to carry this gospel and convey these means of grace to the whole world.
13. I believe that as Jesus Christ has once come in grace, so also is He to come a second time in glory, to judge the world in righteousness and assign to each His eternal award. I believe that if I die in Christ, my soul shall be at death made perfect in holiness and go home to the Lord; and when He shall return in His majesty, I shall be raised in glory and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity. Encouraged by this blessed hope, it is required of me willingly to take my part in suffering hardship here as a good soldier of Christ Jesus, being assured that if I die with Him, I shall also live with Him; if I endure, I shall also reign with Him.

And to Him, my Redeemer,
with the Father,
and the Holy Spirit,
Three Persons, one God,
be glory forever, world without end,
Amen and Amen.

-- *Selected Shorter Writings* 1:407-410