

WHY THIS STUDY?

What we believe is very important. Our beliefs control our actions. This is just as true in spiritual matters as in the affairs of this world. We believe the sun will rise at a certain time and make our plans accordingly. If we believe in a God Who knows us and sees us, One Who loves us enough to send His Son to die for us, surely we shall want to do His will.

It is important that we be definite in our beliefs. We should know what we believe, especially in some vital matters. Uncertainty of belief will result in inconsistency of life. Certainty of Christian belief, combined with faith, love and obedience will help us to grow into the likeness of Christ and in the ability to serve Him in an acceptable way.

It is recognized that many of our members are uncertain as to what are the necessary Christian beliefs and the reasons for them. One reason is a failure of our leaders to sufficiently teach, through the pulpit, through the Sabbath School, through the age groups, through the home, and through personal effort, the important doctrines of our Christian religion. We have been afraid of the word **doctrine**. Another reason is that there have not been available to our lay members books in simple and non-technical language which they might study for themselves. This study is an effort to supply that need.

All Christians do not agree in every detail in their beliefs. That is not surprising, for they do not agree in other matters. God has made each person an individual personality, and environment and teaching have had a great influence upon them and their development. However, in the most important things there is a general agreement. Some of the

larger groups, emphasize different things. We are a part of the large group who are known as Presbyterian in their Church government and Calvinists in their doctrine. There are other large groups, not Presbyterian, who are also Calvinists or Calvinistic in their teachings and beliefs.

In this brief study we shall not attempt to present all the teachings which we believe are true. We shall choose a few which we think are more important for us to consider. Nor will this be an exhaustive study of any one of the matters which will be considered. But we do hope that it will lead to further study of these and other things which are taught in our Standards.

The basis of the studies will be the Bible and the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms as accepted by the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. We believe that these Standards are based on the Word of God, and the effort will be to write from that viewpoint. We acknowledge help from other writers on the Presbyterian Standards. Only a few Scripture references will be given. Check the references in the Standards for others.

These studies, it is clearly understood, have no official sanction of the Church, though they have been prepared at the order of the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. It is hoped that they will be placed in the hands of the members, young and old, and that they will be diligently studied. Pastors may use them as a basis for a Communicants' Class of young people or adults.

In order to make them more profitable for study, some questions are placed at the end of each chapter. The questions have been purposely kept simple and few; simple, to make the study more useful to Christians young in the faith; few, to encourage leaders to add questions appropriate to individual groups.

Our earnest prayer is that our people may grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord.

E. GETTYS,

WILLIAM C. ALEXANDER.

CHAPTER I

THE BIBLE, THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

Read: 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Psalms 19:7-11.

Confession of Faith: Chapter I.

The Larger Catechism: Questions 3-5.

The Shorter Catechism: Questions 2-3.

In seeking to know what Christians should believe, there must be a final authority to which we can appeal. That authority must be trustworthy, else we can never be quite sure what God wants us to believe, and what is the truth. We believe that the Bible is the Word of God. In its original form as God gave it, it was without error. We now have no original manuscripts, and the copies and translations which we now have, though admittedly not perfect, are essentially in accord with the original, having been kept through the ages by God, and are the infallible rule for faith and practice.

God is the Author of the Scriptures, though the actual writing was done by chosen men. God's Spirit so influenced them that what they spoke and wrote is without error, and their message is God's message. They were never perfect men, but under the influence of the Holy Spirit they were infallible as teachers in that which has been preserved. They expressed their own convictions and God's will.

The Scriptures are authoritative because they are the Word of God and because they are true. The Scriptures themselves make these claims. The Holy Spirit testifies to them, and the heart of man acknowledges them. The internal evidence is corroborated by external evidence, the results which are manifest from their acceptance. The unity of the

Scriptures is proof that they have one Author and the facts indicate that the Author can only be God. There are sixty-six books in the Bible, written by some forty writers, over a period of about fifteen hundred years; yet there is one purpose and theme throughout.

This may be illustrated in this way. A person comes to an organ and plays a chord, or a longer selection of music, which is recorded. At another time, another person comes and does the same. Thus over a long period of time a large number of musicians play a longer or shorter selection of music. All is recorded. When all of it together is played it is found to be a beautiful overture. Can any one doubt that they played appointed parts and that the author was one? Thus the unity of the Bible points to the fact that God, Who alone could have lived over that long period of time, is the Author of the Scriptures.

There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. To the whole Scripture, nothing is to be added, and nothing is to be taken from it. The written revelation of God is now closed. God still makes revelations through nature, through His providences, and through the Holy Spirit, all of which should be verified through reference to the Holy Scriptures. Nothing from God will contradict Scripture teaching. The books called the Apocrypha are not a part of the Word of God, but are merely human compositions. Originally the Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language and the New Testament was in Greek. The translations are made by men for the benefit of peoples of all languages, who do not understand the original languages.

All statements of the Bible are not equally clear.

Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture. Various passages should be compared in order to learn the true and full sense of any Scripture. The Holy Spirit, speaking through the Scriptures, is the Supreme Judge by Whom all differences are to be determined in religious matters.

The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man. In the following chapters we shall consider some of these things further.

Questions

1. What is the final authority for a Christian's belief?

2. Who is the real Author of the Old and New Testaments?

3. How many books are in the Bible? How many human writers did God use?

4. In what languages was the Bible originally written?

5. What books, not part of the Bible, are sometimes bound within the same covers?

6. How is Scripture to be interpreted? Who is our Helper and Guide in this?

7. “What do the Scriptures principally teach?” (Give answer both in your own words and in the Catechism answer.)

Conversational Responses

Chapter One

We Reformed Christians like to think of ourselves as “people of the Book.” Indeed, since that watershed 16th century of the Protestant Reformation, we have maintained that the Church has been reformed and ever needs to be reformed *according to the Word of God!* The words of Revs. Gettys and Alexander which open chapter one, are truly foundational and they bear repeating: “In seeking to know what Christians should believe, there must be a final authority to which we can appeal.”

In the same year that our study book first appeared (1957), another champion of the faith, E.J. Young, wrote: “If the Bible is not infallible, then we can be sure of nothing. The other doctrines of Christianity stand or fall with an infallible Bible. Attempts to evade this conclusion can only lead to self-deception.” Study groups should certainly discuss, ponder and “unpack” the significance of these statements.

As we enter into the twenty-first century, the Church and culture at large face a crisis of authority. Theological liberalism has engendered misplaced hopes in societal improvement and technological advances which have crashed into disillusionment. We have entered what most social critics call “post-modernism.” This prevailing philosophy brings both challenges and opportunities to the today’s Christian.

Our postmodern neighbors seem to know that technology in itself has left us morally bankrupt. Yet the idea of human autonomy (everyone is a law unto himself) has also been so ingrained that it is commonly maintained that there are no absolute truths,

no standard of right and wrong *from above*. The grand opportunity before the Church today results from the fact that, having lost hope in technology, many today sense that “there must be more to life than meets the eye.”

We hold out to this world the Lord Jesus Christ revealed in the infallible Word of God the Bible. By His Holy Spirit God has spoken through human authors (2 Timothy 3:16) to produce the Holy Scriptures. And by His all encompassing providence through the centuries He has preserved His Word for us. When the Spirit comes with that Word, we are illuminated to the truth of the Bible which is an absolute standard amid the philosophical and moral chaos of our day.

John Calvin repeatedly stressed that the Scriptures are “self-authenticating.” Our text makes the same claim in the third paragraph. Though rational evidences of the Bible’s reliability are useful in a secondary sense, it is only by the Spirit’s work with the Word that we are born again and come to submit to the authority of God’s Word over every area of life (see Westminster Confession of Faith I,5).

We live in a disorderly age. Our confessional standards rightly point us to the Scriptures as the only unchanging and infallible standard amid the chaotic waves. To the extent that we and our families and our Churches ignore God’s Word, we do so to our great peril.

How committed are we Associate Reformed Presbyterians to God’s Word? In what ways is our commitment demonstrated?

“We yield to and agree to the authority of the Holy Scripture which can neither be deceived nor deceive.” —Augustine

“But I reply: the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For God alone is a fit witness of Himself in His Word.” —John Calvin

CHAPTER II

GOD—FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

Read: Genesis 1:1; Exodus 3:14; Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalms 90:2; Isaiah 6:3; Jeremiah 10:10; Malachi 3:6; Matthew 28:19; John 4:24; John 5:26; 1 Corinthians 8:4,6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 John 4:8, 16.

Confession of Faith: Chapter II

Larger Catechism: Questions 7-11.

Shorter Catechism: Questions 4-6.

The first words of the Bible are, “In the beginning God.” God is. We assume that as a fact which needs no proof. Our Standards follow the Scriptures in showing rather what God is. We know of no better statement than that of the Shorter Catechism, “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” We shall never know all about God to all eternity, though we shall continue to learn of His perfection in all His attributes. He is infinite and we are finite.

We believe there is one only living and true God. We believe that this one God exists as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Who are the same in substance and equal in power and glory. The three Persons are but one God. He is one in three. He is one in His nature, but three in His manner of being. We do not believe that any human being can fully understand and explain the Trinity and Unity of God. We accept this by faith because it is taught in the Word of God. We have seen a number of symbols and illustrations which seek to help us understand that it is not an impossibility, not opposed to reason. They are all imperfect and must not be carried too far, but we think

they are helpful.

For instance, a person may say of himself, "I am six feet tall and weigh one hundred and seventy pounds." He is speaking of his physical being. The same person may say, "I shall live forever." He is speaking of his soul which will pass into the presence of God at what we call death. The person is the same but used in a different sense, of body and soul. One of the statements is not true of the other, but both of the statements are true of the same person. They are not two persons but one. Man is dual in his nature but singular in his personality. God is singular in His nature but plural in His personality.

Likewise, if you were asked the question, "What is H₂O?" you will quickly answer, "Water." But then when you think about it you may say, "Depending on the temperature it may be ice, water, or steam." Ice has its own properties, different from water, and so does steam. One may pick up ice in his hands but not steam. One drinks water but not steam. Yet all are H₂O, having the same elements that ice and water have. Yet they are distinct. It is not unreasonable to think that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, each with His own particular office.

Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." "I and the Father are one." The apostles were commanded to baptize believers "in the NAME of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Notice that this is singular and not plural. If we study the Bible, we shall find the Father, Son and Holy Spirit described by the same terms as to their essence. All three are recognized as God. The Father is referred to as God in John 6:27 and 1 Peter 1:2, as well as in many other passages. The Son is God,

referred to as the Word, Who was with God and Who was God in John 1:1. In Hebrews 1:8 God the Father addresses the Son, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever." The Holy Spirit is spoken of as God in Acts 5:3, 4, as Peter questions Ananias, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost. . .?. . .thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." The Holy Ghost is the old translation of the Greek which we now translate the Holy Spirit.

The same attributes are ascribed to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in different passages of Scripture. Only a few references are given. Some attributes refer to God's relation to Himself, which belong to His nature independently of any connection with the universe. God is Spirit. John 4:24; 1 Corinthians 2:11; 2 Corinthians 3:17. God is self-existent. Exodus 3:14; John 5:26; Romans 8:11. God is supreme. Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 4:35, 39. To accept another God would be confusion. God is infinite. Job 11:7. He is eternal. Psalms 90:2. He is unchangeable. James 1:17; Hebrews 13:8. God is holy. Revelation 4:8; 15:4. In Him is no sin at all.

God is omnipresent, everywhere present, all the time. Psalms 139:7-10. He is omniscient, all wise, all knowing. He knows all things about Himself and all things possible and actual. Acts 15:18; Hebrews 4:13; 1 Timothy 1:17. God is omnipotent, all powerful. He can do anything that is right. He cannot sin, or do that which is against His own nature. Psalms 147:5; Matthew 19:26. God is infinitely just. Genesis 18:25; Colossians 3:25. God is love. 1 John 4:8,16. The grace of God is the unmerited love of God toward those who have by sin forfeited it. Ephesians 1:6-7; 2:7-9; 3:4-7. This also sets forth the mercy of God. God is truth. Deuteronomy 32:4; John 14:6.

God is sovereign. This is a central truth of our beliefs and teachings. Many other beliefs are in relation to this doctrine. In the study of the decrees of God, including the works of creation and providence, election, Christian assurance and the future life, we shall be faced with the fact that God is sovereign. Much of the discussion of the sovereignty of God will be found there. We need to note now that the will of God is the final cause of all things, small and great, yet so that God is not responsible for sin. 1 Timothy 6:15; Daniel 4:35; Revelation 4:11; Psalms 99:1-5.

We cannot understand fully the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are the same in substance, of the same nature, equal in power and glory, and have the same attributes. There is no subordination in Person. However, they have different offices or function, in which there is a fixed order. The Father is always first, the Son second, and the Holy Spirit third. Thus in office only, the Holy Spirit is subordinate to the Father and Son. The Son is subordinate to the Father only. Theologians also express the relationship by saying that Christ is the Son by “natural, necessary, and eternal generation,” and that the Holy Spirit “proceeds” from the Father and Son. John 3:16; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are to be worshipped. 2 Corinthians 13:14. Baptism is to be administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

In reference to the redemption of sinful man, we sometimes say that God the Father elects the saints to everlasting life, choosing them before the foundation of the world, to be adopted into His family. He **purposed** the redemption of man. Ephesians 1:4-6a. The son **provided** this redemption. He gave His life that by His blood all our sins might be forgiven, and

that in Him we might have newness of life, provided we by faith accept Him and His work wrought for us. Ephesians 1:6b-12. The Holy Spirit's work is to **apply** the redemption purchased by Christ to the believer by "convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel." Day by day the Holy Spirit teaches and guides us in the Christian way, seeking to reproduce Christ in our lives. Thus each of the Persons of the Trinity has His functions in the salvation of man. They all work together in unity, because they are really one.

One error we should avoid, that of referring to the Holy Spirit as "it." He is a Person, just as much as the Father and Son are Persons. We should so honor Him.

We have seen that it is the Holy Spirit Who inspired the Scriptures. It was through His power that Jesus was born of Mary without a human father. He came in His fulness upon the believers at Pentecost and through His power the Church was established and grew. He is working in the world today.

Questions

1. What is God?

2. Our God is in how many persons? Who are these persons?

3. Can you give an illustration other than those in this booklet of one substance in three forms?

4. What is the special work of the Father in redemption of man?

5. What is the special work of the Son? Of the Holy Spirit?

6. What are some of the attributes of God?

7. What common error with regard to the Holy Spirit should we be careful to avoid?

Conversational Responses

Chapter Two

This important chapter of our study book springs from the second chapter of our *Westminster Confession of Faith*. The doctrine of God and the Trinity held by Associate Reformed Presbyterians, is clearly that of classic Christian orthodoxy. That is to say, our views of God and the Trinity are held in common with what Christians have believed throughout the centuries. What we Reformed Christians believe on this subject is not distinct to our tradition, nor did our views arise at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

The questions concerning the nature of the Godhead and the mystery of the Trinity were taken up very early in the history of the Church. Some of the earliest Church fathers had unclear conceptions of the Trinity. The Trinitarian language of the Apostles' Creed (the earliest of the great Christian creeds) was generally accepted, but believers in those early centuries struggled to articulate clear statements of the doctrine of the trinity.

To the council of Nicaea, which was convened in AD 325, we owe a great debt of gratitude. This was the first general or "ecumenical" council and it took up the question of whether Christ was as truly and fully God as the Father. Surely this was and is an extremely important question! What is at stake is nothing less than our salvation because the value of Christ's saving work depends entirely upon who He is. Our condition is so utterly hopeless that we cannot save ourselves. Only God can save us and if Christ is not God, He cannot be our Savior. In addition, only the Holy Spirit can bring us out of sin's

darkness.

From the Council at Nicaea (as refined at later councils), came the important creed we know as The Nicene Creed. Perhaps study groups should have copies of the Nicene Creed available. Its Trinitarian format is immediately obvious as is the fact that it is much more detailed on this doctrine than is the Apostles' Creed. As to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, what we Associate Reformed Presbyterians believe is the common teaching of the Greek, Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches. Of course it is on this very point that many of the cults who claim a Christian connection, go into error.

The authors of our study guide admit the difficulty in illustrating the doctrine of the Trinity. Such efforts are indeed imperfect and can't be carried too far. For instance, one problem with the "ice, water, and steam" illustration is that it might be misunderstood to mean that God once existed as the Father, then He became the Son, and now He is the Holy Spirit. There was in fact an ancient false teaching that held that the one God exists in different modes at different times. On the contrary, we believe that the Bible teaches that the Father always was, the Son always was, and the Spirit always was. These three persons eternally exist as one God.

The members of the Trinity have entered into a covenant of redemption on our behalf, the Father has purposed to save His elect people; the Son has redeemed His sheep with His shed blood at Calvary; and the Holy Spirit regenerates the elect and works faith in them. Being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, in

worship Christians participate in the Son's communion with the Father. In service, moved by the Holy Spirit, we commune with the Son in His mission from the Father to the world. It can rightly be said that the doctrine of the Trinity is the "grammar" of worship, of prayer, of service, and indeed of all of the Christian life.

"The Trinity is rather to be adored than speculated upon." —Thomas à Kempis

"In this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another."
—The Athanasian Creed

CHAPTER III

GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

Read: Ephesians 1:4, 5,11; Acts 15:8; Romans 8:30; Romans 9:11; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 1:2; John 6:65; John 8:47; John 10:26.

General

Confession of Faith: Chapter III.
Larger Catechism: Questions 12-13.
Shorter Catechism: Question 7.

God had an eternal purpose or plan in which He has foreordained all things that come to pass. It is not surprising that an all-wise God of love should work according to a plan. This purpose or plan is called God's eternal decree. Here we tread on holy ground and base our teachings on the Word of God, believing that God is wiser than we, far more loving and just. There are many things in the Bible which we are not able to understand but accept as true because they are taught there. In fact there are many things in nature that we know are true though we cannot understand them.

Many stumble over three words, foreordination, predestination and election. Notice first of all that these are Scriptural words. 1 Peter 1:20; Ephesians 1:11; 1 Peter 1:2. The general word is foreordain; predestinate is used of the chosen ones, as is the word elect. See Romans 8:28-30 for the steps in redemption.

In that eternal plan God has rendered certain all the events of the universe, past, present, and future. Out of many possible things God in His infinite wisdom and love planned the things which do come to pass for His own glory. For God, that is not a selfish

purpose, for God is infinitely holy and loving. God's great plan can be only good. God's plan does not change. His plan was the wisest possible and still is. He has the power to carry out His plan. As shall be explained, it includes all the actions of all His creatures, good and bad, either by direction or permission. Yet in all the plan God does not become the author of sin, or responsible for it, yet He does regulate and control the results of sin.

While we may not be able to understand it, the plan of God does not do violence to the will of His creatures. God made man with the ability to choose, but man is responsible for his choices.

The gracious design of God includes what is known as second causes. God has decreed that destruction of the brain or heart will result in the death of the person. The one who shoots another becomes responsible for the death of that person, not God, by reason of that law. We need not go more deeply into this difficult matter now.

God's foreknowledge is based upon His foreordination. God did not plan because He foreknew. He knows what will come to pass because He planned it that way.

God planned that Joseph should save His people from the famine and that Israel should grow in numbers in Egypt. It was a part of His plan that Joseph's brothers should sell him as a slave, and that through difficulties Joseph should become a ruler in Egypt. The brothers were free in the exercise of their wills and were responsible for the wrong they did, and yet they were accomplishing God's plan.

It was God's plan that Pharaoh should be punished for his evil treatment of His people, and that

Israel should go out from Egypt. Pharaoh did his own will in refusing to let the people go, bringing on himself and the Egyptians the plagues until they drove out Israel. He hardened his heart. It is also said that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. We do not know certainly how this was done, but God may have simply permitted him to go to the full length of hatred without restraining him, by which he became more and more stubborn in his resistance to God and to the demands of Moses. God was still not responsible for Pharaoh's sin of rebellion and of lying. He did his own will, as God had planned and known, without restraint, and yet fulfilled God's foreordained purpose.

From before the foundation of the world God had planned to redeem fallen man through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus of His own will gave Himself. Yet it was also by the wicked will of the Pharisees, and of Pilate, who gave the order of crucifixion, that Jesus was crucified. Each did his own will, and yet fulfilled the glorious purpose of God by which God's chosen ones are redeemed.

Thus we see that there is no real conflict in the teachings of the Scripture as to foreordination of God and free will of man. One theologian has stated it thus: "Calvinism is the broadest of systems. It regards the divine sovereignty and the freedom of the human will as two sides of a roof which come together at a ridgepole above the clouds. Calvinism accepts both truths. A system which denies either one of the two has only half a roof over its head."

Sometimes people accuse those who believe in Foreordination and Predestination of being fatalists,

of saying, “What will be, will be, and there is nothing we can do about it.” Fatalism does not recognize any intelligence, leaves no room for human freedom, and includes no moral ideas or purposes. The decrees of God are founded in infinite wisdom, include human freedom, and have great moral purposes, the good of man for the glory of God.

Election is also a part of God’s gracious plan which applies to human beings only. Predestination applies to both men and angels. We shall speak further of this in Chapter V.

Creation

Read: Genesis 1:1-31; Job 33:4; Jeremiah 10:12; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 11:3

Confession of Faith: Chapter IV.

Larger Catechism: Questions 14-17.

Shorter Catechism: Questions 8-10.

God executes His decrees in the works of creation and providence. God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created all things of nothing. By the word of the power of God our universe came into being. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. The work of creation was accomplished in six days. This does not necessarily mean in one hundred and forty-four hours as we count time, though it was possible for God to create all things in that time. Often the word day in Scriptures means a period of time. God made all things good.

The Larger Catechism has a question on the creation of angels. They are spirits, immortal, and excel in knowledge and power. Their mission is to carry out the commandments of God and to praise

Him. They are subject to change, and some of them did fall into sin.

When God had made the earth as a home for man and had made the necessary provision for him, He made the animals. Then last of all He made man with a physical body, formed of the dust of the ground. Of man He made woman. God created them male and female, with an immortal soul, in His likeness in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, with dominion over the creatures. Man is a finite being and God is infinite. Man was made subject to change. He could fall from his perfect state. The Bible account of the origin of man is trustworthy. God placed man in a high position.

Providence

Read: Genesis 45:7; Psalms 94:9-11; Psalms 103:19; Psalms 135:6; Daniel 3:27; Daniel 4:35; Matthew 10:29-30; Romans 8:28; Hebrews 1:3; James 1:13-14.

Confession of Faith: Chapters V, VII (Pars. 1, 2).

Larger Catechism: Questions 18-20.

Shorter Catechism: Questions 11-12.

God also works out His decrees through the works of providence. These are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions. Note the superlatives. God is the first cause and makes His gracious plan to work out surely, but He is also the author of the second causes, the laws of nature, and orders things to fall out according to these laws. He ordinarily uses means, but is free to work without, above, and against them at His pleasure. God had promised that none of the men in the ship with Paul should lose

their lives, but Paul insisted that they must stay in the ship or they could not be saved. Later they left the ship. God was using means. In Hosea God promised to save Judah, not using bow, or sword, or battle, or horses or horsemen. This was without means. Elisha caused the axe to swim in the water. This was against means. In a miracle, the laws of God are not broken; a stronger law overcomes the law which we ordinarily recognize. A magnet holds up an object which would naturally drop to the ground by the law of gravitation. The pull of the magnet is greater. If it happens to be less the object is not held up.

The Confession of Faith makes a definite statement as to moral evil. Notice the words in this connection: God's power, wisdom and goodness manifest themselves, extending to the first fall and all the sins of men and angels, not by a bare permission, but with a wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them for His own holy purposes. Yet in this God does not approve nor can be the author of sin; the sinfulness proceeds from the creature, men or angels, never from God.

Why does God allow His people to suffer? Some suggestions here are: To chastise them for their former sins; to help them to see the real condition of their own hearts and to make them humble; to cause them to depend more upon Him; and to make them more watchful against sin. Those who are not God's people, wicked and ungodly, He permits to do as they

please. They are often hardened in their hearts and come more under the power of Satan. It should be remembered that the same providence which will make one trust God more fully, as an illness or sorrow, will make another bitter against God. The same heat of sun which melts wax hardens the clay into brick.

The covenant of works was a special act of providence between God and Adam, in which Adam represented the human race. The condition of the covenant of life was perfect and personal obedience by Adam. The penalty of the breaking of this covenant was death. The test of the obedience was the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This was certainly a reasonable and fair arrangement.

Questions

1. Give in your own words the meaning of "God's Eternal Decree."

2. Is there any real conflict between God's sovereignty and man's free will?

3. With what false idea is foreordination, predestination and election sometimes confused?

4. In what two ways does God execute (carry out) His decrees?

5. How did God create mankind?

6. How does God usually supply our needs? Give some examples of His not using means.

7. Why does God allow human suffering?

8. Discuss by comparison and contrast the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace.

Conversational Responses

Chapter Three

Unlike the last chapter, this one concerns doctrinal matters which are more distinctive to the Reformed tradition. Indeed, that Presbyterians believe in the doctrines of election and predestination is all that some people know about us. The thoughts put forth in this chapter spring from the teaching of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapters 3, 4, 5, 7.

Modern thinking continues to maintain certain false notions about the supposed basic goodness of mankind. Americans especially have ingrained ideas of what is considered fairness and equity. But as our authors note in the first paragraph of the chapter, we need to be submissive to God's Word in formulating our ideas about God, self, freedom, and how God goes about His saving activity. Study groups should ponder together the texts from Holy Scripture put forth by Revs. Gettys and Alexander.

Generally speaking, our thoughts of God are often too human. We project not only our own weaknesses, but also our views of what God should be like, upon Him. Our God is in control of the universe. He has ordained whatsoever comes to pass (Ephesians 1:11). Mysteries remain, to be sure. Did God ordain sin? Is He the author of it? To this latter question the Westminster theologians clearly gave a negative answer (W.C.F., III, 1.) Augustine is said to have quipped, "To attempt to explain the origin of sin is like trying to see darkness or to hear silence."

The question of the freedom of the human will troubles many Christians today. Some folks seem to believe in a weak God who always must bow to our ideas of letting people be free. Humans are seen

as free (autonomous) and God can't do anything for them unless they cooperate. Such errors are far from the views of the Bible. In reality, as God reaches His hand to save one of His elect, human rebellion is conquered as God lovingly draws one to Christ with irresistible grace. The Reformed doctrine of the freedom of the will always keeps in mind the radical nature of the fall. The fall did not simply injure us, it left us "dead in our trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). And dead people don't come to God on their own.

Perhaps the following is a helpful way of thinking about a Biblically informed view of the so-called "freedom of the will." We humans do what we want, but we don't want what we should. Indeed, we can't want what we should (Romans 3:11; John 6:44). Our freedom is limited by our sinful nature. This matter will be discussed further in the next chapter.

A common error is to suppose that God looks ahead through time, observes how humans act, and then predestines those actions and events. This of course is no predestination at all, nor is it the Biblical doctrine of God's sovereignty (see Romans 9:10-16).

"Foreknowledge" is generally used in the Bible in the sense of God's sovereign distinguishing love and is essentially a synonym for "foreordination."

We believe in the absolute sovereignty of God (Psalm 115:3) but not in fatalism. God's purposes are full of warmth and grace. In the big picture all works together for God's glory. He is glorified both in the damnation of the non-elect who stand guilty in their own willful sins, and God is glorified in the undeserved salvation of the elect who are brought to

Christ by sovereign grace.

Chapter 5 of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* concerns God's ongoing and constant providence or governing of all things. The last article of that chapter is especially warm as we are assured that God, "in a very special way takes care of His Church and orders all things for her good."

"Whoever heaps odium upon the doctrine of predestination openly reproaches God, as if He had unadvisedly let slip something hurtful to the Church." —John Calvin

"Providence is God's own act by which God orders all events in creation, nature, and history, so that the ends for which God created them will in due time be realized." —Thomas C. Oden

CHAPTER IV

MAN'S NEED OF REDEMPTION

Read: Genesis 3:8; Genesis 3:13; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:10; Romans 3:23; Romans 5:12; Romans 5:19; Ephesians 2:1; James 1:14-15; James 4:17; 1 John 1:8; 1 John 3:4.

Confession of Faith: Chapter VI.
Larger Catechism: Questions 21-29.
Shorter Catechism: Questions 13-19.

Our first parents were created in a state of holiness. Yet today we do not find any people who are holy, absolutely without sin. The Scriptures declare that there is not a just man upon the earth who doeth good and sinneth not; and that if we claim to be without sin we are liars. Because all men are sinners, there is a universal need for the redemption of man. What do we believe and teach about this?

What happened to break the close relations of God and our first parents? God had made man a free moral being, holy, but with the power to make his own decisions. Satan took advantage of this fact and tempted them to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which they did. Satan is the prince of the fallen angels. How they sinned is not known to us, nor is it necessary for us to know. We know how man sinned.

Sin is both an act and a state. Sin is any failure to keep God's law and will perfectly, or any breaking of that law. We say that there are sins of omission and commission. It concerns our being and doing. Failure to be and do all that God wants us to be and do is sin. Lack of love for God and man is sin as well as hatred and rebellion.

Man had been warned that eating the forbidden fruit would result in death. Death is separation. As a result of sin the soul is separated from the body. We call that physical death. Man is separated from God. We call that spiritual death. Eternal separation is eternal death. It is decreed that man should die a physical death, except such as shall be alive when Christ returns. But the believer, once spiritually dead on account of trespasses and sins, made alive again in Christ, is never separated from Him. Both the body and soul are still united to Him even in death.

By the fall into sin, man lost fellowship with God. Because man had chosen the suggestion of Satan rather than the warning of God, God withdrew His close fellowship with our first parents, but continued to sustain them physically. God's judgment was upon our first parents, an unchangeable opposition to sin. There are miseries in this life of many kinds. For unrepentant man there is the eternal punishment of hell.

We need to note that Adam brought upon himself a guilt from that first sin, which means just liability to punishment for sin. He failed to continue in his original state. He was no longer holy. His whole nature became corrupt. His whole nature, body and soul, is inclined to evil and alienated from God. God withdraws from man, leaving him to his own impulses and the temptations of others. He does not infuse evil into man. This is what is called original sin.

As a result of this fallen nature there were other actual sins, in the form of evil desires, thoughts, purposes and acts.

God had made a covenant with Adam, con-

ditioned upon perfect obedience. He was not only the actual head of the human race, but also the representative of all mankind in the making of the covenant. In agreements between nations, certain appointed representatives act for their nation. They represent every citizen of that nation. Adam represented all men who should ever live on the earth. He spoke for them. Then later he acted for them. When he broke the covenant by his disobedience, through him the covenant was broken for and by all men. If Adam had kept the will of God perfectly, all men would have enjoyed eternal life with him. Since he disobeyed God, all men with him suffer his disabilities.

The corrupt nature, growing out of Adam's first sin, passes on to all his descendants. Out of it all are disposed to sin, and are unable to live a holy life. Even those who are regenerated, forgiven, and accepted in Christ, are never completely liberated in this life from the old nature. We know this, not only from the teaching of Scripture but also from our own experience.

There is much in the Scripture about sin and its consequences, both in this life and in that which is to come. By this we are made to realize the need of a Redeemer from sin. Every person needs a Redeemer. All will not accept Him but no one can be saved without Him.

Questions

1. How widespread is mankind's need of redemption?

2. What is sin? Into what two main heads is it usually divided?

3. What is the wages of sin?

4. What do we mean by "original sin"? By "actual transgressions"?

Conversational Responses

Chapter Four

This chapter in our study book concerns the fall of mankind in Adam and the effects of that fall. As we began to explain in the previous chapter, it is extremely important to realize the plight of man in his sin, how helpless he is, and how utterly dependent we are upon the sovereign grace of God.

Every person seeking communicant membership in our churches is asked to affirm: “Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope except in His love and mercy?”

God sovereignly decreed that Adam would be a representative or covenant head for all of humanity. American children once commonly learned a little jingle that went: “In Adam’s fall we sinned all.” Adam’s sin has been imputed (charged to the account) of every one of his descendants. Some might balk at this as being unfair, but God Almighty certainly had every right to so arrange this covenantal or “federal” relationship between Adam and his descendants. Being in the line of Adam who was the very “well-spring” of the human race, all of us actually inherit a sinful nature at conception (Psalm 51:5). So the indictment of Holy Scripture is that each one of us is a sinner by birth and also by actual deed (Romans 3:23).

The Apostle Paul, in Romans chapter 5, puts forth Adam and Christ as two great covenant heads. All who belong to the first covenant head Adam (that is, every human being), have his original sin charged to their accounts. All who belong to the second cov-

enant head Christ (that is, all the elect), will have His righteousness imputed to their accounts when they are regenerated and embrace Christ by faith.

Again, it is very important as Reformed Christians for us to realize the radical and thorough-going consequences of the fall. No doubt some Christian traditions have underestimated the plight of man in this regard. Perhaps this is why so many reject the Biblical doctrines of predestination and election as they maintain notions that man still can come to God on his own. But in reality, apart from God's sovereign grace, His choosing of a people, the work of the Holy Spirit in conquering our rebellion and drawing us to Jesus Christ (John 6:44, 65), there is no salvation. It is God's work from beginning to end (Philippians 1:6) and therefore to Him is all the glory!

Our doctrine of "original sin" is also known as "the depravity of man." It is helpful to think of this in terms of "inability." That left to ourselves, we are unable to do good, unable to believe in Christ, unable to live for the Lord, are doctrines clearly taught in both the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, VI, and in our study book.

Oh how great is the grace of God to us, who are completely unworthy!

"We shall never believe, with an effective belief and faith, unless God inclines our hearts, and we shall believe as soon as He does so." —Blaise Pascal

*"The decision of faith rests not on free will but on a liberated will."
—Donald G. Bloesch*

CHAPTER V

CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR—REDEEMER AND LORD

Read: Matthew 1:20-21; Mark 1:15; John 1:14; John 3:16; John 14:6; Acts 1:11; Acts 4:12; Acts 16:31; Acts 26:18; Romans 3:24-26; Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:5; Ephesians 1:20; Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; Hebrews 2:14; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 9:12; Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 12:2.

Confession of Faith: Chapters VIII through XV.

Larger Catechism: Questions 36-76, 153.

Shorter Catechism: Questions 20-36, 85-87.

The great need of man demands a great Saviour, and we have One Who is all-sufficient. God's love is so great, so infinite, that He did not leave all mankind to perish in his state of sin and misery. He made a new covenant, called the covenant of grace, by which man would be brought into a state of salvation. The only Mediator and Redeemer of God's people is our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, Who became man, and Who was and is God and man, in two distinct natures, but one person forever.

The first covenant to which reference has been made was called the covenant of works. God made that covenant with Adam promising eternal life on the condition of perfect obedience. Adam failed and eternal life could not be given under it. This new covenant of grace was made with Christ, the Son of God. Under this covenant Jesus became the Mediator, took all the sins of the elect upon Himself, He being without sin, and paid the penalty for them by His death. The third day He arose from the dead. Later He ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father, and from there He will come to judge the world at the last day. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the

conditions of the covenant of grace.

As part of the covenant God promised and sent the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, to all the elect, that He might work in their hearts, revealing to them their need of the Saviour, and working faith in their hearts in Jesus as the Saviour, causing them to accept Him. One has said that God's grace in its sum is: The gift of His Son to provide salvation; and the gift of His Spirit to apply salvation. Or it may be stated, The gift of His Son to work salvation out; and the gift of His Spirit to work salvation in.

Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man, with a truly human body and soul, being born of the Virgin Mary, yet without sin. Only as the Divine-human Mediator could He accomplish all that needed to be done.

As our Mediator, Jesus is Prophet, Priest and King. The Catechisms set this forth, though it is not mentioned in the Confession of Faith. Christ reveals to us the will of God for our salvation through His Word and Spirit. He once offered up Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, and makes continual intercession for us. He subdues us to Himself, He rules and defends us, He restrains and conquers all His and our enemies. His is a complete salvation.

All whom God has chosen in His grace and wisdom to become partakers of the redemption by Christ are effectually called by God's Spirit. They are led to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and faith in Him and acceptance of Him as Saviour. The Scriptures clearly teach that God has chosen some before the foundation of the world to be His children and has given them to Christ. Not one of these shall be lost.

Others not chosen shall by their own choice continue in their evil way to perdition. No one deserved to be saved. That God chooses to save some is purely of His grace and mercy. Since it is of grace there is no question of injustice. But of one thing we can be sure. No one who otherwise would have ever believed and come to Jesus is rejected. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37. Some who are not sincere in their profession, who really never became one of His children, as Judas Iscariot, shall in the end go their own way.

Perhaps special mention should be made of one other thing in this connection. The Confession says that elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, and so are others who are outwardly incapable of being called by the ministry of the Word. It is generally understood by the Church that all infants dying in infancy are elect, though Scripture proof cannot be cited.

Those whom God chooses He justifies, adopts and sanctifies. This is all of grace, His great love for those who do not merit any good thing. Justification is the gracious act of God by which He pardons all our sins and counts us as righteous. This is not because of anything we do or are, but through the full satisfaction and perfect obedience of Christ, which is credited to our name. We receive this through faith alone, which is also the gift of God. We are not **made** righteous in justification; we are **counted** righteous because there is no longer even one sin charged to our account. Jesus took all our sins upon Himself and died to pay the penalty due us for them. For us this is free, though it cost the Father and Son so much. One whom God has justified may fall under

His displeasure on account of any sin committed afterwards, and may be chastised by Him until he repents and turns to Him again; but never falls out of His purpose and grace. Once justified, he is always justified. That, however, does not say one can do as he pleases and be saved. One who continues in sin has never been justified.

Adoption is also an act of God's free grace. The purpose of God's choosing to save His own was to adopt them into His family. Those who truly believe in the name of Christ, His Son, are not only justified, but become His children, with all the rights which He has graciously granted to them.

Sanctification is a work of God's free grace. Justification and adoption are acts, instantaneous. Sanctification is continuous and is never altogether complete in this life. Someone has said, "Sanctification is the Christianizing of the Christian." In man there is a continual warfare of the flesh and the Spirit, the old remnants of corruption against the new life in Christ. In this warfare, the new life through God's help is enabled to finally prevail as the believer grows in grace and lives unto righteousness. Salvation is God's work for us from regeneration to glorification.

Saving faith is a condition of salvation, as is repentance. The Holy Spirit, through the Word, enables us to believe its teachings, that we are unable to save ourselves, though greatly in need of salvation; that Jesus is able and ready to save us; and then enables us to receive Him as our only Saviour and to trust Him alone to save us. Faith is therefore the gift of God through the Spirit and Word.

Repentance is a turning from sin, a turning to God. It is not simply an act, it is an attitude. Repen-

tance includes confession of sin to God. It includes obedience to God. If we are to be saved, we must repent. We must repent of all sins.

God has given a perfect plan of salvation. Jesus Christ is the perfect Saviour. The Holy Spirit effectively brings us into the saving relationship with God in Christ. Every one of God's chosen ones shall be saved by His grace alone. He chooses, calls, justifies and glorifies them. Praise His great name.

Questions

1. What new "covenant" did God make after the first was broken?

2. Who is the Redeemer of those who are saved?

3. What two natures does Christ have in one Person?

4. Discuss briefly the work of Christ in the several offices of Prophet, Priest and King.

5. Who are saved?

6. What does Christ do for the saved in each: (a) justification; (b) adoption; (c) sanctification?

7. What is meant by “saving faith”?

8. What is “repentance unto life”?

Conversational Responses

Chapter Five

The authors of our study book have done a masterful job of condensing a large amount of material into this chapter. Study groups should take note of, and refer to the eight chapters in the *Confession of Faith* and the many questions from the catechisms which form the basis of this chapter.

Our Reformed theology is sometimes called “Covenant Theology” and this important concept is introduced in this chapter. Covenants include promises and requirements with the accompanying blessings for obedience and cursings for disobedience. Because the covenant of works was broken in Adam, God was pleased to enter into a covenant of grace whereby He would bless believers and their children. Revs. Gettys and Alexander seem to include in this what most theologians call the “covenant of redemption.” In this agreement between the three persons of the Godhead, God has chosen a people, Christ has agreed to give His life for these elect sheep, and the Holy Spirit has agreed to bring these out of darkness into light.

Again the doctrines of election and predestination are clearly brought out in this chapter, as is the truth that Christ’s cross actually accomplished the redemption of the elect only. See *Confession of Faith* VIII, 5, 8.

Several important theological terms are defined in this chapter. The first of these is “justification.” This is a legal term, a term of the law courts. God as Judge, in the high court of heaven, pronounces an elect and believing sinner to be freed from the penalty of the law and fully restored to divine favor. In

short, justification is a declaration of righteousness because God sees His children as clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ.

Sanctification is the ongoing change of moral character and growth into the likeness of Christ. Sanctification is distinct but inseparable from justification in the plan of God for His children. While justification is a change of legal status and is complete, sanctification has degrees and is never perfect in this life. Study groups are urged to ponder the *Shorter Catechism*, questions #33, 35, in which justification is defined as a once and for all “act” of God’s free grace, while sanctification is rightly defined as an ongoing “work” of God’s free grace.

While discussing the glories of salvation, some may still be tempted to claim a share of merit in the whole process by insisting, “at least I believed in Christ while others do not.” But even saving faith is God’s gift to His elect. Certainly it is a condition of salvation, but God Himself works it in us as a result (not the cause) of regeneration. See *Confession of Faith* XIV, 1, where it speaks of the “grace of faith whereby the elect are enabled” to believe in Christ. That faith itself is God’s gift and not humanly generated is taught in such passages as Acts 13:48; 18:27; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29.

The chapter ends with words concerning repentance. Regeneration is often devalued or underestimated by evangelicals today and many accuse us of teaching that once a decision of faith is made, lifestyles don’t matter. This is far from the teaching of the Bible! God never justifies without also working the accompanying sanctification. The mark of the Christian is not perfection, but it is progress in holi-

ness of life to the glory of God who is the “author and finisher of our faith.”

“God justifies us through Christ. He acquits us, not by an admission of innocence, but by the imputation of righteousness. So that we, who are unrighteous in ourselves, are considered as righteous in Christ.” —John Calvin

“Weeds grow of themselves. Flowers are planted. Santification is a flower of the Spirit’s planting.” —Thomas Watson

CHAPTER VI

CHRISTIAN PRACTICE

Read: Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Samuel 15:22; Matthew 5:16; Matthew 22:37-39; Matthew 25:21; Luke 17:10; Romans 3:20; Romans 12:2; Galatians 2:16; Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14; Titus 3:5-6; 1 Peter 2:13-14,16; 2 Peter 1:10; 2 Peter 3:12; 1 John 2:3.

Confession of Faith: Chapter XVI, XIX, XX
Larger Catechism: Questions 78, 91-152.
Shorter Catechism: Questions 39-84.

The results of faith, or the fruits of faith are manifold. Good works done in obedience to God's commandments are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively or living faith. The ability of Christians to do good works is not from themselves, but from Christ through the Holy Spirit. Yet they must exercise themselves diligently to make use of every opportunity to show their zeal in the things commanded of God, for His glory.

Only that which God commands can be a good work. Even the best of effort and the best works of which Christians are capable have in them much of weakness and imperfection. No one through his works can merit salvation or do more than his duty. In fact we all fall short of duty. Yet in His grace, through Christ, God is pleased to accept our good works, as He accepts us, and will reward us.

Those not believers in Christ, being in rebellion against God, cannot expect to have any of their works approved by God, however good they may seem to men. Such must first get right with their sovereign God through His Son before their works can be approved as good.

Of great help to the Christian in his daily life and practice is the law of God. Two general kinds of law are given. One is called the moral law, implanted in the heart of man at creation, in accordance with the nature of God. This revealed will of God sets forth man's duty to God and his duty to man. It was to be perfectly kept, always, and man as created had the power to keep it so. This law has never been changed. It was later given in summary in the Ten Commandments to Moses at Sinai. Since the fall it is still a rule of righteousness for man.

Other than this God also gave other positive commandments for certain purposes, which pass away when that purpose has been fulfilled. Such were the ceremonial laws and the judicial laws which were for that nation only, and which were generally abrogated later.

All people, believers and non-believers, are bound by the moral law. God is sovereign over all people, and His nature and will have not changed. True believers in Christ are delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works. That is, salvation and eternal condemnation are not dependent upon the keeping or breaking of the commandments, but upon acceptance of Christ under the covenant of grace. Yet the moral law expressed especially in the Ten Commandments reveals to Christians what is pleasing to God and what is displeasing. In appreciation to God for His love and grace, and in love for Him, we as Christians should try to do that which pleases Him.

The *Confession of Faith* does not take up the Ten Commandments in detail, but the Catechisms devote a large section to them. We shall note briefly that the first four Commandments give our duty to God and

the last six, or second table, give our duty to men. The First Commandment sets forth the object of worship, God; the Second the mode or method of worship, directly; the Third, the spirit of worship, reverently; the Fourth, the day of worship. The duties to man set forth proper respect for others, the preservation of life, family rights, property rights, the reputation of others. The Tenth Commandment makes it clear that not only shall we not violate these various rights, we shall not want to do so. Jesus summed up all the Commandments in a positive statement, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Christ has purchased liberty for believers from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law. He has made possible the deliverance from this present evil world, from bondage to Satan, the evil of afflictions (though not from some afflictions), the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation. He has given them free access to God and an obedience through love for Him. Also in Christ we are free from the Jewish ceremonial law.

God alone is Lord of the conscience. Christians are not bound by the conscience to obey the doctrines or commandments of men which are contrary to the law of God, and should not obey such. They are to obey lawful powers, when the commands are not contrary to God's law. Christian liberty is not license. Christians are to do that which is in accordance with the will of God to preserve the peace of

the Church. “True freedom is not liberty to do as you please unless you please to do right. Liberty is not absolute, but limited—limited by the will of God and the rights and interest of men.”

Questions

1. Who can do good works?

2. What is “moral law”? To whom does it apply?

3. How does its application to believers and non-believers differ?

4. What class of temporary law appears in the Scriptures distinct from “moral law”?

4. What class of temporary law appears in the Scriptures distinct from “moral law”?

5. What summary of the moral law is given? How is this usually divided?

6. Quote the sum of the Ten Commandments as given by Jesus.

7. What is the Christian’s relation to lawful powers (authority)?

Conversational Responses

Chapter Six

Careful readers of this chapter in our study book will notice that it is a very orderly summary of chapters XVI, XIX, and XX of the *Confession of Faith*. Study groups should certainly have those chapters available for reference.

In our comments in the last chapter it was noted that some might accuse the Reformed tradition of implying that it doesn't matter how one lives because God's elect are eternally secure. The Apostle Paul anticipates such wrong thinking when he writes: "What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (Romans 6:1). Of course the answer is a resounding "no!"

The simple truth is that salvation always leads to less sinning, not more! This is because regeneration and sanctification are nothing less than God Himself at work in us. The Apostle teaches this in Philippians 2:12-13 where the exhortation is "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." The reason that this is possible, and indeed will take place in God's children, is then given: "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good pleasure." For this reason Revs. Gettys and Alexander affirm that the ability of Christians to do good works comes only through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Salvation changes people. A tree is known by its fruit (Matthew 7:16-20) and as our study book affirms, good works are the fruits of true faith. The words of Ephesians 2:8-9 are known by memory to many of us, but how many of us go on to memorize and practice the truth of the next verse (2:10)?

To put it in a very foundational way, Ephesians 1:4 affirms that God's grace of election and predestination has come upon us in order to make us "holy and blameless." This is what God is determined to accomplish in His children (see also Titus 2:14).

God has not left us in the dark about His righteous requirements. He has given us His Holy Law. The summary of the moral law is found in the Ten Commandments and we in the Reformed tradition affirm that these remain as "a rule of life" for us (*Confession of Faith* XIX, 6). But believers are no longer under the crushing load and curse of the Law (Romans 6:14), because Christ has borne this for us and as our substitute.

Study groups should discuss what it means to be "free in Christ." From what have we been freed? What about practices which some Christians condemn but others affirm as legitimate expressions of Christian liberty?

It is important to note that both Psalm 116:16 and Romans 6:18 speak of being set free in order to become a servant!

"Practical godliness is the brightest ornament of the Christian religion." —Robert Shaw

"A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." —Martin Luther

CHAPTER VII

THE CHURCH AND WORSHIP

Read: Exodus 20:1-11; Matthew 4:10; Matthew 6:5-13; Matthew 16:18; Matthew 28:19-20; John 4:23-24; John 14:13-14; Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Ephesians 2:18; Ephesians 4:11-13; Ephesians 5:27; Colossians 1:18; Colossians 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 1:10; Revelation 7:9; Revelation 19:10.

Confession of Faith: Chapter XXV and XXI.

Larger Catechism: Questions 61-65, 116-117, 178-196.

Shorter Catechism: Questions 59-60, 98-107.

The chapter on the Church does not come first in the Confession, but we want to study it first. Perhaps we should first define several words describing the Church. The word catholic means universal. It does not refer to the Roman Catholic Church, but to the whole Church, which is also described as the invisible Church. The invisible Church is made up of all the elect, who have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the Head. That includes believers of the past, present, and future of every nation. The visible Church refers to a society made up of all those living in the world who profess the true religion and of their children. All who profess their faith in Jesus Christ, as their Lord and Saviour, of any denomination, land, or race are included in the visible Church. Thus the visible Church may include some who are not of the elect, whose profession is not sincere, who have not true faith in Christ as Son of God and Saviour.

The Church is the body of which Christ alone is the Head. For any man to claim to be its head is

dishonoring to Him. He directs it. He is the builder of the Church. It can never fail. It will prevail over the forces of evil eventually. While there are weaknesses in the Church, there will always be a true Church.

The Church is organized for the good of its members and the work of Christ's Kingdom. To it Christ has given the ministry, oracles and ordinances of God. These are for the perfecting of the saints, for the building up of the body of Christ. Thus the members of the Church should be mutually helpful in their Christian development. They have a fellowship together. It is also the work of the Church to witness that whosoever believes in Him shall be saved, and that He will exclude none who come to Him.

The Church sponsors the worship of God. God is worthy of all worship. Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to Him alone. There is to be no worship of angels, saints, or any other creature. For our age we may worship God only through Christ. God is to be worshipped directly as a Spirit, and not through any visible representation. He is to be worshipped only as He has directed and revealed in His Word. Man-made devices are to be avoided.

Worship consists of prayer with thanksgiving and confession, praise, reading and hearing of the Scriptures and sound preaching, the observance of the sacraments, and certain other appointed services. Worship is to be offered privately, in the family, and publicly.

Prayer is to be offered in the name of Christ only. He is the only mediator and our access to God is through Him, and through Him alone. The Holy Spirit helps us to pray. The Word of God gives direc-

tion and words and language of worship. The Catechisms emphasize the Lord's prayer as a pattern for our prayers.

Mention should be made of the day of worship, the Sabbath day. From the beginning of the world God set aside this day for Himself. When He gave the Ten Commandments He included the Fourth commanding all to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. The Sabbath was the seventh day, reminding of the Creator and calling on men to worship Him. The Christian Sabbath, the first day of the week, reminds of the resurrection. The Christian Sabbath is often called the Lord's Day.

Questions

1. Give the meaning of (a) catholic; (b) visible Church; (c) invisible Church.

2. Who is the Head of the Church?

3. What is the dual purpose of the organized Church?

4. How is God to be worshipped?

5. What special form of prayer did Christ give His followers?

6. What great truth is emphasized by the change of the day of worship from the seventh day of the week to the first?

Conversational Responses

Chapter Seven

The first paragraph of this chapter in our study book provides good basic definitions of some of the terminology used in our confessional standards. In addition, it might be pointed out that entrance into the visible church is by baptism. The *Confession of Faith* XXVIII, 1 states that baptism is “for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church.” It is for this reason that in our Associate Reformed Presbyterian Churches only the names of baptized children are placed on the roll of non-communicant members. Perhaps we too often think and speak in such a way that fails to convey the precious truth that our baptized children are members (non-communicant) of the Church. By baptism a visible difference has been put between those that belong to the Church and the rest of the world.

Our Lord Jesus declared that He would build His Church and the gates of hell will not be able to withstand His gracious purposes (Matthew 16:18). It is important to realize that the Lord is accomplishing this age long purpose on a universal scale. He has purposed to bring together in heaven a redeemed people “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). This truth should not only strip us of all prejudices in supposing we can decide who might be the objects of God’s grace, but it should also spur us on in our missionary zeal to reach the world for Christ!

The *Confession of Faith* XXV, 5 contains an important and humbling reminder: “The purest churches under heaven are subject both to impurity and error.” In the Reformed tradition, the marks or signs of

a true church are the faithful preaching of the Word of God, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline.

The Church functions by gathering its members for the holy convocation of worship on the Sabbath day, and then by having them depart to witness to and serve the risen Christ. Jesus Christ is the King and only head of the Church.

The constituent parts of worship are “revelation” and “response.” God reveals Himself by Word and Sacrament and His people are to respond with adoring praise and the sacrifice of their lives to His service. We stress that worship is a verb, it involves action. Worship is something God’s people “do,” not something they merely attend. true worship is “vertical” in its orientation as we engage with the Triune God who is high and lofty. Sadly, worship for some people might be likened to a spectator sport in which the audience files in and observes the proceedings. Perhaps too many simply equate worship with listening to a sermon. Such attitudes are closer to medieval conceptions than they are to the theology of the Protestant Reformation. An acute modern danger is the attitude that worship should entertain us. In a very real way, the worshiper is not so much the one who must be pleased with the actions of worship, God is.

Revs. Gettys and Alexander list several activities which together constitute worship. Notice that “confession” is included. Believers should both confess their sins and confess their faith. The Reformed tradition has historically insisted upon a time of confession of sin at the beginning of each service or worship. This is because God is absolutely holy and we

are not. It is unfortunate that this important element has been neglected in some of our churches. Our faith is confessed in our songs of praise, our prayers, and by use of the historic creeds of the church (the Apostles' and the Nicene).

“The whole world is a theater for the display of divine goodness, wisdom, justice, and power. But the church is the orchestra, the most conspicuous part of it.” —John Calvin

“We worship God because God created us to worship Him. Worship is at the center of our existence; at the heart of our reason for being.” —Hughes Oliphant Old

CHAPTER VIII

THE SACRAMENTS

Read: Matthew 28:19; Mark 7:4; Acts 2:38-39; Acts 2:41; Acts 16:33; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Galatians 3:27; Hebrews 7:27; Hebrews 9:19-22.

Confession of Faith: Chapters XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX.

Larger Catechism: Questions 162-177.

Shorter Catechism: Questions 92-97.

There are two and only two sacraments of the New Testament, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In contrast with the Word of God, which is to be preached to believers and unbelievers, the sacraments are for believers only, or for those professing faith in Christ, those who are members of the family of God.

A sacrament has three essentials. It must be divinely instituted. Christ commanded the apostles to baptize, and He instituted the Lord's Supper the night He was betrayed. It must have an outward visible sign, something which some of the five senses can perceive. Water, bread and wine can be perceived through the senses of sight, touch and taste. There must be an invisible grace accompanying the sacrament. It is only by the blessing of Christ and the working of His Spirit in them who by faith receive them that the sacraments become means of grace. The sacraments are signs, or symbols, and seals. They are always accompanied with the appropriate Word of God which indicates what is being done.

Baptism is administered but once to the believer. Those who are baptized are baptized in or into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. This is a symbol of cleansing. Christ cleanses

the heart from sin with His blood, but we cannot see that. We can see the water applied outwardly. It is an outward sign of an inner cleansing. It is also a seal. By baptism we are officially acknowledged as Christians. By it we openly profess that we belong to God.

Not only is baptism to be administered to those who profess their faith in Christ, but also to their children. We shall not go into all the details of this. But as in the Old Testament children of eight days were circumcised and thereby admitted into the family of God's people Israel, so children of believers, being children of the new covenant, have a right to be baptized. Christ received children and declared that of such is the Kingdom of Heaven. In connection with the command by Peter on the day of Pentecost, to be baptized, he said, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." They are non-communicant members of the Church until they make their own profession of faith in Christ.

We believe the proper mode of baptism is by pouring or sprinkling of water upon the person. There is ample proof from the Scriptures of this. Baptism does not necessarily mean immersion. However, we accept those who have been baptized by immersion into the Christian fellowship.

In the Lord's Supper the elements used are bread and wine. These do not actually become the body and blood of Christ, but they stand for, are symbols of His body and blood. A flag is not a country, but stands for, is a symbol of that country. In the Lord's Supper there are acts accompanied by appropriate words. The elements are set apart by prayer, the bread is broken. The elements are given

and received, both of them; Christ gives Himself, the believer receives Him. Both elements are taken in the body. Christ is by faith received into the heart and soul.

These two sacraments set forth dramatically the message of salvation. The emblems of the Lord's Supper, bread and wine, set forth the broken body and shed blood of Christ, His death, the purchase of redemption. In baptism the application of water is a symbol of redemption applied to the believer.

It is possible for a person to be saved without receiving the sacraments, but every believer should observe them because it is the command of Christ, and because of the blessings which come through their proper observance.

Questions

1. Which are the two sacraments of the Christian Church?

2. What three essentials are necessary in a sacrament?

3. What is baptism? To whom is it properly administered?

4. Which is the preferable mode of baptism? If one has already received Christian baptism by another mode need he be baptized again?

5. What elements are used in the Lord's Supper?

6. What does the bread represent? The wine?

7. Since salvation is possible apart from the sacraments, why should they be carefully observed by all Christians?

8. What gives the sacraments their value?

Conversational Responses

Chapter Eight

Reformed Christians often speak of the importance of “Word and Sacrament.” Our study book now takes us to an explicit discussion of the latter. Associate Reformed Presbyterians believe that Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are indeed “sacraments.” That is, they are means of grace and not just bare or symbolic “ordinances” as understood in some other Christian traditions. As is stated in the first paragraph, there are only two sacraments instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ. From that first paragraph one might wish for a clearer statement in reference to our infant covenant children. The sacrament of Holy Baptism is intended for our children, even though they have not yet come to faith.

Revs. Gettys and Alexander are careful to insist that the sacraments consist of both outward elements and, in the sovereignty of God, invisible grace. Chapter XXVII of the *Confession of Faith* instructs us that there is a “sacramental union” between the sign and the reality signified. The same chapter tells us that grace is conferred in the sacraments, but only by the work of the Holy Spirit. Reformed people must guard against entertaining views that treat the sacraments as only symbols. No, in them too, our sovereign God conveys His grace according to His own good pleasure. As John Calvin put it, God “imparts spiritual things under visible ones.”

Baptism is a planting into the Christian Church, the covenant community which is the environment of grace. Baptism marks one as a child of God and is the beginning of the pilgrimage of faith. *Confession of faith* XXVIII, 6 speaks of the effectiveness of baptism

(the implication is clear that it is no bare symbol), but also teaches that the grace promised in baptism is not necessarily tied to the time it is administered. The waters of baptism coming upon a helpless infant is a beautiful picture of our salvation.

As baptism corresponds to the Old Testament rite of circumcision, so the Lord's Supper corresponds to the Old Testament Passover meal. In each case the first was a sacrament of initiation, and the second a continual (repeated) sacrament of spiritual nourishment.

Once again, though symbolism is involved, the Reformed faith insists that the Lord's Supper is much more. Revs. Gettys and Alexander rightly comment: "Christ gives Himself, the believer receives Him." We believe in the real presence of Christ in the sacrament. His presence is real in a spiritual and not corporeal (bodily) sense. The invoking of the Holy Spirit signifies that what takes place in the Sacraments is not of man's doing, but is done by the grace of God.

There is of course a proper order to the reception of the sacraments. Baptism, the sacrament of initiation, must precede the reception of the Lord's Supper just as circumcision was a prerequisite to the Passover meal (Exodus 12:48; Joshua 5:1-10). We also affirm that faith in Christ must precede the reception of the Lord's Supper. Thus our baptized children remain "non-communicant" until they profess faith in Christ and are received into the full fellowship of the church which includes access to Holy Communion.

It seems that our forefathers in the faith had higher views concerning the sacraments than do many in our churches today. There is no doubt that

modern rationalism has tended to strip the sacraments of anything supernatural and has turned them into mere moral lessons or something to think about. May God's people have their sights lifted higher!

“We utterly condemn the vanity of those who affirm the sacraments to be nothing else than naked and bare signs.”
—The Scottish Confession of Faith (1560)

“It (the Lord’s Supper) is a means of grace, appointed by Christ, in which believers are united with their crucified Lord, whose spiritual presence is found in and conveyed through this sacrament when it is received in faith.”
—The A.R.P. Book of Worship

CHAPTER IX

CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE

Read: Psalms 51:8-12; Psalms 89:31-32; Isaiah 54:7-10;
John 10: 28-29; John 14:16-17; Romans 5:1;
Romans 8:1; Romans 8:33-39; 1 Corinthians
11:32; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 7:25; 1 Peter 1:5;
2 Peter 1:10; 1 John 3:2; 1 John 5:13.

Confession of Faith: Chapters XVII, XVIII.
Larger Catechism: Questions 79-81.

The two chapters on the Perseverance of the Saints and Assurance of Grace and Salvation are closely linked. These do not refer to all professed believers, but to true believers in Christ only. They are described as those whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit. It is not said that they shall not fall away at all, but that they can neither “totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace.” Dr. Green calls attention to the fact that saints may and do fall from attainments in grace, but that they never fall out of the **state of grace**. Sometimes they fall into grievous sins, may continue in them for a time and suffer chastisement on account of them, yet they shall be saved. This is not because of man’s efforts, but because of what God does for those whom He has chosen.

The fact is that God is able to save His own. He completes what He begins. No one is able to snatch God’s people out of His hands. The Spirit who brought about their salvation, their acknowledgment of Christ as Saviour, is able to keep them from completely giving up their faith. Peter denied Christ, but he came back and became a leader. David fell into sin in the case of Bathsheba and Uriah, but he repented and was forgiven.

Acceptance of these facts by the believer will bring assurance of salvation. That is, one can be sure that he is saved by the grace of God. It is a fine thing that we do not have to be sure of it in order to be saved. Yet it is most comforting to have that assurance, and we should seek to make our calling and election sure. Those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus, love Him in sincerity, and endeavor in all good conscience to walk in His ways can be sure of salvation. That is because we can always trust God to fulfill His promises, and He has definitely promised to save those who meet those conditions, and gives us the Holy Spirit Who witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God.

It is possible, as has already been indicated, for the child of God to fall into sin under the temptation of Satan, on account of which God may withdraw the light of His countenance for a time, and thus the assurance may be shaken for a time. But such still believe in God and seek to once again walk in His way, because they are preserved by Him, and in time their assurance will return. In the meantime they continue to hope in God and do not utterly despair. A son continues to be a child of his father and cannot cease to be, even though he wander from home. The child adopted into God's family by faith in Christ is never disowned by the heavenly Father.

Thus the Christian, when asked if he is saved, should be able to say sincerely that he is saved.

This does not justify hypocrites and other unregenerate persons from saying that they are saved. This grace is for true believers only.

Questions

1. Who alone has a right to Christian Assurance?

2. Distinguish between “attainments in grace” and “the state of grace.”

3. What is the true basis of Christian Assurance?

Conversational Responses

Chapter Nine

This doctrine of the Christian's assurance of salvation is surely a pleasant one to discuss. Assurance is at the heart of genuine faith. It is a firm and certain knowledge of God's goodness to us founded on the truth of the freely given promise in Christ. This assurance is given and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Holy Scripture itself affirms that assurance is possible and it is related to a knowledge of God's promises in the Word. John writes: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

Under this heading of assurance, our study book summarizes chapters XVII and XVIII of the *Confession of Faith*. Because salvation is God's work from beginning to end (Philippians 1:6), the objects of His grace are secure. But this security never leads to license. Again, regeneration has its effects (its "marks") and the true saints of God persevere in good works as they grow in grace. Of course we stumble and fall often, but God's hand is upon his children and His Spirit is at work in them "to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). So in the big picture, the old adage that "time will tell" is true. If a snap shot were taken of any particular moment of the believer's life, he might indeed appear not to be a Christian at all. But because sanctification is an ongoing work of God's free grace, the endurance of the believer does not depend on his own will but on God's unchangeable decree of election.

The Holy Spirit is continually at work in the believer and Jesus Christ is constantly praying for His

own (Hebrews 7:25). God is conquering and will completely subdue all of our sins. The children of God finally persevere because they are preserved and kept by the power of God. All glory is His.

Because of this the believer enjoys assurance of his salvation. Holy Scripture and the *Confession of Faith* base this assurance upon nothing less than promises of God in His Word and the inner testimony of the Spirit. “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16).

In the Middle Ages some theologians wrongly taught that ordinarily the believer cannot have assurance. This they thought was a good thing, supposing that to be doubtful was spiritually profitable. But for the reformers like John Calvin, “gratitude” is put forth as the best motive for godly living. Assurance is at the heart of faith yet the Christian continues to struggle. But in our conflict our weapon is faith in Christ and in His strength there is no doubt. Our salvation does not depend upon us. Faith can be weak and struggling but as long as there *is* faith, it clings to the promise of God in Christ Jesus. Confidence remains at the core, though we may be in weakness. And so full assurance of salvation is not only a tremendous blessing, it is expected to come along with faith.

The *Confession of Faith* XVIII, 4 teaches that our own sin may shake assurance, but the Spirit revives assurance because faith itself is the Spirit’s work. When faith is genuine and properly understood, it includes assurance. This is because faith always looks away from oneself and to its object, our Savior Jesus Christ.

“The perseverance of faith flows from election. Both will and effort would immediately fail in us, were He not to add His gift of perseverance.” —John Calvin

“Therefore away with your sense and feeling, and go to the promise!”
—Thomas Hooker

CHAPTER X

DEATH AND AFTER

Read: Job 19:26-27; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Matthew 12:36; Matthew 24:36; Matthew 25:31-46; Mark 13:35; Luke 16:23-24; Luke 23:43; John 5:28-29; Acts 13:26; Acts 17:31; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Philippians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Hebrews 9:27; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 22:20.

Confession of Faith: Chapters XXXII-XXXIII.

Larger Catechism: Questions 84-90.

Shorter Catechism: Questions 37-38.

All men face death. We are told that it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment. Only those who are living when Christ returns shall not die but be changed.

Death is separation. Separation of the soul from the body we call death. Immediately upon death the soul of the person goes to its own place. The body begins to decay, being matter, and returns to dust. The soul neither dies nor sleeps. The soul of the believer goes at once into the very presence of God in heaven, where it awaits in happiness and glory the redemption of the body.

The soul of the unbeliever goes immediately to its place in hell where it remains in torment, reserved to the judgment of the great day. The Scriptures recognize no other place for the souls of the dead other than heaven and hell.

The bodies of believers remain in their graves and are still united to Christ. For them, death is a sleep of the body. In sleep, we expect to awake after a time. The body may turn again to dust but its identity in the sight of God is not lost. The bodies of

unbelievers also remain in the graves, awaiting the resurrection.

At the resurrection all the bodies of the dead shall be raised. "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." The bodies of believers shall be made like the glorious-resurrection body of Jesus, fitted for eternal living in heaven, a spiritual body. But it will be the same body that was buried. God Who made it is able to remake it and raise it to glory. Those living at that time shall not die, but they shall be changed. All the saved shall meet the Lord in the air, to be forever with the Lord.

There will be a general judgment in which the righteous will be openly acquitted and acknowledged, and made perfectly blessed to the full enjoying of God in heaven to all eternity. The wicked shall be condemned to eternal punishment, to remain in hell with the devil and his angels.

The day of Christ's coming is not known to any man. He has commanded all to be ready in order that all may be ready to meet Him. This should cause people to refrain from sin and to ever walk in His way.

There are many things concerning the return of Christ and related events about which Bible scholars differ. It is worthy of note that very little is said in the Standards about these matters. God will bring to pass His own plan. We should be ready to say, in response to His warning, "Surely I come quickly," "Even so come, Lord Jesus."

Questions

1. What is death?

2. What becomes of the believer's soul at death? Of the unbeliever's soul?

3. Is the resurrected body a real body?

4. Who alone knows the time of Christ's coming for the general judgment?

5. What will God do for believers at the resurrection?

Conversational Responses

Chapter Ten

Before the twentieth-century addition of chapters Thirty-four and Thirty-five to our *Confession of Faith*, the final two chapters concerned the matters of death, resurrection, and the last judgment. These form the basis for the overview in the final chapter of our study book.

By reason of the fall, all of us face death (Hebrews 9:27) except those alive at the return of our lord Jesus Christ. Until that glorious day, death entails a separation of body and soul. This is true of the believer and the unbeliever alike. At the moment of death the soul of the believer is immediately in the blissful glory of the very presence of the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). The souls of those not redeemed by the blood of Christ go immediately into the torment of hell. The Holy Scriptures and the Reformed faith deny any notions of so-called “soul sleep.”

On the last day there will be a general resurrection of all bodies, both of believers and unbelievers. Judgment concerns those decisions and actions done while in the body and therefore all bodies will be raised and reunited with the souls. Chapter XXXIII of the *Confession of Faith* is quite explicit about this general resurrection occurring on a certain “day” ordained by our Lord. Some modern systems of prophetic understanding put forth multiple judgment days for different groups of people, sometimes separated by periods of time. Not so the Reformed tradition as expressed in our *Confession*.

The final judgment serves as a vindication of the Lord’s righteousness. It also involves a final pronouncement that the wicked deserve to be in hell

and that the redeemed have had eternal victory won for them by Jesus Christ.

The twentieth-century has seen a rise in interest in prophetic themes among Christians, especially evangelical Christians. Different systems of thought abound. But our confessional standards have a relative simplicity about them in that Jesus returns, the great day of judgment takes place, and the eternal state is inaugurated. Rooted in this historic understanding, Reformed Christians generally have not been caught up in the sensationalism of modern prophetic systems and teachers.

Study groups might discuss other systems of prophetic understanding of which they are aware, and which differ from the Reformed understanding.

We know the future, God wins! And the victory is also ours in Jesus Christ our Lord!

“Therefore we expect that great day with a most ardent desire, to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.” —The Belgic Confession of Faith

“Then Christ the great Redeemer shall be most perfectly glorified. God the Father shall be glorified in Him, and the Holy Spirit shall most perfectly be glorified in the perfection of His work in the hearts of all the Church.”

—Jonathan Edwards

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