

## Westminster Confession of Faith: Session Thirty-Two

### WCF 31 – Of Synods and Councils

“Certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. ... [T]he apostles and elders came together to consider this matter” (Acts 15:1-2, 6 NKJV).

#### I. Introduction

#### II. WCF Chapter XXVI

##### a. Paragraph 1: Their Existence

“Divine Right” (*Jure Divino*) Presbyterianism  
Definition

*Esse* and *Bene Esse* (“Being” and “Well Being”)

Acts 15: The Jerusalem Council

American Revision: Magistrates Calling Assemblies?

##### b. Paragraph 2: Their Authority

Key Word: “Ministerially”

Authority of Councils Ministerial, Not Magisterial

Councils Have No Inherent Authority

Two Things Required for Church Councils

Duly Constituted Body

Consonance with Word of God

- c. *Paragraph 3: Their Fallibility*  
General and Particular = Regional and Local

The Only Rule of Faith and Practice

- d. *Paragraph 4: Their Limits*  
Church Government Distinct from Civil Magistrate (WCF 30.1)

Avenues of Addressing Civil Magistrate  
Petition

Advice

### **III. Conclusion**

#### **Helpful Resources**

Hodge, Archibald Alexander. *A Commentary on the Confession of Faith*. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1869; pp. 505-514.

Sproul, R. C. *Truths We Confess: A Systematic Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Revised Edition. Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2019; pp. 635-641.

Van Dixhoorn, Chad. *Confessing the Faith: A Reader's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014; pp. 409-422.

Witherow, Thomas. *The Apostolic Church: Which Is It?* Edinburgh: CrossReach Publications, 2020.