



**Puritan**  
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**Communicant Membership/Enquirers Class  
2021-2022**

by

Pastor Grant Van Leuven

*Lectures taught during Wednesday Prayer and Bible Studies*

## Week 1, September 1, 2021: The Work of the Westminster Assembly

### Introduction to the Class:

1. Doctrine of the Church (Membership):
  - a. Union in and with Christ: Romans 6:1-11 and Galatians 2:20
  - b. The Visible Church is a body and the Sacraments (with the reading and preaching of the Word) are its life focus: 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27; Ephesians 1:23; 4:4-5, 12, 15-16; Ps. 116:13-14, 17-19.
  - c. The focus of Church membership is expressed by the nourishment of the Sacraments, which affirm God's Covenant of Grace to its members: Baptism as the admittance into the Body, and the Lord's Supper as her spiritual sustenance (with the Word).
  - d. The Church is primarily spiritual, organic, familial: WCF 25:2, 4. WLC 62.
  - e. The Visible Church is where the Invisible Church is raised (Rom. 9:6; Rev. 12:1-5) and where Christ visibly rules. Membership is necessary to obey: Hebrews 13:7, 17.
  - f. See examples of certificates of church membership in Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:1, 11:28; Philemon 1-2, 16-17 (and a brief SermonAudio video interview by Rev. Alan Cairns as available on our website under "Duty Required", "Being the Church").
2. Goal of membership, yoking to visible church and its benefits: "communicant member": A youth, young adult, or adult who is baptized into a branch of the Visible Church and able to communicate and profess faith (at an appropriate level based on age and ability) and discern the body and blood of the Lord Jesus in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:29). This person has gone through the membership class with Pastor and has been examined and accepted by the elders as having a credible profession of faith and a life endeavoring after God. This person may partake of the Lord's Supper. If not baptized and raised a Christian, baptism will first be necessary as a sign of admittance to the church before communing.
3. Membership Vows/Queries (see attached).
4. Examination to review with elders (see attached).
5. Westminster Standards: focus of class
  - a. What's included: WCF and Larger and Shorter Catechisms (and Scripture references).
  - b. Review of pre-assigned reading on Confessionalism:
    - Pastor's letter on confessionalism
    - A.A. Hodge, "A Short History of Creeds and Confessions"
  - c. Review highlights of Barret Gritters and Pastor Burley enclosures
  - d. History of the Westminster Assembly/Unique men/Superiority:
    - Met 1643 to 1649 for England's Parliament during civil war: "An Ordinance of the Lords and Commons in Parliament for the calling of an Assembly of learned and godly divines and others, to be consulted with by the Parliament, for the settlement of the Government and Liturgy of the Church of England, and for the indicating and clearing of the doctrine of the said Church from false aspersions and interpretations."
    - "Divines" rested on the shoulders of the Early Church and Reformers of the 1500s.



- Not including all the committee work (where the main work was done), there were 1,163 sessions of the Assembly from July 1643 to February 22, 1649 during which the standards were produced to be printed, after which the Assembly met “some three years more of irregular life, acting as a committee for the examination of appointees to charges and applicants for licensure to preach. It ultimately vanished with the famous ‘Long Parliament’ to which it owed its being. The last entry in its Minutes is dated March 25, 1652.”<sup>1</sup> Notice the care of Parliament to get the “cream of the crop” representing all of England: “The names of suitable ministers to sit in it were canvassed; selection was made of two divines from each English and one from each Welsh county, two from the Channel Islands and from each University, and four from London.”<sup>2</sup> As well, their work was so thorough that the original task of revising the Church of England’s Thirty-nine Articles was abandoned for something better.
- Never adopted by Church of England (although commissioned in England). Accepted by Church of Scotland and used by most Presbyterian churches throughout the world. The historical context was Civil War, aiming to unite England, Scotland, and Ireland.
- Five Scottish Presbyterian commissioners (Robert Baillie, 1602-1662; George Gillespie, 1613-1648; Alexander Henderson, c.1583-1646); Samuel Rutherford, c. 1600-1661) along with some Scottish elders attending. They had a huge influence.
- B.B. Warfield wrote that the Westminster Confession “exists to-day in some seventeen languages and is professed by perhaps a more numerous body than any other Protestant creed.”<sup>3</sup> Further, “The amount of time consumed directly on the preparation of the Confession of Faith was certainly very great ... in framing the very language of the Confession, regard was had to the *minutiae* of the work done ...”<sup>4</sup> Further, it was the work of “three large Committees into which the Assembly [at least 40 men] was permanently divided for the preparing of its business.”<sup>5</sup> He later adds, “time, pains, and scrupulous care were not spared for perfecting the instrument.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, “The Westminster Assembly And Its Work”, “First Article”, in *The Westminster Assembly And Its Work*, Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981) , 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Warfield, “The Westminster Assembly And Its Work”, “Second Article”, 61.

<sup>4</sup> Warfield, “The Making of the Confession”, in *The Westminster Assembly And Its Work*, 76-77.

<sup>5</sup> Warfield, Ibid, 88. He cites Baillie: if there were fewer than forty in the Assembly, there was no meeting. 119.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 96. He gives an example describing the work alone put into carefully getting things precise on the chapter, “Of God’s Eternal Decree”: “... the text of the third chapter occupied the attention of the Assembly some part of at least twenty separate days, besides all the time given to it in the various Committees through whose hands it or parts of it passed. The proof-texts similarly occupied the Assembly on some parts of at least four days in addition to the care given to them in Committee. It would not be excessive to say, in a word, that a good portion of a month’s public labor was given to this chapter by the Assembly; and certainly much more than this was expended on it by its Committees ... the real work of creating the chapter was of course done in Committee; and the chapter as finally passed by the Assembly is obviously substantially what in the first instance was reported by the Committee. The notes of debate are sufficient to certify us of that natural and almost inevitable fact. But they also certify us that it was not passed by the Assembly without the most careful scrutiny or without many adjustments and alterations, so that as passed it represents clearly the deliberate and reasoned judgment of the Assembly as a whole.” 123. The first debate of chapter three, for instance, was on the exact wording of the title alone! 124, 125. See his chapter on the process of printing the Westminster Confession, pp. 337-376.

- Gordon H. Clark: “On one occasion I gave a series of theological lectures for the congregation of a brother minister. After one service when most of the people had gone home, one of the women with the pastor remained for conversation. Going beyond the limits of the lecture I continued by arguing that the phrase, ‘He descended into hell,’ might well be omitted from the Apostles’ Creed. True, I had no conscientious reason for not using it, for Christ did indeed suffer the pains of hell for our redemption. But because of the real danger of fanciful interpretations of I Peter 3:19, I thought the omission might be wise. The woman resisted this line of argument with a determination that at first puzzled me. I finally came to understand when she very politely undertook to give me a gentle rebuke. **When a group of the most learned and devout Christian scholars, she said, give careful consideration to the formulation of a Creed, it borders on rashness to attempt alterations. The woman’s statement is highly commendable, particularly in the present century when creeds are held in little honor.** But unfortunately this woman did not know that the Apostles’ Creed was not the result of learned discussion.” [in *What Presbyterians Believe: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1956) , 1. Leading to his point of honoring the work of the Westminster Assembly and what they bequeathed to us, while noting his own careful and deliberate study in juxtaposition to that of the woman previously referenced, he goes on to humbly compare himself with a Westminster Divine: “ ... when I read *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming* by George Gillespie, and some other works by that remarkable young man, I could only lower my eyes from heaven to earth, smite on my breast, and cry, God be merciful to me an ignoramus.” (2). He continues, “After the deep abyss of Romish ignorance and superstition there came a great discovery of God’s truth in the sixteenth century. At an astounding rate new knowledge of the divine revelation was discovered by the leaders and taught to the populace. The culmination of those times of refreshing is enshrined in the Westminster Confession.” (2).
- "For those of us who believe the Bible, the [Westminster] Confession can supply an invaluable introduction to its main doctrines. Growth in grace will follow upon a careful study of the Confession as we compare its statements with the Biblical passages which it combines and summarizes. Let us not neglect this excellent document ... any communicant member who neglects the Confession is thereby deprived of the best brief guidebook to an understanding of the Bible." -- Gordon H. Clark, *What Presbyterians Believe*
- “The Westminster Confession is no abbreviated creed written by men of abbreviated faith. On the contrary it is the nearest approach men have yet made to a full statement of the whole counsel of God which Paul did not fail to declare. The Westminster divines were the best Biblical scholars of their time and as a group have not been surpassed since. For a full five years or more they labored unremittingly to formulate their summary of what the Bible teaches.”<sup>7</sup>
- "This is what I have found the Standards to be, a guided tour through the far reaches of heaven ... Find whatever time each day you can spend taking this guided tour of heaven by the Westminster Divines as contained in the Larger Catechism, and make that a mandatory part of each and every day ... I think we can find a direct correlation between the condition of the home, church, and government to the emphasis the

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<sup>7</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *God’s Hammer: The Bible And Its Critics* (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1987) , 196-197.

church and individuals place on teaching these precepts (The Westminster Catechisms) to the children in their care." -- Chuck Baynard, *Commentary on the Westminster Larger Catechism*, Volume 2.

- "The Westminster Confession and Catechisms are ... the mature fruit of the whole movement of creed-formation throughout fifteen centuries of Christian history, and, in particular, they are the crown of the greatest age of confessional exposition, the Protestant Reformation. No other similar documents have concentrated in them, and formulated with such precision, so much of the truth embodied in the Christian revelation." John Murray, *Collected Writings: The Claims of Truth*, Vol. 1: ("A Notable Tercentenary", 313)
- "The amount of work and time expended on the Confession of Faith will stagger us in these days of haste and alleged activism. But the influence exerted all over the world by the Confession can only be understood in the light of the diligent care and prayerful devotion exercised in its composition." (Murray, "The Importance and Relevance of the Westminster Confession", 316-317)
- "The Westminster Assembly of Divines, representing all parties of English Protestantism ... sat for about seven years, during which time 1163 sessions were held. Ample time was taken for the unhurried and thorough investigation and discussion of the matters under consideration. There was a patient and painstaking effort to ascertain the real sense of the Scriptures on these matters. No doubt the Assembly's work, for industry, patience, thoroughness and whole-hearted devotion to the Word of God, has never since been paralleled." – J. G. Vos, *The Visible Church: Its Nature, Unity and Witness*
- For example, the work on the Larger Catechism "... would last nearly eleven months and dominate activity for 136 of the next 187 sessions" (John R. Bower, *The Larger Catechism: A Critical Text and Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010): 16). On their work on the Ten Commandments, "... the Assembly approved the appointment of eleven subcommittees, one for each commandment and one for laying down general rules." (Ibid, 33). "Debate over the Larger Catechism's proof-texts extended from November 30, 1647 to March 6, 1648" (Ibid, 43).
- "The great work of building up a corporate witness to the truth has already been done [in the Westminster Standards]; it stands today in the Reformed creeds, not indeed as infallible, nor as complete in every element nor in detail, but as substantially complete. In its main outlines and in all its principle features, this work has been done for all time, and can never be improved upon." – J. G. Vos, Ibid.
- We are a confessional church (Westminster Standards our confession).
- David Engelsma: "To be Reformed is to be confessional."<sup>8</sup>

**Confessions of the Reformation:** <http://www.rcus.org/index.php/doctrine/standards/173-confessions-important>)

*A confession is similar to a creed. It is also biblical term (homologia), and means that we "say the same thing" or affirm a statement that has previously been made. The pattern of confession is provided by Christ Himself, who witnessed a good confession before Pilate that He was the Christ and the King (1 Tim. 6:13, Mk. 15:13, Jn. 18:36–37). The first great confession in the New Testament was made by Peter in answer to Christ's question, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"*

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<sup>8</sup> David Engelsma, *Bound to Join: Letters on Church Membership* (Jenison, Mich.: Reformed Free Publishing Assoc., 2010), 1.

*Peter's affirmation focused on the Person of Jesus Christ: He is the Messiah and the Son of the living God (cf. 1 Jn. 4:15, 2 Jn. 7).*

*It is our duty not only to believe as a personal act before God, but to verbally confess this before men (Matt. 10:32, Lk. 12:8, Rom. 10:9). A confession of faith means to declare publicly before many witnesses that an individual or a congregation pledges allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord ... it is a covenant commitment to follow Him. In it, a person is willing to state what he believes, even if it means suffering persecution (Matt. 10:32–39, Jn. 9:22, 12:42) ...*

#### Necessity of Creeds and Confessions

*Some question whether a creed, confession, or catechism is necessary. Is it not sufficient, they say, to just believe the Bible and have “no creed but Christ”? Although this seems laudable, Christ exhorts us, “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32–33, Lk. 12:8–9). Paul elaborates further when he connects faith and confession: “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9–10). The Scriptures give us both the warrant and even the duty to confess our faith publicly before men.*

*Some say that they have no creed or confession. But whenever they state what they understand the Bible to teach, they are in fact making a confession. Many immature Christians are deceived by such rhetoric and are “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Eph. 4:14).*

*As our culture embraces post-modern views we see the wholesale rejection of truth itself. There are those who hide under the cover of ambiguity, while either continually modifying their opinions, or secretly embracing heretical opinions. Their real objection to confessions is an unwillingness to submit to any ecclesiastical authority. They will not commit themselves to a theological tradition which maintains historic biblical orthodoxy [making themselves and their conscious their Lord].*

6. PRPC distinctions: superiority of KJV, denial of common grace/well-meant offer, denial of analogical truth, Presbyterian government, *a capella* psalmody/regulative principle, etc.
7. Use this as an opportunity to answer nagging or new questions. And to be stretched/to grow.
8. Plan/requirements:
  - a. Reading assignment each week of WCF and corresponding Larger and Shorter Catechisms with their Scripture references. Take notes on reading, keep in 3-ring binder and sign each week that you have done the reading and by what date completed. Suggestion: start early in week, use as daily devotions.
  - b. We will discuss the reading each week, pastor will highlight important emphases and weave in church history/PRPC distinctives relevant for each section in lecture format.
  - c. Absences: If you miss, you can make it up with a personal class with pastor.
  - d. All classes must be attended (or made up). All readings should be completed in advance of each class and must be before joining. Some extra articles will be assigned on certain topics as required reading. Some books and articles will be suggested.
9. Membership Process:
  - a. Pastor will begin a 6-month membership class during Sabbath School.

- b. Those who wish to become communicant members at the end of the class will take a brief quiz (see attached) to demonstrate a basic knowledge from the class and agreement in the essentials of the faith. This will serve as a guide in talking with Session. It is take-home, open book/notes, and you can call Pastor for help. Feel free to fill it out as we go along.
- c. Those who wish to become members will meet with Session (including Pastor) to share their testimony, share their faith, discuss the quiz and their beliefs, and share feedback and ask any questions they may have (not answered from class).
- d. In a morning worship service, those who are approved and welcomed to become members will do so by answering a brief series of membership queries from Pastor before the congregation and welcomed into formal fellowship, life, and membership with all its benefits of this Church. The queries (to which answers of “yes” will be required) will serve as the person’s public testimony of faith, vows to God, and oaths to the Church.

**Assigned Readings for Next Week, Wednesday, September 8, 2021:**

- Read in your WCF before the WCF:
  - 1) “Forward”;
  - 2) “To The Christian Reader, Especially Heads of Families”;
  - 3) “Mr. Thomas Manton's Epistle to the Reader”;
  - 4) “An Ordinance of the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament”. 1643;
  - 5) “Assembly at Edinburgh, Aug 19, 1643”;
  - 6) “Assembly at Edinburgh, August 27, 1647”;
  - 7) “Act anent the Catechisms, Confession of Faith, and Ratification thereof. At Edinburgh, February 7, 1649”;
  - 8) “Ratifying the Confession of Faith, and settling Presbyterian Church Government ACT 7th June 1690.”

**Suggested Readings (most on our website under “Practice: Duties God Requires”):**

- Article by Pastor, “Thomas Watson on Being Doctrinally Settled Christians.
- [http://www.pcanet.org/general/cof\\_origin.htm](http://www.pcanet.org/general/cof_origin.htm) (“The Origin and Formation of the Westminster Confession of Faith”)
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westminster\\_Confession\\_of\\_Faith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westminster_Confession_of_Faith)
- [Membership Matters](#) — Alistair Begg
- [Church Membership: Is It Biblical?](#) — Phillip Kayser
- [Church Membership: Why Bother?](#) — Adam Parker
- [A Living and Legally-Binding Relationship](#) — Mark Johnston
- [Is Church Membership Biblical? \(VIDEO\)](#) — Alan Cairns (Please note, Rev. Cairns alludes to but does not cite Scripture references; please see the following: [Acts 18:27](#); [Romans 16:1-2](#); [2 Corinthians 3:1, 11:28](#); [Philemon 1-2, 16-17](#); [Hebrews 13:7, 17.](#))
- [Belonging Part 1B \(AUDIO\)](#) — Alistair Begg
- [Belong to the Church \(The Mother of Christ and His Seed\) \(AUDIO\) Lecture on Revelation 12:1-6](#) — Grant Van Leuven
- [Built upon the Rock: A Study of the Doctrine of the Church](#) — Richard Bacon and Gary Crampton
- [Is Church Membership Optional?](#) — Stephen Pribble
- [Message to the Great Oxymoronic Class of Churchless Believers: Church Membership Matters!](#) — Neil Stewart
- *The Creedal Imperative*, Carl R. Trueman