

## Week 33, Wednesday, September 28, 2022: Final Class. Congratulations!

1. Membership exam:
  - a. Remember this document is to serve as a guide for discussion with Session during a review toward you possibly becoming a communicant member. The exam is take-home, open notes, open book, open internet, etc. (and open phone – call Pastor for answers if you have any questions). There are a few questions that carried over from earlier membership exams with an earlier pastor that were not touched upon in this class directly (ask for help any time you need it).
  - b. In the exam, you will need to sign that you have completed *all* assignments (reading in full the WCF, WLC, WSC, and all their Scripture proofs – it’s OK to skip repetitions in the catechisms already given in the Confession per grouped assignments—along with any pre-assigned articles or videos each week) and that you have attended all classes. Whatever classes you have missed must have been made up with Pastor or via the SermonAudio posts (audio and pdf) before being received into membership; then you must also sign that you have listened to all 32 of the class’s MP3 audio lecture files while reading along with all their corresponding class notes completely. When you take your membership vows as agreeing to query number 4, these signatures will be understood to be behind it (please take seriously what you learned about the solemnity of oaths and vows and truth telling in WCF chapter 22).
  - c. Please return your exam to Pastor within a week so that Session can review them in advance of meeting with you. This document helps us make sure you have a general understanding and commitment to the basics, and allows you to express any uncertainties or disagreements that could exist so we can talk about them. The goal of this review is that we can agree together to welcome you into formal fellowship under Session’s oversight with the Puritan Reformed Presbyterian Church (or if already a baptized member, to begin taking communion). It is not anticipated to be a lengthy visit, but it can be if you need it to be.
2. Review Membership Queries (given at the beginning of class). During a worship service, you will be received into membership or “graduate” to communicant membership (if a baptized member) by taking these vows before the congregation who also will be responding in standards congregational vows of commitment to you (guided by the OPC Blackbook ceremony language), led by Pastor and the Elders, and sign the vows. You will be given a certificate of communicant membership signed by all the Elders.
3. Discuss LC and SC questions assigned for this week, if any.
4. Quotes on why to become a church member: “The Bible commands, ‘Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves.’ [Hebrews 13:17] This does not mean to obey in some vague way, simply giving lip service. You cannot obey those empowered to rule in Christ’s church if you never join. You simply cannot submit to the church’s lawfully-constituted leadership unless you become a member. You could never be *excommunicated* if you had never been a *communicant* member to begin with ... Is church membership optional? For the Christian, who is obligated to live his life according to every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, it is only necessary to determine: Does God’s Word require it or not? What does our text say? “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves.” That is pretty clear, isn’t it? There is no getting around the fact that the disciple of Jesus Christ is under solemn obligation to submit obediently to the lawful authority of Christ’s church ...” – Stephen Pribble, Southfield RPC: <http://www.reformed.com/publications/ischurchmembershiptoptional.php>

5. The Westminster Confession. Your confession of faith and life in and for Christ. May your copy be well worn over time to live the kind of life that will “turn the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).
  - a. “Truth does not change. And advance in acquiring more of the truth of God does not come by disregard for, or contradiction of, that which the Lord has taught his Church in the past. If there is to be a new day of advance, in which the Church will again recover genuine zeal and faithfulness, we believe it must be brought about by raising up the banner of truth that is expressed in the Confession. It will not be to a lesser Gospel than this Confession expresses that we can look for glorious conquest and victory. The need of the hour is not for new creeds—or still worse, no creeds—but rather, to recover the faith of our fathers as it is so wonderfully set forth in this statement of faith—the greatest of all Christian creeds.” – G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes*, 267.
  - b. “... when the Reformers preached the complete Biblical message in all its detail and with the greatest possible clarity, God granted the world its greatest spiritual awakening since the days of the apostles. May we not similarly expect astonishing blessings if we return with enthusiasm to all the doctrines of the Westminster Confession.” – Gordon H. Clark, “The Reformed Faith and the Westminster Confession”, in *What Presbyterians Believe*, 130.
  
6. Answers to questions asked during a previous membership class included here for reference:
  - a. What does “ye are gods” mean? John 10:31-36 (particularly vss. 34-35). Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6 to make a point. John Calvin gives a helpful explanation:
    - **“Is it not written in your Law?** He clears himself of the crime charged against him, not by denying that he is the Son of God, but by maintaining that he had justly said so ... The argument which he employs is not drawn from equals, but from the less to the greater.
    - **I said, You are gods.** Scripture gives the name of gods to those on whom God has conferred an honorable office. He whom God has separated, to be distinguished above all others, is far more worthy of this honorable title. Hence it follows, that they are malicious and false expounders of Scripture, who admit the first, but take offense at the second.
    - The passage which Christ quotes is in Ps 82:6, I have said, You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High; where God expostulates with the kings and judges of the earth, who tyrannically abuse their authority and power for their own sinful passions, for oppressing the poor, and for every evil action. He reproaches them that, unmindful of Him from whom they received so great dignity, they profane the name of God. Christ applies this to the case in hand ...”
    - Notice that Jesus knew His Word very well, and how prominent the Psalms are in the NT.
  - b. James and Acts 15:20 about not eating things strangled or with blood (is the Ceremonial Law still binding?). Following is a helpful summary explanation from [www.gci.org/acts/decreed2](http://www.gci.org/acts/decreed2):
    - Gentiles without a synagogue background were coming into the church—a situation significantly different than that faced in Acts 10. Their single greatest instructional need would be to avoid paganism or syncretism.
    - The decree lists four things demonstrably associated with pagan cults as well as with Jewish sensitivities. The words have other associations, too, but pagan cultic associations are a viable option ...
    - The decree is given in answer to people who taught that gentiles had to keep the law of Moses. This implies that the decree is not based on the law of Moses. It does not perpetuate ritualistic laws for either Jews or gentiles.
    - This theory explains why all gentiles needed to comply with the decree, whether they lived near Jews or not, and why there was no decree for Jewish Christians.

c. How do our bodies, after years of decomposition into almost nothing recognizable (or in some cases having been burned to ashes or rotten away or eaten by fishes in the sea) be brought back together to be raised?

We turn to Thomas Watson in his *Body of Divinity* (306-307) to answer:

*“But some say, as the Virgin Mary to the angel, ‘How can this be?’ How can it be, that the body, which is consumed to ashes, should rise again?”*

“It does not oppose reason, but transcends it. There are some resemblances of the resurrection in nature. The corn, which is sown in the ground, dies before it springs up. ‘That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die.’ I Cor xv 36. In winter the fruits of the earth die: in spring there is a resurrection of them. Noah’s olive-tree springing after the flood, was a lively emblem of the resurrection. After the passion of our Lord, many of the saints which slept in the grave arose. Matt xxvii 52. God can more easily raise the body out of the grave, than we can wake a man out of sleep.” Revisit 1 Cor. 15:35-58, which seems to mainly be addressing this question. See also Gen. 2:7; 3:19; 18:27; Job 30:19; Eccl. 3:20; Matt. 6:19-21.

*“But when the dust of many are mingled together; how is it possible that a separation should be made and the same numerical body arise?”*

“If we believe God can create, why not distinguish the dust of one body from another? Do we not see that the chemist, out of several metals mingled together, as gold, silver, alchymy, can extract one from the other, the silver from the gold, the alchymy from silver, and can reduce every metal to its own kind? And shall we not much more believe, that when our bodies are mingled and confounded with other substances, the wise God is able to reinvest every soul with its own body?”

Further, this miraculous reality will be another magnification of God’s mighty majesty in His ability to conquer death and all its consequences. Another helpful text to review would be Ezekiel 37:1-14.

Appendix: Other excerpts from J.V. Fesko, *History and Theology of the Westminster Standards*:

“Preface”:

- “... the Westminster Standards form the core of the Savoy Declaration (1658) and the Second London Confession (1689), the Congregational and Reformed Baptist versions of the Confession ..” (13)

“Introduction”:

- (combine with comment from FCSC American Presbytery on what is not said also important to note): “Confessions of faith were typically written to define truth and fence off heterodoxy and heresy while allowing a degree of doctrinal latitude within the boundaries of the confession ... the Westminster Confession is equally silent about a number of other teachings, which typically were viewed as issues of doctrinal liberty—issues upon which theologians could disagree but still be within the bounds of confessional orthodoxy. In the debates over God’s decree, for example, and the composition of the Confession’s third chapter, one of the divines, George Gillespie (1613-1648), wanted the assembly to compose certain phrases in such a manner that ‘everyone may enjoy his owne sence.’” (28)

“The Historical and Theological Context”:

- “... the authors sometimes heard cannon fire in the background as they debated doctrine; they were writing their confession and catechisms in the midst of civil war.” (33)

- “The St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre, the Marian persecution of Protestants in England, and the Spanish Inquisition (1480-1834) would be recalled, recounted, and seared into the collective memories of Protestants across Europe for generations to come and, as such, set the broader context for Reformed-Roman Catholic conflict in England, which played a part in creating the Westminster Assembly.” (41)
- “The events of the failed Spanish invasion and the Gunpowder Plot also echoed in the theological literature of the period and weighed heavily on the minds of a number of the Westminster Divines.” (46) – give example with M. Henry’s reference in his sermon against RC a hundred years later.
- “To say the least, Roman Catholicism was not merely an ideology or something to be debated over coffee, but a threat both to the church and to national security, according to many Reformed theologians of the period.” (47)
- “... during the assembly’s most productive years, 1643-1647, when it produced the Confession and catechisms—the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) raged on the Continent.” (47)
- “The Westminster divines ... lived under the long shadow and threat of Roman Catholicism.” (48)
- “The straw that broke the proverbial camel’s back and started a chain reaction that would eventually lead to the civil war and the formation of the Westminster Assembly was the effort of Charles and Laud to impose Anglican worship upon Presbyterian Scotland.” (50)
- “The National Covenant bound its signatories to propagate and defend the Reformed faith ‘all the days of our life.’ ... as was the case in early modernity, declarations of theological war were tantamount to declarations of war *simpliciter*—there was no separation of church and state. For the church to reject the authority of the state in theological matters was tantamount to treason, and naturally Charles perceived the National Covenant in precisely this manner. So he called upon his noblemen and lords to raise an army and march on Scotland, and the Scots responded in kind by raising an army of their own.” (51)
- “... Long Parliament ... 1640-1660 ... sought to restrict the king’s power so that he could not impose Roman Catholic worship upon England.” (52)
- “... civil war ensued. The king departed London with 236 royalist MPs in his wake, which left 302 members of Parliament in the capital ... Charles made an alliance with the Roman Catholics of Ireland ... Parliament ... reached out to the Scots in the North, who had one of the most effective armies in the British Isles. In so doing, Parliament signed the Solemn League and Covenant (1643) with Scotland. To be clear, the messiness of the situation is best captured by Robert Baillie’s (1602-1662) famous characterization of this alliance: ‘The English were for a civill Leage, we for a religious Covenant.’ ... The Solemn League and Covenant was written to promote and bind its signatories to the reformation and defense of religion in the three kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland.” (53)
- “The covenant and the pursuit of reformation in the three kingdoms laid the blueprint for the Westminster Standards and its attending documents, such as the Form of Government and Directory for Public Worship. To that end, Parliament called the Westminster Assembly, which at first was tasked with revising the Thirty-Nine Articles, but was later given the responsibility to write a new confession of faith, catechisms, and attending documents. To ensure that the assembly would stay on course, the Scots sent six representatives to serve as advisors to the assembly. The differences and interests of the parties surfaced in the origins of each set of representatives—the English divines were called and authorized by Parliament; the Scottish divines were commissioned and authorized by the Kirk of Scotland.” (54)
- “... early modern England ... was a hotbed of religious pluralism that included but was not limited to Arminians, Anabaptists, antinomians, enthusiasts, Erastians, Familists, Brownists,

Papists, Quakers, Socians, and the like ... plurality of streams of theological influence ... flowed into the Westminster Assembly.” (55)

- “... the theological conversation was broad and was carried across a number of historical, theological, geographical, and generational boundaries.” (58)
- “... though the assembly was a decidedly English event, it was by no means a theological island. The assembly had numerous streams of influence that must be taken into account: its broader reading habits, connection to other Reformed churches on the Continent, interaction with other Reformed confessions and catechisms, as well as the education of a number of its members at Cambridge and Oxford. Any attempt to skip over this all-important theological historical context or to anchor the assembly’s theology to one source, such as Calvin, is likely to distort the meaning of the Standards.” (63)
- “... some of the Confession’s cryptic statements.” (63)
- “... the Confessions sobriety at many points ...”
- “The Confession and catechisms are marked by a great deal of circumspection.” (63)
- “They represent the very best of the doctrine, government, and worship of the Reformed churches.” (63)

“The Doctrine of Scripture” (Ch. 1):

- “One of the most immediate influences upon the Confession ... was the Irish Articles (1615) ... “Confessions were not written in a vacuum or in isolation from other confessional documents ... The corpus of Reformed symbols, therefore, is crucial to historical contextualization.” (67)
- “... the divines were not myopic in their exegetical and theological labors; they consulted a wide spectrum of sources in the construction of their theological convictions.” (92-93).
- “... Reformed theologians did not completely eliminate all reference to tradition; rather, they engaged with and employed it critically in the construction of their theology .. They were learned men of letters with a broad knowledge base that they regularly employed in the exegesis and exposition of Scripture.” (93)

“Conclusion”:

- “Historical context is all-determinative for understanding the theology contained in the Westminster Standards. As helpful and necessary as popular commentaries on the Standards are, a contextually sensitive reading of the documents must first be established.” (395)
- “The Westminster divines were not only profoundly learned men, but also Reformed Catholics. They culled insights from a broad spectrum of sources, including Patristic, medieval, Roman Catholic, Remonstrant, Rabbinic, philosophical, and Reformed authors.” (395).