

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH

MODERN ENGLISH STUDY VERSION

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CHAPTER 1: THE HOLY SCRIPTURE

1. Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, to such an extent that men are without excuse, yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will which is necessary for salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at various times and in diverse ways, to reveal himself and to declare his will to his church; and afterward—for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and of the world—to commit this revelation wholly to writing. Therefore the Holy Scripture is most necessary, God's former ways of revealing his will to his people having ceased.

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

The Old Testament

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

Joshua

Judges

Ruth

1 Samuel

2 Samuel

1 Kings

2 Kings

1 Chronicles

2 Chronicles

Ezra

Nehemiah

Esther

Job

Psalms

Proverbs

Ecclesiastes

The Song of Songs

Isaiah

Jeremiah

Lamentations

Ezekiel

Daniel

Hosea

Joel

Amos

Obadiah

Jonah

Micah

Nahum

Habakkuk

Zephaniah

Haggai

Zechariah

Malachi

The New Testament

The Gospels according to

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

The Acts of the Apostles

The Epistles of Paul:

1 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians

1 Timothy

2 Timothy

Titus

Philemon

The Epistle to

Romans
1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians

the Hebrews
The Epistle of James
The first and second
Epistles of Peter
The first, second, and
third Epistles of John
The Epistle of Jude
The Revelation

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

3. The books commonly called the Apocrypha, because they are not divinely inspired, are not part of the canon of Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the church of God and are not to be approved, or made use of, in any manner different from other human writings.

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

5. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to a high and reverent esteem for the Holy Scripture. The heavenly character of its content, the efficacy of its doctrine, the majesty of its style, the agreement of all its parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full disclosure it makes of the only way of man's salvation, its many other incomparable excellencies, and its entire perfection, are arguments by which it gives abundant evidence that it is the Word of God. Nevertheless, our full persuasion and assurance of its infallible truth and divine authority is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

6. The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory and man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly stated in Scripture or by good and necessary inference may be deduced from Scripture, unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or by traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the inward illumination of the Spirit of God is necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word. We also acknowledge that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and the government of the church—circumstances common to human activities and societies—which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

7. Not all things in Scripture are equally plain in themselves or equally clear to all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly stated and explained in one place or another in Scripture, that not only the educated but also the uneducated may gain a sufficient understanding of them by a proper use of the ordinary means.

8. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old) and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time it was written was the language most generally known to the nations), being directly inspired by God and by his unique care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authoritative, so that in all controversies of religion the church is finally to appeal to them. But, because these original languages are

not understood by all the people of God, who have a right to, and a vital interest in, the Scriptures and are commanded to read and search them in the fear of God, therefore the Scriptures are to be translated into the common language of every nation to which they come; so that, the Word of God dwelling abundantly in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner and by perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures may have hope.

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

10. The supreme judge by whom all controversies of religion are to be settled and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and claims to private revelations are to be examined, can be only the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. With his decision we are to be satisfied.

CHAPTER 2: GOD AND THE HOLY TRINITY

1. There is only one living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection. He is a most pure spirit, invisible, with neither body, parts, nor passive properties. He is unchangeable, boundless, eternal, and incomprehensible. He is almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, and most absolute. He works all things according to the counsel of his own unchangeable and most righteous will, for his own glory. He is most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. He is also most just and terrifying in his judgments, hating all sin, and will by no means acquit the guilty.

2. God has all life, glory, goodness, and blessedness in and of himself. He alone is all-sufficient, in and to himself, not standing in need of any creatures which he has made, nor deriving any glory from them, but rather manifesting his own glory in, by, to, and on them. He alone is the fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things. He has absolute sovereignty over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatever he pleases. In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent of his creatures; so that nothing to him is contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.

3. In the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.

CHAPTER 3: GOD'S ETERNAL DECREE

1. God, from all eternity, did—by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will—freely and unchangeably ordain whatever comes to pass. Yet he ordered all things in such a way that he is not the author of sin, nor does he force his creatures to act against their wills; neither is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

2. Although God knows whatever may or can come to pass under all conceivable conditions, yet he has not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future or as that which would come to pass under such conditions.

3. By God's decree, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined to everlasting life, and others are foreordained to everlasting death.

4. These angels and men, thus predestined and foreordained, are individually and unchangeably designated, and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or decreased.

5. Those people who are predestined to life, God—before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and unchangeable purpose and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will—has chosen in Christ to everlasting glory. He chose them out of his free grace and love alone, not because he foresaw faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of these, or anything else in the creature, as conditions or causes moving him to do this; and all to the praise of his glorious grace.

6. As God has appointed the elect to glory, so he has—by the eternal and most free purpose of his will—foreordained all the means to that end. Therefore, his chosen ones, all of them being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ and are effectually called to faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season. They are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation. No others are redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, except the elect only.

7. The rest of mankind God was pleased—according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extends or withholds mercy as he pleases—for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.

8. The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, so that men, taking heed to the will of God revealed in his Word and yielding obedience to it, may—from the certainty of their effectual calling—be assured of their eternal election. Thus, this doctrine shall provide reason for praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and for humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all who sincerely obey the gospel.

CHAPTER 4: CREATION

1. It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create—or make out of nothing—the world and everything in it, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.

2. After God had made everything else, he created mankind. He made them male and female, with rational and immortal souls, endowed with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image. They had the law of God written in their hearts and had power to fulfill it. They were, however, under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change. In addition to this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As long as they obeyed this command, they were happy in their communion with God and had dominion over the creatures.

CHAPTER 5: PROVIDENCE

1. God—the great Creator of all things—upholds, directs, disposes, and governs all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least. He exercises this most wise and holy providence according to his infallible foreknowledge and the free and unchangeable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

2. Although—in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first Cause—all things come to pass unchangeably and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, he orders them to occur according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

3. In his ordinary providence, God makes use of means, yet he is free to work without, above, and against them as he pleases.

4. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God manifest themselves so completely in his providence that it extends even to the first fall and all other sins of angels and men—not by a bare permission, but by a permission which has joined with it a most wise and powerful limiting, and otherwise ordering and governing of them in a varied administration, for his own holy purposes. However, the sinfulness comes from the creatures alone and not from God, who, because he is most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

5. The most wise, righteous, and gracious God often leaves his own children, for a time, to manifold temptations and to the corruption of their own hearts. He does this to chastise them for their past sins, to humble them by making them aware of the hidden strength of the corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, and then to raise them to a closer, more constant dependence upon himself for their support, to make them more watchful against all future occasions for sinning, and to fulfill various other just and holy purposes.

6. As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as a righteous judge, blinds and hardens because of their past sins, God withholds his grace, by which their minds might have been enlightened and their hearts affected. He also sometimes takes away the gifts which they had, and exposes them to such things as their corrupt nature makes into occasions for sinning. Moreover, he gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan, by which they harden themselves even under the same means which God uses to soften others.

7. As, in general, the providence of God reaches to all creatures, so, in a very special way, it cares for his church and disposes all things for its good.

CHAPTER 6: THE FALL OF MAN, AND SIN AND ITS PUNISHMENT

1. Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. God was pleased to permit this sin of theirs, according to his wise and holy counsel, because his purpose was, through it, to glorify himself.

2. 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.

3. Since they were the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed to—and the same death in sin and corrupted nature were conveyed to—all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation.

4. From this original corruption, by which we are utterly disinclined, disabled, and antagonistic to all that is good and wholly inclined to all that is evil, all actual transgressions proceed.

5. During this life, this corruption of nature remains in those who are regenerated. Even though it is pardoned and put to death through Christ, yet both this corruption of nature and all its expressions are in fact really sin.

6. Every sin—both original and actual—is a transgression of the righteous law of God and contrary to it. Therefore, every sin in its own nature brings guilt upon the sinner, on account of which he is bound over to the holy wrath of God and the curse of the law. Consequently, he is subject to death, with all miseries—spiritual, temporal, and eternal.

CHAPTER 7: GOD'S COVENANT WITH MAN

1. The distance between God and the creature is so great that, even though rational creatures are responsible to obey him as their Creator, yet they could never experience any enjoyment of him as their blessing and reward except by way of some voluntary condescension on his part, which he has been pleased to express by way of covenant.

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

3. Since man, by his fall, made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was then pleased to make a second covenant, commonly called the covenant of grace. In it God freely offers life and salvation by Jesus Christ to sinners, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give his Holy Spirit to all those who are ordained to eternal life, to make them willing and able to believe.

4. This covenant of grace is sometimes presented in the Scriptures by the name of a will or testament, with reference to the death of Jesus Christ (the testator) and to the everlasting inheritance—with all that belongs to it—bequeathed in it.

5. In the time of the law, this covenant was administered differently than in the time of the gospel. Under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the passover lamb, and other types and ordinances given to the Jewish people, all of which foreshadowed Christ to come. These were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the work of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in their faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they received complete forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. This covenant administration is called the old testament.

6. Under the gospel, Christ (the reality) having been revealed, the ordinances by which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper. Although these are fewer in number and are administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, yet in them the covenant is set forth in greater fullness, clarity, and spiritual efficacy to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles, and is called the new testament. Therefore, there are not two covenants of grace differing in substance, but only one, under various administrations.

CHAPTER 8: CHRIST THE MEDIATOR

1. God was pleased, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the mediator between God and man. As the mediator, he is the prophet, priest, and king, the Head and Savior of the church, the heir of all things, and the judge of the world. God gave to him, from all eternity, a people to be his seed and to be by him, in time, redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

2. The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being truly and eternally God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time had come, take upon himself man's nature, with all its essential properties and common frailties, yet without sin. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary and of her substance. In this way, two whole natures, the divine and the human, perfect and distinct, were inseparably joined together in one person without being changed, mixed, or confused. This person is truly God and truly man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

3. In his human nature, united to the divine nature, the Lord Jesus was set apart and anointed with the Holy Spirit beyond measure, having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In him the Father was pleased to have all fullness dwell, so that—being holy, blameless, and undefiled, full of grace and truth—he might be completely equipped to fulfill the office of a mediator and guarantor. He did not take this office to himself but was called to it by his Father, who put all power and judgment into his hand and commanded him to execute it.

4. This office the Lord Jesus most willingly undertook, and in order to discharge its obligations he was born under the law and perfectly fulfilled it. He endured most grievous torments in his soul and most painful sufferings in his body; he was crucified, died, and was buried; he remained under the power of death, yet his body did not undergo decay; and he arose from the dead on the third day with the same body in which he had suffered. In this body he ascended into heaven, where he sits at the right hand of his Father, making intercession, and he shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the age.

5. The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself—which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up to God—has fully satisfied the justice of his Father. He purchased not only reconciliation but also an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all those whom the Father has given to him.

6. Although the work of redemption was not actually accomplished by Christ until after his incarnation, yet the power, efficacy, and benefits of it were applied to the elect in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices by which Christ was revealed and signified to be the seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head, and to be the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

7. In the work of mediation, Christ acts according to both natures. Each nature does what is proper to itself; yet, by reason of the unity of his person, that which is proper to one nature is in Scripture sometimes attributed to the person designated by the other nature.

8. To all those for whom Christ purchased redemption, he certainly and effectually applies and communicates it. He makes intercession for them and reveals to them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation. He effectually persuades them by his Spirit to believe and obey, and governs their hearts by his Word and Spirit. He overcomes all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom in such a manner, and by such ways, as are most agreeable to his wonderful and unsearchable administration.

CHAPTER 9: FREE WILL

1. God has endowed the will of man with such natural liberty that it is neither forced nor—by any absolute necessity of nature—determined to good or evil.
2. Man, in his state of innocence, had freedom and ability to will and to do what was good and well-pleasing to God, and yet not unalterably, so that he might fall from it.
3. Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has completely lost all ability to choose any spiritual good that accompanies salvation. Therefore, an unregenerate man, because he is opposed to that good and is dead in sin, is unable by his own strength to convert himself or to prepare himself to be converted.
4. When God converts a sinner and brings him into the state of grace, he frees him from his natural bondage to sin, and by his grace alone he enables him freely to will and to do what is spiritually good. Yet, because of his remaining corruption, he does not perfectly nor only will what is good, but also wills what is evil.
5. The will of man is made perfectly and unchangeably free to do good alone, only in the state of glory.

CHAPTER 10: EFFECTUAL CALLING

1. All those—and only those—whom God has predestined to life, he is pleased to call effectually in his appointed and accepted time, by his Word and Spirit. He calls them from the state of sin and death—in which they are by nature—to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ. In this calling, God enlightens their minds spiritually and savingly, so that they understand the things of God. He takes away their hearts of stone and gives them hearts of flesh, renews their wills, and by his almighty power turns them to what is good and effectually draws them to Jesus Christ. Yet he does this in such a way that they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.
2. This effectual call is from God's free and special grace alone, and not from anything at all that God foresees in man, who is entirely passive in it, until—being made alive and renewed by the Holy Spirit—he is enabled to answer the call and embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.
3. Elect infants who die in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when, where, and how he pleases. So also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.
4. Although other persons who are not elected may be called by the ministry of the Word and may experience some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never really come to Christ and therefore cannot be saved. Much less can men not professing to be Christians be saved in any other way, no matter how carefully they may order their lives by the light of nature and by the laws of whatever religion they profess. To assert and maintain that they may be saved in some other way is very pernicious and is to be detested.

CHAPTER 11: JUSTIFICATION

1. Those whom God effectually calls he also freely justifies, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins and by accounting and accepting them as righteous. It is not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone that they are justified. It is not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing,

or any other act of Christian obedience to them, as their righteousness, but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ to them who receive and rest on him and his righteousness by faith. Men do not have this faith of themselves; it is the gift of God.

2. Faith—receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness—is the only instrument of justification; yet it is not the only grace in the person justified, but is always accompanied by all other saving graces. Justifying faith is not dead, but works by love.

3. Christ, by his obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. He made a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, because he was freely given by the Father for them, and because his obedience and satisfaction were freely accepted in their stead, and not for anything in them, their justification is only of free grace. It was God's purpose in the justification of sinners to glorify both his exact justice and his rich grace.

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

5. God continues to forgive the sins of those who are justified. Although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may by their sins fall under God's fatherly displeasure and not have the light of his countenance restored to them until they humble themselves, confess their sin, plead for pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

6. The justification of believers under the old testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the new testament.

CHAPTER 12: ADOPTION

1. All those who are justified God graciously guarantees to make partakers of the grace of adoption in and for his only Son, Jesus Christ. By this act they are taken into the number of God's children and enjoy the liberties and privileges of that relationship; they are given his name; they receive the Spirit of adoption; they have access to the throne of grace with boldness; and they are enabled to cry, "Abba, Father." Like a father, God has compassion on, protects, provides for, and chastens them; yet, they will never be cast off, but are sealed to the day of redemption, and will inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation.

CHAPTER 13: SANCTIFICATION

1. Those who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified—truly and personally—through the power of Christ's death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them. The dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, its various lusts are more and more weakened and put to death, and those called and regenerated are more and more enlivened and strengthened in all saving graces, leading to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

2. This sanctification, although imperfect in this life, is effected in every part of man's nature. Some remnants of corruption still persist in every part, and so there arises a continual and irreconcilable war—the flesh warring against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

3. Although in this war the remaining corruption may strongly prevail for a time, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate nature overcomes, and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

CHAPTER 14: SAVING FAITH

1. The grace of faith, by which the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily produced through the ministry of the Word. This faith is increased and strengthened by the same means, and also by the administration of the sacraments and prayer.

2. By this faith, a Christian believes to be true whatever is revealed in the Word, because of the authority of God himself speaking in it. He also responds differently to what each particular passage contains—obeying the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

3. This faith varies in degrees. It may be weak or strong. It may often, and in many ways, be assailed and weakened, but it gains the victory. It matures in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the author and the perfecter of our faith.

CHAPTER 15: REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE

1. Repentance unto life is a gospel grace, the doctrine of which is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, just as is the doctrine of faith in Christ.

2. By it a sinner—seeing and sensing not only the danger but also the filthiness and hatefulfulness of his sins, because they are contrary to God's holy nature and his righteous law—turns from all his sins to God in the realization that God promises mercy in Christ to those who repent, and so grieves for and hates his sins that he determines and endeavors to walk with God in all the ways that he commands.

3. Although repentance is not to be relied on as any payment of the penalty for sin, or any cause of the pardon of sin (which is God's act of free grace in Christ); yet repentance is so necessary for all sinners, that no one may expect pardon without it.

4. No sin is so small that it does not deserve damnation. Nor is any sin so great that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent.

5. No one should be satisfied with a general repentance; rather, it is everyone's duty to endeavor to repent of each particular sin, particularly.

6. It is the duty of each one to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for pardon (and whoever confesses his sins, prays for forgiveness, and forsakes those sins shall find mercy). Similarly, anyone who has scandalized a brother, or the church of Christ, ought to be willing by private or public confession, and sorrow for his sin, to declare his repentance to those that are offended, who are then to be reconciled to him and receive him in love.

CHAPTER 16: GOOD WORKS

1. Good works are only such as God has commanded in his holy Word, and not such as, without the warrant of Scripture, are devised by men out of blind zeal or any pretense of good intention.

2. These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and living faith. By them believers show their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, build up their fellow believers, adorn the profession of the gospel, shut the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God. They are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, so that, bearing fruit unto holiness, they may attain the outcome, which is eternal life.

3. Their ability to do good works is not at all from themselves, but entirely from the Spirit of Christ. And—in order that they may be enabled to do these things—besides the graces believers have already received, there must also be an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit working in them both to will and to do God's good pleasure. This truth, however, should not cause believers to become negligent, as though they were not bound to perform any duty without a special moving of the Spirit; rather, they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them.

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

5. We cannot, by our best works, merit forgiveness for sin or eternal life at the hand of God. This is true because of the great disproportion between our best works and the glory to come, and because of the infinite distance between us and God. We cannot benefit God by our best works nor render satisfaction for the debt of our former sins, for when we have done all we can, we have done merely our duty and are unprofitable servants. This is because, insofar as they are good, these deeds proceed from the Spirit; and, insofar as they are done by us, they are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment.

6. Nevertheless, because believers are accepted through Christ, their good works are also accepted in him. They are accepted not because believers are in this life unblamable and unreprouvable in God's sight, but because he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, even though it is accompanied by many weaknesses and imperfections.

7. Although the works done by unregenerate men may in themselves be things which God commands and things which are useful to themselves and others, yet—because they do not come from a heart purified by faith, are not done in a right manner according to the Word, and are not done for the right purpose, which is to glorify God—they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God or make one suitable to receive his grace. Yet, neglecting them is even more sinful and displeasing to God.

CHAPTER 17: THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

1. Those whom God has accepted in his Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere in it to the end and be eternally saved.
2. The perseverance of the saints does not depend upon their own free will, but on the unchangeableness of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; on the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; on the continuing presence of the Spirit and the seed of God within them; and on the nature of the covenant of grace. These are grounds of the certainty and infallibility of their perseverance.
3. Nevertheless, they may—through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the pervasiveness of the corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means by which they are to be preserved—fall into grievous sins and for a time continue in them. In so doing they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit; some measure of God's graces and comforts is taken from them; they have their hearts hardened and their consciences wounded; they harm others and give them occasion to sin, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.

CHAPTER 18: THE ASSURANCE OF GRACE AND SALVATION

1. Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and fleshly presumptions that they are in God's favor and in a state of salvation, this hope of theirs will perish. Nevertheless, those who truly believe on the Lord Jesus, love him sincerely, and strive to live in all good conscience before him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, a hope that shall never make them ashamed.
2. This certainty is not merely a conjectural and probable persuasion grounded on a fallible hope, but an infallible assurance of faith, founded on the divine truth of the promises of salvation, on the evidence in our hearts that the promised graces are present, and on the fact that the Spirit of adoption witnesses with our spirits that we are God's children. The Holy Spirit, by whom we are sealed for the day of redemption, is the pledge of our inheritance.
3. This infallible assurance does not so belong to the essence of faith but that a true believer may wait long and contend with many difficulties before he partakes of it. Yet, because he is enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given to him by God, he may—without any extraordinary revelation—attain this assurance by a proper use of the ordinary means. It is therefore the duty of everyone to be very diligent in making certain that God has called and chosen him. By such diligence his heart may grow in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties which obedience to God requires—the proper fruits of this assurance. Thus it is far from inclining men to carelessness.
4. True believers may have the assurance of their salvation shaken, diminished, or temporarily lost in various ways: as by negligence in preserving it, by falling into some special sin which wounds the conscience and grieves the Spirit, by some sudden or violent temptation, or by God's withdrawing the light of his countenance and allowing even those who reverence him to walk in darkness and have no light. Yet, true believers are never completely deprived of that seed of God and life of faith, that love for Christ and fellow believers, that sincerity of heart and conscience concerning duty, out of which—by the operation of the Spirit—this assurance may in due time be revived; and by which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair.

CHAPTER 19: THE LAW OF GOD

1. God gave Adam a law, in the form of a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his descendants to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience. He promised life if Adam kept the law and threatened death if he broke it. Moreover, he endowed Adam with power and ability to keep that law.
2. This law, after Adam fell, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness and, as such, was given by God upon Mount Sinai in ten commandments written on two stone tablets. The first four commandments contain our duty to God, the other six our duty to man.
3. In addition to this law, commonly called the moral law, God was pleased to give the people of Israel—as the church under age—ceremonial laws, which contained several typological ordinances. These ordinances consisted partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits, and partly of various instructions of moral duties. All these ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the new testament.
4. To the people of Israel, as a civil entity, he also gave various judicial laws which expired at the time their State expired. Therefore, these judicial laws place no obligation upon anyone now, except as they embody general principles of justice.
5. The moral law binds all people at all times to obedience, both those who are justified and those who are not. The obligation to obey the moral law is not only because of its content, but also because of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. In the gospel, Christ in no way dissolves this obligation, but greatly strengthens it.
6. Although true believers are not under the law as a covenant of works by which they are justified or condemned, nevertheless the law is of great use to them as well as to others. By informing them—as a rule of life—both of the will of God and of their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly. It also reveals to them the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives. Therefore, when they examine themselves in the light of the law, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred of their sin, together with a clearer view of their need of Christ and the perfection of his obedience. The law is also useful to the regenerate because, by forbidding sin, it restrains their corruptions. By its threats it shows them what their sins deserve, and, although they are free from the curse threatened in the law, it shows the afflictions that they may expect because of them in this life. The promises of the law likewise show to the regenerate God's approval of obedience and the blessings they may expect as they obey the law, although these blessings are not due to them by the law as a covenant of works. Therefore, the fact that a man does good rather than evil because the law encourages good and discourages evil is no evidence that the man is under the law rather than under grace.
7. These uses of the law do not conflict with the grace of the gospel, but are in complete harmony with it; for it is the Spirit of Christ who subdues and enables the will of man to do freely and cheerfully those things which the will of God, revealed in the law, requires.

CHAPTER 20: CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AND LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

1. The liberty which Christ purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, from the condemning wrath of God, and from the curse of the moral law. Furthermore, it consists in their being delivered from this present evil age, from bondage to Satan and the dominion of sin, from the evil of afflictions,

from the sting of death, from the victory of the grave, and from everlasting damnation. It consists also in their free access to God and in yielding obedience to him, not out of slavish fear, but out of a childlike love and willing mind. All of these things were common to believers also under the law. Under the new testament, however, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged: they are free from the yoke of the ceremonial law to which the Jewish church was subjected; they have greater boldness of access to the throne of grace; and they experience in greater measure the gifts of God's free Spirit than believers under the law ordinarily partook of.

2. God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are—in anything—contrary to his Word, or which—in matters of faith or worship—are in addition to it. Therefore, anyone who believes such doctrines or obeys such commands out of conscience betrays true liberty of conscience. The requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, destroys both liberty of conscience and reason.

3. Those who, on the pretext of Christian liberty, practice any sin or cherish any evil desire destroy the purpose of Christian liberty. This purpose is that, having been delivered out of the hand of our enemies, we may serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

4. Because the powers which God has ordained and the liberty which Christ has purchased are not intended by God to destroy each other, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, those who, in the name of Christian liberty, oppose any lawful power or any lawful exercise of it, whether civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. Those who declare opinions or maintain practices contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning faith, worship, or manner of life), or the power of godliness; or who are guilty of such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive of the external peace and order which Christ has established in the church, may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against, by the censures of the church.

CHAPTER 21: RELIGIOUS WORSHIP AND THE SABBATH DAY

1. The light of nature shows that there is a God who has lordship and sovereignty over all, that he is good and does good to all, and that he ought therefore to be feared, loved, praised, prayed to, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God has been instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations or devisings of men, or the suggestions of Satan, or under any visible representation, or any other way not commanded in Holy Scripture.

2. Religious worship is to be given to God alone—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is not to be given to angels, saints, or any other creature. And since the Fall, worship is not to be given except through a mediator, nor is it to be given through any mediator other than Christ.

3. Prayer with thanksgiving is a special part of religious worship and is required by God of all men. In order that prayer may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of his Spirit, and according to his will. Prayer is to be offered with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance. If vocal, it must be offered in a language that is understood.

4. Prayer is to be made for things that are lawful and for all kinds of men now alive or who will live at a later time. But it is wrong to pray for the dead or for those known to have committed the sin unto death.

5. The various elements of the ordinary religious worship of God are the reading of the Scriptures with reverence; the sound preaching and conscientious hearing of the Word in obedience to God, with understanding, faith, and reverence; the singing of psalms with grace in the heart; and the proper administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ. Also, on special occasions and at appropriate times, there are other elements of worship, namely, religious oaths, vows, solemn fasts, and thanksgivings. These are to be used in a holy and devout manner.

6. Under the gospel, neither prayer nor any other part of religious worship is now limited to—or made more acceptable by—any particular place where it is performed or toward which it is directed. On the contrary, God is to be worshiped everywhere in spirit and truth. He should be worshiped daily in families, and privately by individuals, and with greater solemnity in public worship services. Such worship services are not to be carelessly or willfully neglected or forsaken when God by his Word or his providence calls people to them.

7. As it is the law of nature that, in general, a proper proportion of time ought to be set apart for the worship of God, so God in his Word—by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages—has specifically appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy to him. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, the appointed Sabbath was the last day of the week. Beginning with the resurrection of Christ, the Sabbath was changed to the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord's day, a day to be continued until the end of the age as the Christian Sabbath.

8. This Sabbath is then kept holy to the Lord when men, after due preparation of their hearts and arranging of their common affairs beforehand, not only observe a holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts concerning their everyday occupations and recreations, but also devote the whole time to the public and private exercises of God's worship and to the duties of necessity and mercy.

CHAPTER 23: THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES

1. God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has ordained civil authorities to be, under him, over the people for his own glory and the public good. For this purpose he has armed them with the power of the sword for the defense and encouragement of those who are good, and for the punishment of those who do evil.

2. It is lawful for Christians to hold public office when called to it. In such office they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth. For that purpose they may now, under the new testament, lawfully wage war upon just and necessary occasion.

3. Civil authorities may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, nor should they interfere in any way in matters of faith. Yet, as caring fathers, it is the duty of civil authorities to protect the church of our common Lord without giving preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest—doing so in such a way that all church authorities shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of carrying out every part of their sacred functions without violence or danger. As Jesus Christ has appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, prevent, or hinder their proper exercise among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief. It is the duty of civil authorities to protect the person and good name of all their people in such an effective manner that no person be allowed, either in the name of religion or of unbelief, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatever. They should also take care that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without interference or disturbance.

4. It is the duty of people to pray for those in authority, to honor them, to pay them taxes or other revenue, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority for the sake of conscience. Neither unbelief nor difference in religion makes void the just and legal authority of officeholders nor frees the people—church authorities included—from their due obedience to them. Much less does the Pope have any power or jurisdiction over civil authorities in their domains or over any of their people, nor can he deprive them of their domains or lives if he shall judge them to be heretics or on any other pretense whatever.

CHAPTER 24: MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

1. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman. It is not lawful for any man to have more than one wife, or for any woman to have more than one husband, at the same time.

2. Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with legitimate offspring and of the church with godly children, and for the prevention of sexual immorality.

3. It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry who are able to give their intelligent consent. Yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord. Therefore, those who profess the true reformed religion should not marry unbelievers, Roman Catholics, or other idolaters; nor should Christians be unequally yoked by marrying those who are notoriously wicked in their way of living or hold to damnable heresies.

4. Marriage ought not to take place between persons who are within the degrees of close relationship by blood or by marriage forbidden by the Word. Such incestuous marriages can never be made lawful—so that such persons may live together as man and wife—by any law of man or by the consent of the parties involved.

5. Adultery or fornication committed after engagement, if detected before marriage, gives valid reason to the innocent party to break the engagement. In the case of adultery after marriage it is lawful for the innocent party to seek a divorce and after the divorce to remarry just as if the offending party were dead.

6. Although the corruption of mankind is such that people are apt to seek arguments to justify unwarranted separation of those whom God has joined together in marriage, nothing but adultery or such willful desertion as cannot be remedied by the church or the civil authorities is sufficient cause to dissolve the bond of marriage. In such cases a public and orderly procedure is to be observed, and the persons concerned are not to be left to their own wills and discretion in their own case.

CHAPTER 25: THE CHURCH

1. The catholic (that is, universal) church, which is invisible, consists of all the elect who have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ its head. This church is his bride, his body, and the fullness of him who fills all in all.

2. The visible church, which is also catholic (that is, universal) under the gospel (that is, not confined to one nation, as it was before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion, together with their children. It is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

3. To this universal, visible church Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the age. For this purpose he makes these means effectual by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise.
4. This universal church has been sometimes more and sometimes less visible. Particular churches, which are members of this universal church, are more or less pure to the extent to which the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, the ordinances are administered, and public worship is performed more or less purely in them.
5. The purest churches on earth are subject to both mixture and error, and some have so degenerated that they have become no churches of Christ at all, but rather synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall always be a church on earth to worship God according to his will.
6. There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome be its head in any sense.

CHAPTER 26: THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

1. All saints—who are united to Jesus Christ their head by his Spirit and by faith—have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory. And, being united to one another in love, they participate in each other's gifts and graces and are obligated to perform those public and private duties which lead to their mutual good, both inwardly and outwardly.
2. It is the duty of professing saints to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God and in performing such other spiritual services as help them to edify one another. It is their duty also to come to the aid of one another in material things according to their various abilities and necessities. As God affords opportunity, this communion is to be extended to all those in every place who call on the name of the Lord Jesus.
3. The communion which the saints have with Christ does not make them in any way partakers of the substance of his Godhead, or in any respect equal with Christ. To affirm either is irreverent and blasphemous. Nor does their fellowship with one another as saints take away or infringe upon any person's title to, or right to, his own goods and possessions.

CHAPTER 27: THE SACRAMENTS

1. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace. They were directly instituted by God to represent Christ and his benefits and to confirm our relationship to him. They are also intended to make a visible distinction between those who belong to the church and the rest of the world, and solemnly to bind Christians to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.
2. In every sacrament there is a spiritual relationship, or sacramental union, between the visible sign and the reality signified by it, and so it happens that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.
3. The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them. Neither does the efficacy of a sacrament depend on the piety or intention of him who administers it, but rather on

the work of the Spirit and on the word of institution, which contains (together with a precept authorizing its use) a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.

4. There are only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the gospel: baptism and the Lord's supper. Neither sacrament may be administered by any person except a minister of the Word, lawfully ordained.

5. With regard to the spiritual realities signified and exhibited, the sacraments of the old testament were essentially the same as those of the new testament.

CHAPTER 28: BAPTISM

1. Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, by which the person baptized is solemnly admitted into the visible church. Baptism is also for him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of forgiveness of sins, and of his surrender to God through Jesus Christ to walk in newness of life. By Christ's own appointment, this sacrament is to be continued in his church until the end of the age.

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

3. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary. Baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water on the person.

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

5. Although it is a great sin to despise or neglect this ordinance, nevertheless, grace and salvation are not so inseparably connected with it that a person cannot be regenerated or saved without it. Neither is it true that all who are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.

6. The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time when it is administered. Nevertheless, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Spirit to all (whether adults or infants) to whom that grace belongs, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time.

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

CHAPTER 29: THE LORD'S SUPPER

1. Our Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of his body and blood, called the Lord's supper. It is to be observed in his church until the end of the age for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death, for the sealing of all the benefits of that death unto true believers, for their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, for their increased commitment to perform all the duties which they owe to him, and for a bond and pledge of their fellowship with him and with each other as members of his mystical body.

2. In this sacrament Christ is not offered up to his Father, nor is any real sacrifice made at all for the forgiveness of the sins of the living or the dead. Instead, this sacrament is only a commemoration of that one sacrifice by which Christ offered himself on the cross once for all. The sacrament is a spiritual offering of the highest praise to God for that sacrifice. So, the Roman Catholic sacrifice of the mass (as they call it) is a detestable insult to Christ's one and only sacrifice, which is the only propitiation for all the sins of his elect.

3. In this ordinance the Lord Jesus has appointed his ministers to declare his word of institution to the people; to pray and consecrate the elements of bread and wine, and so set them apart from a common to a holy use; and to take and break the bread, take the cup, and give both to the communicants, and to partake with the congregation. But they are not to give the elements to any who are not then present in the congregation.

4. Private masses—or receiving this sacrament from a priest or anyone else, alone—are contrary to the nature of the sacrament and to the institution of Christ. For the same reasons it is forbidden to deny the cup to the members of the congregation, to worship the elements, to lift them up or carry them around for adoration, or to reserve them for any supposedly religious use.

5. The visible elements in this sacrament, when they are properly set apart for the uses ordained by Christ, have such a relationship to Christ crucified that they are sometimes called—truly, but only sacramentally—by the name of the things they represent, namely, the body and blood of Christ. This is true even though in substance and nature they still remain truly and only bread and wine, as they were before.

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

7. Worthy receivers of this sacrament, outwardly partaking of its visible elements, also inwardly by faith—really and indeed, yet not physically but spiritually—receive and feed upon Christ crucified and all the benefits of his death. The body and blood of Christ are not physically in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet in this ordinance the body and blood of Christ are present to the faith of believers in as real a spiritual sense as the bread and wine are to their physical senses.

8. Even if ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament, yet they do not receive that which is signified by the elements. Rather, by their unworthy coming to the sacrament, they are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation. Therefore, all ignorant and ungodly people, because they are unfit to enjoy fellowship with the Lord, are also unworthy to participate in the Lord's supper. As long as they remain unworthy, they cannot be admitted to the Lord's table or partake of the holy mysteries without great sin against Christ.

CHAPTER 30: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

1. The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his church, has appointed a government in it, to be administered by church officers, distinct from the civil authorities.

2. To these church officers he has committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven. For this reason they have authority to retain and to remit sins, to shut the kingdom against the unrepentant both by the Word and by

censures, and to open it to repentant sinners by the ministry of the gospel and by releasing from censures, as the occasion requires.

3. Church discipline is necessary for reclaiming and gaining fellow Christians who are guilty of offenses, for deterring others from committing similar offenses, for purging the leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honor of Christ and the holy profession of the gospel, and for averting the wrath of God which might justly fall on the church if it should allow his covenant and its seals to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.

4. For the better attaining of these purposes, the officers of the church are to proceed by admonition, by suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a time, and by excommunication from the church, according to the nature of the offense and the degree of the person's guilt.

CHAPTER 31: SYNODS AND COUNCILS

1. For the better governing and further edifying of the church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils. Overseers and other rulers of particular churches, by virtue of their office and the power which Christ has given them for edification and not for destruction, have authority to appoint such assemblies and to convene together in them as often as they judge it expedient for the good of the church.

2. Synods and councils have authority ministerially to decide controversies of faith and cases of conscience, to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God and the government of his church, and to receive and authoritatively act on complaints of maladministration in the church. If the decrees and decisions of these synods and councils are in accordance with the Word of God, they are to be received with reverence and submission, not only because of their agreement with the Word, but also because of the authority by which they are decided, as being an ordinance that God has appointed in his Word.

3. Since apostolic times, all synods and councils, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred. Therefore, they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but are to be used as a help in regard to both.

4. Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but what pertains to the church. They are not to intermeddle in civil affairs which concern the state, except by way of humble petition in extraordinary cases, or by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they are required to do so by the civil authority.

CHAPTER 32: THE STATE OF MEN AFTER DEATH, AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

1. After death, the bodies of men decay and return to dust, but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal existence, return immediately to God, who gave them. The souls of the righteous are then made perfect in holiness and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory as they wait for the full redemption of their bodies. The souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness as they are kept for the judgment of the great day. Scripture recognizes no other place except these two for the souls which have been separated from their bodies.

2. At the last day those who are alive shall not die but shall be changed. All the dead shall be raised up with their selfsame bodies, and no other (although with different qualities), which shall be united again with their souls forever.
3. By the power of Christ the bodies of the unjust shall be raised to dishonor. The bodies of the just shall be raised to honor by his Spirit and brought into conformity with Christ's own glorious body.

CHAPTER 33: THE LAST JUDGMENT

1. God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment has been given by the Father. In that day not only shall the apostate angels be judged, but also shall all people who have ever lived on earth appear before the judgment seat of Christ in order to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds, and to receive judgment according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.
2. God's purpose in appointing this day is to manifest the glory of his mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect, and the glory of his justice in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. On that day the righteous shall go into everlasting life and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord; but the wicked, who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.
3. As Christ would have us to be absolutely convinced that there will be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin and to give greater consolation to the godly in their adversity, so will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, may always be watchful—because they do not know at what hour the Lord will come—and may always be prepared to say, “Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly. Amen.”