

Essentials of the Christian Faith: Covenant Doctrine and Life

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Foreword

This material is designed to provide an understanding of the Scriptures with help from the confessions of the Reformed family of churches and has been designed to aid the student in preparation for public profession of faith. This material is not a replacement for the Westminster confession of faith, the Westminster larger catechism, the Westminster shorter catechism, the Heidelberg catechism, the Belgic confession of faith, or of the Canons of Dort. The purpose of this training material is two-fold:

- To show how the Reformed confessions understand Christ and His work from the Scriptures
- To instill in the student a love for Reformed doctrine and practice.

The faith of our fathers has been costly and remains precious. Our forefathers at various times sealed their faith with their blood. Truth has a high price. The essence of preparation for public profession of faith lies in the realization and profession that Christ's relationship with us is more precious than life itself, and to deny Christ is to deny life. Let the diligent student take note of the words that adorn the BC¹:

During the sixteenth century the churches [of the Netherlands] were exposed to the most terrible persecution by the Roman Catholic government. To protest against this cruel oppression, and to prove to the persecutors that the adherents of the Reformed faith were not rebels, as was laid to their charge, but law-abiding citizens who professed the true Christian doctrine according to the Holy Scriptures, Guido de Bräs prepared this confession in the year 1561. In the following year a copy was sent to King Philip II, together with an address in which the petitioners declared that they were ready to obey the government in all lawful things, but that they would "offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire," rather than deny the truth expressed in this confession. Although the immediate purpose of securing freedom from persecution was not attained, and de Bräs himself fell as one of the many thousands who sealed their faith with their lives, his work has endured and will continue to endure.

The day may soon come again that saints may be called upon to defend the honor of Christ against opposition. May the student take note that the public profession of faith is a most serious, sincere and precious ongoing process in the lives of those who declare that they shall at all cost follow in the footsteps of the martyrs if called upon in obedience to Him who redeemed and elevated His people to a place of eternal privilege. May this resource material help the serious student to grasp hold with vigilance the only way to eternal happiness.

Notes and disclaimer: The questions and answers at the end of each lesson used herein has been derived from "Essentials of Reformed Doctrine", by Rev. H. Hoeksema and as revised by Prof. H. Hanko, of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America. These resources have been adopted and edited for use within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The material comprising this document has been sourced from a diverse range of original authors. Where possible attribution is given, however in presenting this content it is in no manner implied that the original authors held the particular points of view presented herein, nor is the endorsement of these diverse authors implied or assumed.

1 The Belgic Confession of Faith, <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/belgic-confession>

Introduction

This material was originally assembled as resource and training guide for candidates wishing to make a public profession of faith. The candidates had grown up within the Reformed faith as non-communicant members of Christ's church. A non-communicant member is a covenant member of Christ's church. This requires being baptized (generally as a child), growing up within the pale of the church, and receiving instruction from the Holy Scriptures. When a non-communicant seeks to be admitted to full communion in the church a public profession of faith is made.

The Directory for Worship (DFW), part of the Book of Church Order (BCO) of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), 2015 Edition, Section IV: *Public Reception of Church Members* (Pages 156-166) sets out the requirements for reception of communicant members of the church of Jesus Christ. The requirements for reception of baptized covenant children (Noncommunicant members) are set out per DFW IV:B, and those who profess their faith shall answer the 5 questions set out in DFW IV:B.2. Equivalent questions may be asked by the Session. Those making profession shall give assent to all questions asked. So that this profession may be made with integrity, in sincerity, the DFW IV:A.2 sets out the requirement to conduct classes in Christian doctrine and life. These are summarized here:

(1) Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?

(2) Do you believe in one living and true God, in whom eternally there are three distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—who are the same in being and equal in power and glory, and that Jesus Christ is God the Son, come in the flesh?

(3) Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, that you repent of your sin, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?

(4) Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord, and do you promise that, in reliance on the grace of God, you will serve him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?

(5) Do you promise to participate faithfully in this church's worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline, even in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life?

It is generally understood within the OPC that non-communicant members shall have received instruction and nurture in the faith. This manuscript systematically explains the essential tenets of the Christian faith as seen and taught from a Reformed perspective. Many ask the question, “*Why teach the catechism(s)?*” There are three good reasons to do this:

- a) To provide a concise summary and overview of doctrine and teaching within the OPC,
- b) To help believers grow in the grace and knowledge of God,
- c) To provide a key resource to help counter heresy and error,

Without doubt the Bible is sufficient to inform the believer of all that is necessary to be saved, and to walk according to the true faith. The Reformed confessions provide a systematic roadmap through the Scriptures. The confessional standards warn and inform the believer of errors that have been introduced into various churches. All error is dangerous and may lead the believer away from the truth. The creeds of the Christian church together with the confessions help to guard the visible church from error.

The reward of diligent study of God's Word is an ability to better defend the faith, while being constantly reminded of the great works that God has done throughout the history of the Church. Diligent study of the Scriptures strengthens the believer and imparts greater resistance to the temptation to sin. A clear and systematic understanding of the Scriptures imparts to the believer a world-view that is quite unlike that of the unbeliever. A worldview that is centered on Jesus Christ and the work He completed on behalf of His chosen people.

It is our desire that this manuscript will help the reader to articulate, explain, and defend the Reformed faith against error. We respectfully point to examples of error as including the teaching of: Arminianism, Dispensationalism (popular in non-Reformed churches today), and sectarianism (such as taught in the Seventh Day Adventist church, Churches of Christ, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons.)

The genius of the Westminster larger and shorter catechisms, as well as the Heidelberg catechism, lies in the simple questions, straight forward answers, and in the scripture references that establish each assertion made in those answers. All three cover the essence of the Scriptures in the ten commandments, the creeds of the Church, and the Lord's prayer. All three provide a template for a Christian walk in covenantal faithfulness. Nothing can surpass the rich doctrinal knowledge that is taught in the catechisms and the confessions of the Reformed faith. No principle or doctrine therein should be taken to heart without first apprehending its origin from the Scriptures.

Only God's word, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is said to create faith (Romans 10:14-17); only God's word, proclaimed faithfully, is called the "*seed of regeneration*" (1 Peter 1:23-25). Only God's word is called the "*sword of the Spirit*" (Ephesians 6:17) and is described as "*sharper than any double-edged sword*" as a living and active power to lay bare the secrets of the heart (Hebrews 4:12-14). Only God's living and faith-giving word can be the foundation upon which evangelism (literally, the work of explaining the gospel – the good news) is built; only it is the source knowledge and possesses the power to convert³ sinners. The Word of God is the light of men, for by it we must learn to walk as citizens of a heavenly kingdom while all the time showing the glory of the risen King as we work and walk until He comes again.

Many in America today view church as an optional human invention⁴. The practice of *church hopping* demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of Christ's church. It is spiritually invigorating to shape the faith of Christ's disciples in the understanding that the church is the living body of Jesus Christ, which He is gathering by His Word and Spirit, and which He is equipping with His gifts to accomplish His mission on earth.

Remarks regarding use of this document:

All who read or study this document are urged to read the introductory comments to each chapter only as commentary upon the questions and answers section. Please study the questions and answers with particular reference to the scripture references that have been provided.

Where reference is provided to the confessional standards of the Reformed churches, you are strongly encouraged to read those references and to check the scripture citations each is based on. Please satisfy yourself that the scriptures cited to support the assertions made in the confessional standards have been used in their proper context.

Those who make a public profession of faith in Reformed and Presbyterian churches are expected to own their profession as fully comporting with, and faithfully representing the Word of God.

2 Regeneration, Rev. G.R. Procee, FRCNA, <http://frcna.org/component/k2/item/8607-/8607->

3 The Holy Spirit's Work of Calling and Regeneration, Herman Bavinck, <https://www.monergism.com/holy-spirits-work-calling-and-regeneration-herman-bavinck>

4 How many points?, Richard A. Muller, Calvin Theological Journal, Issue 28 (1993), 425-33

Questions:

- a. What five questions will be asked when a candidate wishes to profess faith before the congregation?
- b. How will this course in the essentials of the Reformed Faith expand the candidate's knowledge of the faith?
- c. What major work is Christ doing at the present time?

Abbreviations used:

Each of the following are confessional standards of the Reformed faith. They are subject to, and summarize the doctrines of, the scriptures. These reference documents provide a rich abundance of additional texts from the scriptures that bear upon each doctrine summarized therein.

HC = Heidelberg Catechism⁵. This document is broken into 52 sections, called Lord's Days. Has 129 Q&A.

BC = Belgic Confession⁶ of faith (the Confession of Belgium and the Netherlands).

CD = Canons of Dort (also known as the Edicts of the Synod of Dort [Dordrecht], NL).

WCF = Westminster Confession of Faith⁷. This document has 33 major sections that summarize doctrine.

WLC = Westminster Larger Catechism⁸. This document has 196 Q&A.

WSC = Westminster Shorter Catechism⁹. This document has 107 Q&A.

Note:

References are considered in no manner to be a replacement for, or as a supplement unto Holy Writ. The scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the superior source in all matters of doctrine and faith.

5 <http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/en/>

6 <https://christurc.squarespace.com/belgic-confession>

7 <https://www.opc.org/wcf.html>

8 <https://www.opc.org/lc.html>

9 <https://www.opc.org/sc.html>

Lesson 1: The knowledge of God

What we think regarding God, and what we know of Him, shapes the way we live. In his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer says: “*We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God.*”

Psalm 115:8 says of idols and those who worship them that: “*Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust them.*” Psalm 115:11 says: “*You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.*”

A deep knowledge of God is necessary to provide the foundations for trust. Sinful man attempts to comprehend the relationship between God and man from a self-sufficient logic¹⁰. Because of man's fall from grace his every inclination is to escape the necessity of trust and faithfulness in God. By nature man seeks autonomy from God.

In Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul lays out and explains the foundations of trust in Christ. This foundation consists of a wisdom that is given by the Holy Spirit, of revelation in the knowledge of Jesus, through having our eyes opened, so that we may know the hope to which His Saints have been called – a great and rich inheritance in Christ.

We should pray that the Lord will grant His people a deeper and richer knowledge of Him. Christianity is not just a religion, it is a personal relationship with the living God. Personal relationships require much work. It takes deliberate effort to keep a marriage close and growing as the years roll on. The same applies to the relationship believers have with the covenant-keeping living God. When relationships become boring and routine this is a sign that we aren't working effectively at keeping the thrill and excitement, the joy and gratitude alive in our memory. When you are hungry, you know you need to eat. When you are thirsty, you know its time to drink. Hunger and thirst drive us to food and drink because we know that we will eventually die if we are denied them. We are driven to satisfy our needs, and in the same manner we should seek to know God – only He can satisfy our deepest needs. When we eat or drink we feel satisfied and ought to be thankful for the means that God provides to satisfy our bodily needs. Likewise, we should drive towards expansion of our knowledge of God to that we may grow in gratitude for the wonders of grace in Christ Jesus.

“Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies. For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great. Who is the man who fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.”
(Psalm 25:8-12)

Jesus said: “*Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.*” (John 14:21)

Read:

John 14, Psalm 115, Psalm 25

Talking points:

- a. How can we know God?
- b. How does a knowledge of the Scriptures affect how we live?
- c. Can we learn the truth about God by our own efforts?

¹⁰ What is the Ontological argument for the existence of God?, <http://www.gotquestions.org/ontological-argument.html>

Questions

a. What is precious above all else?

To delight the Lord in understanding, knowing that He practices steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth. (Jeremiah 9:23-24, WSC 1, HC 90)

b. Why is this knowledge important?

To know the only true God, and Jesus Christ is to have eternal life. (Psalm 111:9, John 17:3, John 14:15-17, BC 1, HC 1-2)

c. How may we know the truth regarding God?

Through the written Word of God by the work of the Holy Spirit. We also see God's handiwork in all creation. (WCF 1.1; Psalm 19:1-3; Psalm 8:3-4, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, HC 21)

d. Does God make Himself known to all people?

Yes, God shows through creation that He is God and that He must be served, so that no-one may be without excuse. (Romans 1:20, Psalm 19:7-8, WCF 1.6)

e. What else does God make known to all people?

The conscience of man bears witness to the law of God that is written on his heart. (Romans 2:14-15, 1 Corinthians 1:18-21, BC 2)

f. Is this knowledge of God able to lead sinners to salvation?

No, for through this the wrath of God is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. (Romans 1:18)

g. How does God make Himself known to the people of His choosing?

Through the Holy Scriptures, which reveal to us Christ, in whom alone is salvation. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, WLC 4)

h. How else does God reveal Himself to His people?

In the light of Scripture we see that the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament His handiwork. (Psalm 19:1) God makes Himself known through history. (Psalm 78, WLC 5)

i. Can we acquire true knowledge of God by our own efforts?

No, the Holy Spirit must make these truths known to us through His work in our hearts. (1 Corinthians 2:10-12)

j. What is the Bible?

The Bible is the divinely inspired and infallibly written word of God. (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:19-21, WCF 1.2)

k. How can we be sure that the Bible is God's infallible Word?

First, from the testimony of the Bible itself; secondly, from the testimony of the Spirit in our hearts. (1 John 5:6, Psalm 119:130, WCF 1.4, BC 5)

l. How did God inspire the writers of Holy Scripture?

"Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21, WCF 1.10)

m. What are the key attributes of Holy Scripture?

Infallibility, unity, perspicuity, authority, and sufficiency. (WCF 1.4, WCF 1.5, WCF 1.6, WCF 1.7)

n. What is the infallibility of Holy Scripture?

That Scripture is word for word the inspired Word of God and is, therefore, without error. (Psalm 12:6, 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21)

o. What is meant by the unity of Holy Scripture?

That all Scripture is the one revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the God of our salvation. (John 5:39, Hebrews 1:1-3)

p. What is meant by the perspicuity of Holy Scripture?

That through the operation of the Spirit, Scripture can be easily understood by God's people sufficient for their salvation. (WCF 1.7, WCF 1.8)

q. What is meant by the authority of Holy Scripture?

That Scripture is the only rule for our faith and our life. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

r. What is meant by the sufficiency of Holy Scripture?

That Scripture fully contains the will of God for our salvation. (WCF 1.9, WCF 1.10)

Lesson 2: God's Essence, Names, Persons and Attributes

Man is unable to comprehend God. At best we may describe the attributes which the Lord reveals to us. We may refer to the Lord as omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, holy, perfect, pure, all wise, etc. None of these fully describes the essence of God. The Lord God is not like man that we may comprehend His essence. The Lord is not bound by time and space. His being is above and beyond our comprehension. When we describe God, we do so in terms we are familiar with. While those terms communicate truly and accurately, yet they do not say everything about God.

By analogy, how would we define the unique characteristics of mankind? How can we describe a man without making reference to all his attributes. Humans are able to reason, know, love, hate, and to interact socially in complex ways. These are attributes but not the essence of man. Though this does not define the essence of mankind, this does not mean that humanity does not exist!

Genesis 1:1 declares that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. This is exceedingly profound because this tells us that before there was a beginning God existed. When Moses asked God at the burning bush,

“If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, '*The God of your fathers has sent me to you,*' and they ask me '*What is His name?*' what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, '*I AM WHO I AM.*' And He said, '*Say to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'*” (Exodus 3:13-14)

God does not merely exist, He is. Job confessed of the Lord that he knows the Lord can do all things, and that His purposes cannot be thwarted. Job acknowledges that he had heard of God those things he had been told, but when he saw the majesty of the Lord with his own eyes he despised himself, and he repented in dust and ashes. (Job 42:1-6). God is majestic and not bounded by time. God is eternally the same. God has put eternity into man's heart, yet man cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

The Psalmist acknowledges that the Lord has exalted His name and His Word above all things. (Psalm 138:2). Given the importance of the Name of the Lord, and the supreme importance of His Word, we ought to learn what this means for us, and how we shall number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:12).

God is the fountain¹¹ of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things. God has most sovereign dominion over all things, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever pleases Him. In His sight all things are open and manifest, His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent of the creature, so as nothing is to Him uncertain. He is most holy in His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands. To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, worship, service, and obedience. Paul acknowledged the greatness of the Lord when he declared that: “*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.*” (Romans 11:36).

The God we worship is essentially personal. He is not a removed object or an aloof¹² person. Rather He is tri-personal¹³, He is three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three persons are equally the one God we worship. God is at the same time three persons and one being. Deuteronomy 6 teaches “*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.*” But we also know the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. We will discuss the divinity of the persons of the Godhead later, but for now suffice it to say that our God is the eternal one-and-many. He is one God in His being, but how exactly God can be three and one at the same time is not easy to comprehend, and ultimately our triune God is incomprehensible. But this is the God who is revealed to us in His Word.

11 God the Fountain of Salvation for all His Elect, Thomas Goodwin, <http://www.puritansermons.com/goodwin/good02.htm>

12 The Lord's Holy Temple, Ligonier Ministries, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/lords-holy-temple/>

13 The Mercersburg Review; An organ for Christological, Historical and Positive Theology, T. G. Apple, D.D., Volume XVIII.-1871, p. 439.

Read:

WCF 2, Psalm 138, Psalm 31, Psalm 90, Romans 11:33-36

Talking points:

- a. How are we to know God?
- b. What are some of the names of God in the Old and New Testaments?
- c. Why is it important to know God's names?
- d. How does God pity His people?

Questions

a. In what ways are we to know God?

In His essence, names, attributes, persons, and works.
(WCF 2)

b. What does Scripture reveal of God's being or essence?

That He is a Spirit of infinite attributes subsisting in three Persons.
(Job 11:7-9, Job 26:14, John 4:24, BC 8)

c. What does Scripture reveal of God's essence?

That God is both immanent and transcendent.
(Psalm 139:1-16, Jeremiah 23:23-24, BC 9)

d. What is meant by God's transcendence?

That God is infinitely exalted above all His creation and that there is none like unto Him.
(1 Kings 8:27, Psalm 138:2)

e. What is meant by God's immanence?

That God is present with His whole being in every part of the creation. (Acts 17:27-28, WCF 2.2)

f. Does Scripture tell us that God has names?

Yes, although His names are not like our names, for there is no being like God.
(Psalm 119:89-93, Isaiah 40:25)

g. What is the importance of God's names?

They are the revelations of some of God's attributes to us. (Psalm 111:9, Romans 11:33)

h. What are the most important names of God?

The names I AM, God and Jehovah.
(Exodus 3:13-14, Exodus 34:6-7)

i. Why does God give Himself names?

That we may reverently speak to Him and about Him.
(Psalm 50:14-15)

j. What are the attributes of God?

They are the infinite perfections of His divine being that reveal to us who and what God is.
(1 Peter 2:9, WCF 2)

k. How are God's attributes generally distinguished?

They are distinguished as communicable and incommunicable attributes. (WCF 2.1)

l. Which are God's incommunicable attributes?

His oneness, simplicity, independency, infinity, and immutability. (WCF 2.1; WSC 4; 1 Kings 8:27; Deuteronomy 33:27; James 1:17)

m. What is meant by the truth of the Trinity?

That God is one in being and three in Persons.
(Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14)

n. How is God both one in being and three in Persons?

There are three divine individuals, each subsisting in His own personally distinct manner in the one divine being. (Deuteronomy 6:4, 1 Timothy 2:5, Galatians 3:20, WCF 2.1, WLC Q11)

o. What are these three Persons?

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
(HC 26)

p. Where is the doctrine of three Persons taught in Scripture?

Genesis 1:26, Genesis 3:22, Genesis 19:24, Psalm 110:1, Matthew 3:13-17. The three Persons are distinctly mentioned in the New Testament, for example in the Baptism formula, and in the Apostolic benediction. At the baptism of Jesus a triple theophany was evident in Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the voice of the God the Father.

q. Does Scripture teach also that these three Persons are one being?

Yes, all scripture testifies that God is one.
(Deuteronomy 6:4, 1 John 5:7, WCF 2.3)

r. Why are these Persons called the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

Because in these three names their distinct personal properties are made known to us.
(John 1:14, John 14:26, Matthew 28:19, WLC 9-11)

s. What is the distinct personal property of each of these divine Persons?

Of the Father that He generates the Son; of the Son that He is generated by the Father; of the Holy Spirit that He proceeds from both the Father and the Son.
(John 14:26, John 15:26, Galatians 4:6, John 1:14, Psalm 2:7)

t. What is the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity?

That the Triune God dwells in perfect covenant fellowship with Himself and establishes a covenant relationship with us. (Psalm 33:6, Luke 1:35, Galatians 4:4, WCF 2.2, BC 11)

u. Does each Person have His own work in creation and in salvation?

No, the Triune God creates, redeems, and sanctifies.

v. What is meant by the *Triune God*?

That there is only one divine essence, yet in His economy He is in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. (Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 18:31, WCF 2.3)

w. What is meant by God's infinity?

That God is a God of endless perfection, and that He is eternal and everywhere present.
(Psalm 90:2, Jeremiah 23:23-24, 1 Timothy 1:17)

x. What is meant by God's immutability?

That God never changes in His own being or in any of His works and ways.
(Malachi 3:6, James 1:17, WCF 2.1)

y. Why does God reveal His incommunicable attributes to us?

That we may know that He is highly exalted above all and that He alone ought to be praised.
(Jeremiah 10:6-7, Psalm 145:3)

z. How can God's communicable attributes best be understood?

As revealing God's knowledge, His will, and His power. He is most holy in all His counsels, in His works, and in all His commands. (WCF 2.2, BC 2)

aa. Whom does God love?

God loves Himself as the highest good and all His creatures for His own name's sake.
(1 John 4:8, Psalm 8)

ab. How then can God love the reprobate wicked?

He cannot, for the Scriptures teach that the curse of God is in the house of the wicked. (Proverbs 3:33).
Nevertheless, God does have a general benevolence toward all creatures desiring that none would perish but turn and be saved.
(John 3:16-18; Ezekiel 18:23; 1 Tim 2:4)

ac. How then can God love His people who are also sinners?

He loves them not as sinners, but as those whom He chose in Christ and justified through Him.
(Ephesians 1:4)

ad. What is God's grace?

It is His attitude of undeserved favor towards His people in Christ and the power whereby He saves them.
(Romans 11:6, BC 23-24, WCF 3)

ae. What is God's mercy?

It is His attitude of pity towards His people in their misery and His power to deliver them from it.
(Ephesians 2:4-5, Psalm 106:44-45, WCF 3.7)

af. What is God's power?

It is His omnipotence, whereby He is able to accomplish all that He has determined to do in His counsel.
(Genesis 17:1, Genesis 18:14, Luke 1:37, HC 27-28)

Lesson 3: The Decrees of God – His Works in Eternity

The Lord God makes known to man his works from of old. (Acts 15:17-18). Isaiah declares:

“To whom shall you liken God, or what likeness compare with Him? ... Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?” (Isaiah 40:18-21)

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not grow weary; His understanding is unsearchable.” (Isaiah 40:28).

The Psalmist said:

“So I said: “Do not take me away, O God, in the midst of my days; Your years go on through all generations. In the beginning You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain the same, and Your years will never end.” (Psalm 102:24-27)

“We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what works You did in their days, in times long ago.” (Psalm 44:1)

The entire Bible is a narrative of the works and wonders God has performed in eternity and in time¹⁴. In it, God describes His works in the context of time, which we understand as history. He provides blue-prints by which the covenant keeper shall live, by faith. The Lord promises great blessings for the faithful covenant keeper. This is why it is so important to keep alive in our active memory the great works God has done. In short, the Bible contains the infallible narrative of God’s redemptive works throughout history.

“The eyes of the Lord our God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.” (Deuteronomy 11:12)

God's works and His statutes are enormous, that is why the Lord requires that:

“You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” (Deuteronomy 11:19)

Paul says that all those whom Christ has blessed with spiritual blessings, he chose in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

“In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” (Ephesians 1:3-6)

“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:11-12).

Read:

Psalm 102, Deuteronomy 11, Ephesians 1, Romans 9:17-18, Proverbs 16:4, John 6:35-47, John 10:25-26

¹⁴ A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Word of God, Jonathan Edwards,
<http://www1.cbn.com/churchandministry/a-faithful-narrative-of-the-surprising-work-of-god-part-1>

Talking points:

- a. Does God elect people because they believe on Him?
- b. What does John 10:25-26 teach concerning the relation between reprobation and unbelief?
- c. What does John 6:44 say regarding the elect?
- d. What does Romans 9:18 tell us?

Questions

a. How are the works of God recorded for our understanding?

His works are performed in all time (past, present and future) and He has established His works in eternity (before and after time).

(Acts 15:18, Isaiah 46:10, WCF 3.1, BC 2)

b. What are His works in eternity?

His eternal decrees. (Ephesians 1:4, WCF 3.2)

c. What are God's decrees?

His eternal counsel, according to which He works all things. (Ephesians 1:11, WLC 12)

d. Does Scripture use other words to refer to God's decrees?

Yes, His counsel, will, purpose, and good pleasure. (Ephesians 1:9-11, Acts 2:23)

e. What attributes does Scripture give to God's counsel?

Scripture teaches that God's counsel is eternal, sovereignly free, independent, unchangeable, efficacious, all-comprehensive, wise, and good. (Romans 11:33-36, Hebrews 6:17)

f. What does it mean that God's counsel is eternal?

That God determined all things in His counsel before the world began. (Psalm 33:11, Isaiah 46:10, WLC 14)

g. What does it mean that God's counsel is all-comprehensive?

That God in His counsel determines all things that come to pass. (Acts 15:8, 1 Samuel 23:11-12, WLC 13)

h. What is the decree of predestination?

God's eternal counsel with regard to the eternal state of His rational creatures, including election and reprobation. (Psalm 139:16, Romans 9:11-13, WCF 3.5)

i. What is the decree of election?

The eternal, sovereign, and gracious good-pleasure of God to save to eternal glory some men through the instrument of faith in Christ.

(Deuteronomy 6:20, Ephesians 1:5-6, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Romans 8:29, BC 17, WCF 10)

j. What is the decree of reprobation?

The eternal, sovereign, and righteous good-pleasure of God to condemn others to eternal damnation on account of their sin.

(1 Peter 2:8, Romans 9:17-18, Proverbs 16:4, WCF 3.7)

Lesson 4: Creation and Providence

The Scriptures reveal to us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, by the power of His Word and Spirit. (Genesis 1:1-3)

The Psalmist acknowledges that the Lord made the heavens by His word, and that by the breath of His mouth He made all their host. (Psalm 33:6) Likewise St. John declares that *“in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.”* (John 1:1-3). St. John goes on to say that *“He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him.”* (John 1:10). It is clear from the Scriptures that the creation is a most marvelous work of God. See how the Psalmist describes the workmanship of God:

“On the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works, I will meditate.”
(Psalm 145:5)

“The Lord is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made. All Your works shall give thanks to You, O Lord, and all Your saints shall bless You! They speak of the glory of Your kingdom and tell of Your power.” (Psalm 145:9-11)

“You open Your hand; You satisfy the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His works.” (Psalm 145:16-17)

God created the heavens and the earth in six days (Exodus 20:11), each bounded¹⁵ by night and day and all very good. Furthermore, we see that after six days of creative work God rested (He ceased from His work) and He rejoiced in all the work which He had done. (Genesis 2:1-3). The Lord has indeed made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble. (Proverbs 16:4) So far does His righteous work continue that Paul could say:

“For in Him we live, and move, and have our being;” (Acts 17:28)

The Lord continues to rule over all He has made and is due all honor and praise.

“His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand or say to Him, “What have you done?”” (Daniel 4:34-35)

The Scriptures teach us that God is close to and personally near all he has made. God is personal, and all doctrine is personal. God's Law sets clear moral boundaries. There is nothing abstract regarding God's works in creation and providence¹⁶. Where the unbeliever see's only fate and change, the Scriptures teach us that everything God has made was made for a purpose. History consists in the unfolding of God's works and His purposes in all that He has made, and in every event that takes place.

Regarding God's purposes we gain a very clear sense from the account given of Joseph. In a most unrighteous act Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery in Egypt. When his brothers finally arrives in Egypt Joseph could declare:

“And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of

¹⁵ The Meaning of “Day” in Genesis, James Stambaugh. <http://www.icr.org/article/meaning-day-genesis/>

¹⁶ “God’s Ever-Present Hand” - Calvin on Providence (Institutes I.16-18), John Drury, <http://www.drurywriting.com/john/Calvin%20on%20Providence.htm>

Egypt.” (Genesis 45:5-8)

“But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.” (Genesis 50:19-21)

James Montgomery Boice¹⁷ says: *“The Old Testament story of Jonah teaches that a believer can disobey God, in fact, with such determination that it takes a direct intervention by God in history to turn him around. But when he does, he suffers the consequences that God has previously established to govern disobedience. Jonah had been given a commission to take a message of judgment to Nineveh. It was similar to the great commission that has been given to all Christians, for he was told to “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me” (Jonah 1:2). But Jonah didn’t want to do God’s bidding, as Christians today often don’t. So he went in the other direction, taking a ship from Joppa, on the coast of Palestine, to Tarshish, which was probably on the coast of Spain. Did Jonah succeed? Not at all. We know what happened to him. He ran into trouble as God took drastic measures to turn him around. After God let him sit in the belly of a great fish for three days, Jonah decided he would obey God and be his missionary.”*

So, in summary, God not only creates all things but also governs His creatures and all their actions. His making all things out of nothing (ex nihilo) and all very good is the doctrine of creation. His governing all His creatures and their actions is called the doctrine of providence. Creation and providence are closely related, but should not be confused with one another. Both creation and providence are the works of God’s sovereign will and Word. But whereas creation is out of nothing, God exercises His will and Word in providence in, with and by the things that are already made. This means that everything which every one of His creatures do comes about in accordance with God’s eternal decree and by His sovereign hand. Nothing comes to pass except by the determination of His will.

And yes, that means that every sinful evil action of creatures is an act that transpires by His providential care. Yet, we must understand, God is in no way the author of those evil actions. Only His creatures are culpable for their sinful actions for such actions flow from their wicked and depraved hearts.

Read:

Psalm 104, Psalm 145, Matthew 10, WCF 4 & 5

Talking points:

- a) What key benefit do we gain out of God's providence?
- b) How does God maintain His works?
- c) What is the significance of the statement that God gives every living thing food in due season?
- d) What does God promise will happen to those who do not love Him?

¹⁷ God’s Providence, James Montgomery Boice, http://www.the-highway.com/providence_Boice.html

Questions

a. What is the first work of God in time?

The creation of the heaven and the earth. (Genesis 1:1, WCF 4, BC 12)

b. What does it mean to create?

To create is that act of God whereby God, by the word of His power, called into existence the things that were not as though they were.

(Hebrews 11:3, Jeremiah 10:12, John 1:1-3, Psalm 33:6, WLC 15)

c. What did God create?

All things: the heaven, the firmament, the earth, and all creatures in heaven and on earth. Even Hell was prepared by God.

(Genesis 1, Psalm 8:3-8, Matthew 25:41, HC 6-10)

d. In how long a period did God create all things?

God created all things in the space of six days. (Exodus 20:11)

e. What did God create on the first three days?

Light, the firmament, the seas, the dry land, and the whole world of plants and trees. (Genesis 1:1-13)

f. What did God create on the last three days?

The heavenly bodies, fish and birds, animals and man. (Genesis 1:14-31)

g. What does it mean that God rested on the seventh day?

First, that He ceased from the work of creation; and secondly, that He rejoiced in all the work which He had done. (Genesis 2:1-3, HC 103)

h. What does it mean that God saw all that He had made, and it was very good?

That all creation was perfectly adapted to the purpose for which He had created it. (Revelation 4:11)

i. What is God's purpose in creation?

The glory of His name through the manifestation of His wonderful praises.

(Proverbs 16:4, Psalm 8:1, Revelation 4:11, WSC 1)

j. How are we able to understand this work?

By faith, for: "*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*" (Hebrews 11:3)

k. Does the creation continue to exist by itself?

By no means, but all things continue to exist only by the providence of God. (John 5:17, Acts 17:28, WLC 18)

l. What is the providence of God?

The almighty and omnipresent power of God whereby He upholds all things and governs them according to His own counsel. (Hebrews 1:3, WSC 11)

m. What is included in the providence of God?

All things great and small, good and evil; all things in heaven, on earth, and in hell; all the acts of men and angels. (Matthew 10:20-29, Psalm 103:19, Proverbs 21:1, Proverbs 16:1-9, WCF 5)

n. How does God preserve His works?

He continues to give existence to all the creatures He created. (Daniel 4:34-35, Acts 17:25-28)

o. In what does God's government exist?

It exists in that act of God whereby He leads all things to the end which He has determined for them. (Acts 15:18, WLC 192)

p. As God governs men's actions, are they passive instruments in His hands?

No, but man remains a thinking, willing, and active agent and is responsible for all he does. (Acts 2:23, Philippians 2:12-13, WLC 191)

q. What is the comfort of providence for the believer?

That all things come to us by the hand of our heavenly Father and that He makes all things serve our salvation. (Amos 9:8-9, Romans 8:28, WLC 190)

Lesson 5: The Creation of Man and His Fall

Man was made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). The Triune God made man according to the counsel of His divine will. We see clear evidence of this in the statement “*Let us make man ...*” and we see confirmation of this in Ephesians 1:11 “... *according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.*” By comparison, the animals were made “*after their kind*” while man was made “*after the likeness (image) of God.*” But of what does this image and likeness consist? Later in the New Testament we are told that believers are restored in the image of God in “*knowledge, righteousness, and holiness*” (Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10). Before the fall man was created in God's image and had upright knowledge of God along with a blameless standing before him.

Genesis 2 sets the stage for the necessity of redemption. God made a covenant of works with man. If man would obey God's command to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would be rewarded with eternal life. If he disobeyed he would be punished with eternal death: “*for on the day you eat of it you shall surely die.*” Man was made good, unfallen, and upright with original righteousness, holiness, and knowledge. He was therefore capable of resisting the temptation of the subtle serpent. However, as the Bible records for us, man sadly gave in to temptation and took of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And when he ate he plunged himself, and us all, into an estate of sin and misery.

That last part, about plunging himself and us all into sin and misery, may need more explanation. The Covenant of Works which God made with Adam was not made with Adam alone. Adam represented the entire human race in that Covenant. Therefore, what he did would count for us all. His sin is our sin (Romans 5:12ff). That is why when he fell into sin, the effects of that sin are ours as well. That is why when he fell he plunged not just himself into sin and misery, but also all humans everywhere.

The prophet Hosea says: “*But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.*” (Hosea 6:7). It is clear from the Scriptures that God had established with Adam and Eve a covenant of Works, which if Adam had obeyed in perpetuity God would have rewarded him with eternal life. When Adam broke that covenant he not only fell himself, but in him all mankind fell since Adam was the head of all mankind (1 Corinthians 15:21). As a direct result of the fall of man from grace the Law which was designed to secure life became to man a curse against life because of sin. (Romans 10:5).

This idea is what we call the imputation of original sin. Adam's sin is imputed to all those he represents – every human (except Christ!). Now, some think this idea is unfair. After all, who asked us if Adam could represent us? Why should the sin of someone else become my fault? Now, this can be answered in two ways. First, when God makes a covenant it is never with mere individuals¹⁸. He makes his covenants with people who represent other people. We might not like that, but God is the covenant maker and he gets to set the terms. But, second, if we have a problem with this idea then we have a problem with the Gospel as well. For Christ represented us, believers, when he atoned for our sins. His righteousness is imputed to us who believe in him (as we will see in greater detail in the section on justification). We did no good deed to deserve eternal life. And so the righteousness of another must be imputed to us if we are to have any hope of eternal life¹⁹. This Christ does for us and that is the good news (gospel). If we have a problem with the imputation of sin, then we must have a problem with the imputation of righteousness. We cannot have one without the other.

18 Keeping God's Covenant, Herman Hanko & David J. Engelsma, Protestant Reformed Church, http://www.prca.org/books/Keeping_Covenant/Covenant.htm

19 What God Requires, Christ Provides, John Piper, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-god-requires-christ-provides/>

Read:

Genesis 1 – 3, Romans 5, WCF 6

Talking points:

- a) Adam had free-will. Do you have free-will? Why or why not?
- b) Are man's works of charity good works? Why or why not?
- c) Why are we blamed for Adam's sins?
- d) Describe the newly created man. What does it mean that he was made after the image of God?

Questions**a. What does Scripture teach us concerning the creation of man?**

That God formed Adam out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. That God created him body and soul. That God created him after His own image.

(Genesis 1:27; 2:7; WCF 4, BC 14, HC 26)

b. What is meant by the image of God in man?

That there is a reflection of some of God's perfections in man's nature, so that in a creaturely way he resembles God. Adam is described as the son of God. In God we live and move and have our being.

(Genesis 1:26-27, Luke 3:38, Acts 17:28)

c. What elements belong to this image of God in man?

True knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. (Colossians 3:10, Ephesians 4:24)

d. Prove from Scripture that these elements belong to the image of God in man

Ephesians 4:23-24 teaches: "*and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*"

e. What was Adam's relation to God?

Adam lived in a covenant relation in which he was God's friend-servant. (Hosea 6:7) This means that Adam was at the same time both friend and servant of God in God's creation. (BC 15, WCF 6)

f. In what way did God make special provision for man before the Fall?

God entered into a covenant of life with Adam, upon condition of perfect obedience, forbidding him to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death. (WSC Q12, Ephesians 1:4)

g. What was his relation to the creation?

Adam had dominion over all creatures on the earth as their king. (Genesis 1:28)

h. What was his relation to the human race?

He was its first father and its representative head. (1 Corinthians 15:21)

i. Did Adam have a free will?

Yes, Adam was created good, so that He was able to serve God perfectly; but he could also, by an act of his own will, turn against God into sin.

(Ecclesiastes 7:29, WCF 9.2, BC 14, HC 9)

j. Did man remain in the relationship of being God's friend-servant?

No, man violated the covenant relation when he sought to be as God, knowing good and evil. He sealed the violation of the covenant relation when by seeking autonomous wisdom he ate of the forbidden tree.

(Genesis 3: Genesis 2:17, Deuteronomy 4:23, WCF 9.3, WSC 13, WSC 15)

k. What is sin?

Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God. (WSC Q14, HC 3-4)

l. Was this sin a great offense?

Yes, for: It was disobedience to God's command. (Genesis 3:11) By sinning, Adam chose for Satan against God. (Genesis 3:14) Adam sinned as the head and first father of the whole human race.

(1 Corinthians 15:21-22, WCF 6)

m. What was the punishment for sin?

Death: "*for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*" (Genesis 2:17, Romans 6:23)

n. Did Adam die immediately as God had said?

Yes, Adam was separated from God and banished from His presence in the garden, and he became by nature dead in sin and the object of God's wrath. Adam placed himself under the burden of sin and eventually died naturally, but his discourse was still in the confines of the garden. He became deserving of God's wrath, so you could say he died spiritually the moment he sinned. (Ephesians 2:1, Romans 5:12, Genesis 3)

o. Are we by nature also under the punishment of Adam's sin?

Yes, for we also are born dead in trespasses and sins. (Romans 5:12, Jeremiah 17:9, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

p. What is original guilt?

Original guilt is the imputation of Adam's guilt to the whole human race, so much so that we by nature are inclined to follow the example of Adam in seeking wisdom apart from God's law. (Romans 5:12, WCF 6, HC 7-9)

q. What is original pollution?

The corruption of Adam's nature, which was passed on to the whole human race. (Genesis 2:17, Job 15:14, Psalm 51:5, WCF 6.6)

r. Is man capable of doing any good?

No, he is by nature inclined to all evil, and all his works are corrupted and polluted with sin. By works of the Law no man can self-justify himself in God's sight, because through the Law comes knowledge of sin. By sin came a separation from God that man cannot undo. It took an act of Divine grace by Jesus Christ, the second Adam (man), to redeem man from the condition to which he had fallen. (Psalm 51:5, Romans 3:20, WCF 6.2)

s. How did God reveal His grace after the fall?

He gave the promise of Christ, the seed of the woman, who would crush the head of the serpent. (Genesis 3:15, WCF 7, HC 19)

Lesson 6: Redemption and the Work of the Redeemer

The central tenet of the Christian faith is the fact that sinful man, incapable of making atonement to God, is redeemed by the atoning work of Jesus Christ alone. Man cannot add to the work of Christ, for in so doing he adds to his sin by seeking righteousness by his own works. The great work of redemption cannot be properly understood without reference to the Old Testament, for therein we find the salvation promise in the Messiah. If Jesus Christ is not the promised One, then man remains without hope. Isaiah 53 is fulfilled in Christ – He is the promised Messiah.

The Genesis account in chapters 3 - 5 sets out in clear detail the fall of man from grace and the subsequent course of mankind. Man as a sinner lacks the holiness and righteousness which is God's due. He is lawless and rebellious in his sinful being, now naturally inclined to oppose God. He is no longer willing or capable of faith in God, nor of obedience to God's law. Paul stresses man's total inability to justify himself by self-righteousness (Romans 3:9-20). The sinner's self-righteousness compounds his sin.

God is man's creator therefore man's will and all his being are the handiwork of the Creator. Man exists wholly at the mercy of the Lord. Fallen man's will is a slave of sin.²⁰ If man is to be saved from sin, this too must be a work of God. To assume man's independence from God²¹, even if just in a so called free-will, is to assume that God is not truly the Creator God²². God decreed that in the day that man sinned he would surely die. Dead men do not have a free-will.²³ Rather, their wills are in bondage to their own sinfulness.

The work of redemption is shown in Psalm 87 as the work of the Lord.

*“Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush – 'This one was born there,' they say. And of Zion it shall be said, 'This one and that one were born in her'; for the Most High himself will establish her. **The Lord records as he registers the peoples, 'This one was born there.'**” (Psalm 87:4-6).*

God is here portrayed as choosing individuals from all nations, and by his sovereign choice decreeing their rebirth and reconciliation. To be *born there (of Zion)* means to be born into God's covenant community that enjoys his sovereign grace. We are redeemed *out of and from* the sinful humanity of the first Adam, and *into* the sinless humanity of the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

Redemption is not universal and does not apply to all men. Jesus Christ's expiation and atonement is exclusively for His chosen covenant people. Jesus suffered and died for “*His sheep*” (John 10, 11, 15), “*His Church*” (Acts 20:28, Ephesians 5:25-27), “*His people*” (Matthew 1:21), and “*the elect*” (Romans 8:32,35).

Read:

Psalm 86, Isaiah 53, Romans 6, WCF 8, HC 16-19

Talking points:

- How does WCF 8.6 agree with Hebrews 11?
- From what do we know that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah who would deliver and redeem His people?
- What is the significance of Psalm 86:11? Explain this in your own words.
- From Psalm 86:13 - What has the Lord done, and how has He done this?

20 Calvinism, Hypercalvinism, & Arminianism, Kenneth G. Talbot and W. Gary Crampton, Liberty Press, ISBN: 1-930367-51-1, Chapter 3.

21 A Short Response to the Arminian Doctrine of Prevenient Grace, John Hendryx,
<https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/prevenient.html>

22 The Error of Libertarian Free Will, Calvinist Corner, <http://www.calvinistcorner.com/error-of-libertarian-free-will.htm>

23 TULIP: The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture, Duane E. Spencer, Baker Book House Company, ISBN: 0-8010-6393-0, p. 35

Questions

a. How does God save His people?

God saves His people by means of a true faith in the Mediator of the covenant of grace, our Lord Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 8:6, WCF 7, HC 12-15)

b. Could not His people save themselves?

Absolutely not, for they could never satisfy God's justice and atone for their own sin. (Romans 4:5, WCF 7.3, HC 13)

c. Was such satisfaction necessary?

Certainly, for God cannot deny Himself; therefore, He can receive us into His covenant communion only if His justice is satisfied. (Isaiah 53:11, HC 12)

d. But why could not fallen man satisfy God's justice?

Because man is dead in sin and can only daily increase his guilt. (Romans 6:23, HC 13)

e. Who gives us this Mediator?

He is from God, ordained by Him and given us of Him. (1 Corinthians 1:30) Hence, He is also called the Lamb of God.

f. Which are the most common names of the Mediator?

The names Jesus, Christ, and Lord. (Acts 2:36)

g. Does Scripture give other names of the Mediator?

Yes, there are many names given Him, some of which are: Son of God, Son of Man, Immanuel, Lamb of God, Lion of Judah's tribe, Son of David. (Matthew 27:43)

h. Why is the Mediator called Jesus?

Because He delivers us from the power of sin and death and makes us partakers of eternal glory. (Acts 4:12, HC 29)

i. What does the name Christ signify?

The name Christ means anointed of God: that He is ordained by God the Father and qualified by the Holy Spirit to be our Mediator. (John 1:41, HC 31)

j. Why is He called Lord?

Because He redeemed and delivered us from the power of the devil and made us His own property. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, HC 32)

Lesson 7: The Nature and Offices of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ has testified in the New Testament that He is the promised Messiah as set forth by the prophets in the Old Testament. This confession is confirmed by the preaching of the apostles, that Jesus indeed is the Only-Begotten of the Father. This is in direct conflict with all human thinking, and is against the inclinations of our hearts. Mankind stands in enmity to this confession, for it is not in accord with the nature of sinful man. No-one can confess²⁴ that Jesus is the Christ, the Lord of Lords, and the King of Kings, except through the Holy Spirit - Neither can anyone by the Holy Spirit call Jesus accursed. Jesus must be recognized as the one and only Savior and King (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Jesus confesses that He is the Son of God, but although He has ascended on high He providentially ensures that the confession of His Name finds entrance into the world and is believed by the church. Jesus called ordinary men to be His apostles, instructed them, and made them witnesses to His words and deeds, His death and His resurrection.

Jesus gave His Apostles the Holy Spirit who brought them personally to the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16), and who later caused them, from the day of Pentecost on, to minister as preachers of those things which their eyes had seen, and they beheld, and their hands had handled of the Word of life (1 John 1:1). The apostles were really not the real witnesses. The Spirit of truth, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is the original, infallible, and almighty witness to Christ, and the apostles are that only in Him and through Him (John 15:26 and Acts 5:32). And it is that same Spirit of truth who by means of the testimony of the apostles brings the church of all ages to a true confession and preserves them in it: *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God* (John 6:68-69).

In the letters of the apostles mention is made of events in the life of Jesus. They picture Him before the eyes of their observers and readers²⁵ (Galatians 3:1). They stress the fact that John the Baptist was His herald and precursor (Acts 13:25 and 19:4), that He comes from the family of Judah and the stem of David (Romans 1:3; Revelation 5:5 and 22:16), that He was born of a woman (Galatians 4:4), was circumcised on the eighth day (Romans 15:8), that He was brought up in Nazareth (Acts 2:22 and 3:6), and that He also had brothers (1 Corinthians 9:5 and Galatians 1:19). They tell us that He was perfectly holy and sinless, that He presented Himself to us as an example (1 Corinthians 11:1 and 1 Peter 2:21), and that He spoke words that have authority for us (Acts 20:35 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-12). But it is especially His dying that is significant for us. The cross stands at the central point of apostolic preaching. Betrayed by one of the twelve apostles whom He chose (1 Corinthians 11:23 and 1 Corinthians 15:5), and not recognized by the princes of this world as the Lord of glory (1 Corinthians 2:8), He was put to death by the Jews (Acts 4:10; 5:30; and 1 Thessalonians 2:15), dying on the accursed wood of the cross. But, even though He suffered greatly in Gethsemane and upon Golgotha, He has by the pouring out of His blood achieved the reconciliation and an eternal righteousness. And therefore God raised Him up, exalted Him to His right hand, and appointed Him Lord and Christ, Prince and Savior for all nations.

It is true that the disciples could not reconcile these Messianic claims of Jesus with His approaching passion and death (Matthew 16:22). But through the resurrection, and after it, they learned to know also the necessity and the meaning of the cross. Now they recognized that God had by the resurrection made this Jesus, whom the Jews had destroyed, to be Lord and Christ and had exalted Him to be a Prince and Savior (Acts 2:36 and 5:31). This does not mean to say that before His resurrection Jesus was not yet Christ and Lord, and that He became this only after the resurrection, for Christ had proclaimed Himself as the Christ beforehand and He was then also acknowledged and confessed as such by the disciples (Matthew 16:16). But before the resurrection He was Messiah in the form

²⁴ The Divine and Human Nature of Christ, Herman Bavinck, <http://articles.ochristian.com/article3127.shtml>

²⁵ Ibid.

of a servant, in a form and shape which concealed His dignity as Son of God from the eyes of men. In the resurrection and after it He laid aside that form of a servant, He re-assumed the glory which He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5), and was therefore appointed as Son of God in power, according to the spirit of holiness that dwelt in Him (Romans 1:3).

The figure we encounter in the person of Christ on the pages of Scripture is unique²⁶. He is very man. He became flesh and came into the flesh (John 1:14 and 1 John 4:2-3). He bore the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3). He came of the fathers, according to the flesh (Romans 9:5), of Abraham's seed (Galatians 3:16), of Judah's line (Hebrews 7:14), and of David's generation (Romans 1:3). He was born of a woman (Galatians 4:4), partook of our flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14), possessed a spirit (Matthew 27:50), a soul (Matthew 26:38), and a body (1 Peter 2:24), and was human in the full, true sense. As a child He grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:40 and 52). He was hungry and thirsty, sorrowful and joyful, was moved by emotion and stirred to anger. He placed Himself under the Law and was obedient to it until death. He suffered, died on the cross, and was buried in a garden. He was without form or comeliness. When we looked upon Him there was no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised, and unworthy of esteem, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:2-3).

Since the New Testament administration many heresies have been promulgated regarding the divine and the human natures of Jesus Christ. The councils of Nicaea, of Ephesus, of Constantinople, and of Chalcedon dealt with aspects of Christ's Divinity. The Confession²⁷ of Chalcedon²⁸ provides a clear statement on the human and divine nature of Christ:

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; (ἐν δύο φύσεσιν ἀσυγχύτως, ἀτρέπτως, ἀδιαρέτως, ἀχωρίστως – in duabus naturis inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter) the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person (prosopon) and one Subsistence (hypostasis), not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God (μονογενῆ Θεόν), the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

Read:

WCF 2, WCF 8, BCF 10, Matthew 1, Romans 1:3-4, Romans 9, John 1, 1 John 1, Revelation 21:22-26

Talking points:

- a) What is the significance of the Lamb in Revelation 21:22-23?
- b) Explain what the references to light and darkness in 1 John 1 make reference to.
- c) Which is the greater: God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit? Whom is more important?

²⁶ The Divine and Human Nature of Christ, Herman Bavinck, <http://articles.ochristian.com/article3127.shtml>

²⁷ The Council of Chalcedon, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Chalcedon

²⁸ The Creeds of Christendom, Philip Schaff, Vol. 1, p. 29-34.

Questions

a. How many natures does Christ have?

Two, Christ has a divine nature and a human nature. (Romans 1:3-4; Romans 9:5, HC 15)

b. How are these two natures united?

They are united in the one Person of the Son of God. (Mark 15:39, HC 16-17)

c. Is Christ, then, true and eternal God?

Yes, for the Word was God and was made flesh. (John 1:1, John 1:14, 1 John 5:20, 1 Timothy 3:16)

d. Why must Christ be truly God?

Because only one who is truly God can bear the burden of our sins and deliver us from them. (Galatians 1:3-4, Psalm 49:7-9)

e. Is Christ also true man?

Yes, for God sent His Son into the likeness of sinful flesh. (Romans 8:3)

f. What proof is there that Christ had a real human nature?

Christ had a real human body (Luke 24:39), and a real human soul (Matthew 26:38). He could hunger and thirst and feel sorrow and joy (John 19:28, John 11:35).

g. What more can you say of Christ's human nature?

That it was a complete human nature. (Hebrews 2:14-17) That it was a weak and humiliated human nature. That it was a human nature without sin, holy and undefiled. (Hebrews 4:15, Hebrews 7:26ff)

h. How did Christ become man?

Christ assumed the human nature through the power of the Holy Spirit and from the virgin Mary. (Luke 1:35)

i. Why did Christ have to be truly a man?

Because only a man can suffer for the sins which man committed. (Exodus 21:23, HC 16)

j. What can you say as to the union of the two natures in Christ?

That the two natures of Christ exist in unity of divine Person, without division, change, mixture, or separation. (John 7:26ff)

k. To which office was Christ anointed?

To the threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King. (Isaiah 61:1)

l. What does Christ do as our Prophet?

He reveals to us the whole counsel of God with respect to our salvation. (Matthew 11:25-27)

m. Was Christ already our Prophet while on earth?

Yes, in His own Person and in His works He revealed God's purpose in salvation. (John 15:15)

n. What does Christ do as our Prophet in heaven?

He continues to teach us by His Word and Spirit. (John 14:26)

p. What did Christ do as our Priest while on earth?

He offered Himself upon the cross for the sins of His people. (Hebrews 9:14, 28)

q. What is the power and value of that sacrifice?

It was a substitutionary sacrifice, by which He paid for all the sins of His people and secured their salvation. (Romans 5:19, Hebrews 10:14, Ephesians 5:2)

r. What does Christ do as our Priest in heaven?

He intercedes for us with the Father and blesses us with every spiritual blessing. (Hebrews 2:17)

s. What did Christ do as our King while on earth?

He destroyed all the powers of the devil and hell, of sin and death, by His perfect work on the cross. (Colossians 2:15)

t. What does He do now as our King?

Christ rules His church by His Word and Spirit. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

u. Does He do anything else?

Yes, Christ protects His church against the assaults of the powers of darkness and brings His kingdom into final glory. (Romans 8:31-39)

Lesson 8: Christ's Humiliation

Humiliation is the condition where someone of high estate, someone very important like a ruler or a dignitary, is made to endure shame or reproach, is mocked or made sport of, is denigrated or disrespected. Humiliation in life comes to almost everyone at one point or another, and it always hurts. The victim of humiliation feels pain and displeasure because of this condition.

Jesus Christ was humiliated because He was born a human being! The key to this is the fact that He, being the Son of God, became man. The incarnation is that the Son of God condescended to the level of sinful and rebellious man to the extent that He became one of us, yet without sin.

Jesus Christ faced humiliation²⁹ because, being God, he took to himself "*a true body, and a reasonable soul*" (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 22). This aspect of Christ's humiliation is spelled out in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and it helps us look at the birth of Jesus Christ in a new way:

Q27. Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?

A. *Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.*

Jesus was not born into a wealthy family; he faced the humiliation of poverty. We know this because Joseph and Mary offered the sacrifice of the poor for purification (Luke 2:22-24; cf. Leviticus 12:6-8). Jesus was the lawgiver and loved the law of God (Psalm 119:97), yet he had to live as though he needed the Law to keep him from sin, being subject to the very Law he gave (Galatians 4:4). He faced the sufferings of this fallen world as though he were simply another of Adam's sin-cursed descendants (Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15). Although he was completely innocent, the Holy Son of God had the wrath of God poured out on him for the sin of others (Isaiah 53; 1 Peter 2:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21). The one who was the prince of life submitted to the indignities of death (Acts 2:24, 27; Philippians 2:8). We can understand these phrases, but we quickly slip over that first one: "Christ's humiliation consisted in *his being born*."

Read:

1 Peter 2, Romans 5, Matthew 20, WSC 20, WLC 47, BCF 18

Talking points:

- a) When Jesus died on the cross did God die? Explain!
- b) We learned that Jesus suffered. How is it possible that God suffered?
- c) In the Scriptures we read of Heaven, Sheol, Hell, and The Earth. How many levels are there? Which did Jesus descend into as part of His humiliation?

29 http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=39&pfriendly=Y&ret=L25oLmh0bWw%2FYXJ0aWNsZV9pZD0zOQ%3D%3D, New Horizons, Christ's Humiliation, Stephen D. Doe.

Questions

a. How many states of the Mediator do we distinguish?

Two: the state of humiliation and the state of exaltation. (Romans 1:3-4; 1 Timothy 3:16)

b. Which passage of Scripture clearly speaks of these two states?

Philippians 2:7-9, where Scripture teaches that Christ was highly exalted because He humbled Himself to the death of the cross.

c. What is the state of humiliation?

It is the state in which Christ humbled Himself in our flesh even unto death in order to merit salvation for us. (HC 35-36)

d. How many degrees are there in the state of humiliation?

Five: His lowly birth, His suffering, His death, His burial, and His descent into hell. (see above texts)

e. How was Christ's birth a part of His humiliation?

He was born in abject poverty and was rejected of men. (Isaiah 53:2-3)

f. How else was the incarnation of Christ a matter of humiliation?

Though He remained God, Christ came into the likeness of sinful flesh. (John 17:5, Romans 8:3)

g. Did the Son of God suffer?

The Person of the Son of God suffered in His human nature, in body and soul. (1 Peter 2:24, Matthew 26:37-38)

h. Why was Christ's suffering necessary?

He had to satisfy God's justice and atone for our sins. (Romans 5:8-11)

i. How did Christ suffer?

He suffered at the hands of wicked men, but, more particularly, He bore the burden of God's wrath. (Matthew 20:28, Romans 5:6, Isaiah 53:4-5, HC 40)

j. For whom did Christ suffer?

He suffered for the elect, given Him by the Father. (John 6:39, John 10:15, Matthew 1:21, HC 37)

k. What is the third step in the state of humiliation?

Jesus' death on the cross. (Luke 23:46)

l. What kind of death did Jesus die?

The death of the cross, which was an accursed death. (Deuteronomy 21:23)

m. Why did Jesus have to die the accursed death of the cross?

He had to bear God's curse, which was upon us because of sin. (Galatians 3:13)

n. Was Jesus' death like ours?

No, Jesus gave Himself to death in obedience to the Father. (Matt 26:39)

o. Why did Jesus' death have to be an act of His own?

Only in the way of obedience to the Father could Christ merit salvation for His people. (Rom 5:17-21)

p. Why was Jesus buried?

He entered into our grave to show that He had overcome the power of death and destroyed the corruption of the grave for us. (Psalm 16:9-10)

r. Why, then, must believers die?

The death of believers is only a passage to life and glory. (2 Corinthians 5:1, HC 42)

s. Why must the body of believers rest in the grave for a time?

Salvation and glory cannot be completed until the return of Christ and the creation of the new heavens and earth. (Revelation 21:1-4)

t. Did Jesus descend locally into hell?

No, He endured the torments of hell during all His sufferings, but especially on the cross and most ultimately by virtue of his burial in the grave which is his descent into Sheol, where God will not leave him but raised him up on the third day. (Matthew 27:46; Psalm 16:10)

Lesson 9: Christ's Exaltation

No created being escapes death. Death strikes even the famous, the rich, and the powerful. Death strikes down the mighty and the lowly alike. Therefore the greatest and clearest demonstration of the power of God is set forth by defeating death. He did precisely that in raising Jesus from the dead. This is plainly explained by Paul in Ephesians 1:19-20 “... and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead” This is the power and authority that we should know for it stands in stark contrast to the natural end wrought by sin. Since Jesus overcame death itself, nothing can undo His eternal plan and purpose.

Take a moment to ponder the significance of the fact that Jesus has overcome death. His saints no longer need to fear any enemy, people, illness, or powers of darkness. God works this great power and authority for the benefit of His saints by raising Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior from the dead. By virtue of our union³⁰ with Christ through the Holy Spirit, we are assured that we too shall be raised in triumph over all His and our enemies (WSC 26). Jesus was raised from the dead and the Father gave Him the seat of ultimate favor and authority over all things:

“... and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” (Ephesians 1:20-23)

We are thus reminded of the proclamation that:

*“I bow down toward Your holy temple and give thanks to Your Name for your steadfast love and faithfulness, **for You have exalted above all things Your Name and Your Word.**”* (Psalm 138:2)

Although Jesus Christ was born of man, yet we must recognize His extreme Majestic exaltation in that Jesus is the Word who is God and is now seated at the right hand of the Father.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not over come it.” (John 1:1-5).

Our eternal comfort is nicely summed up with these words:

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”” (Revelation 21:3-4).

This is the greatness of Christ's exaltation – that having conquered death Jesus dwells with His people and death shall be no more. In light of our future exaltation with Christ, no suffering in this world can be too harsh for His elect. Christian fear not, but look to the Son who is seated on high.

Read:

1 Timothy 2, 2 Timothy 3, 1 Peter 4, WLC 51-59

Talking points:

- What do we understand from Philippians 2:9-11 regarding Christ's exaltation?
- How does Christ's exaltation benefit our conscience?
- What will Christ demonstrate at the final judgment?

30 Union with Christ in Paul's Epistles, J. V. Fesko, Ligonier Ministries. <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/union-with-christ-in-pauls-epistles/>

Questions

a. What is meant by the state of exaltation?

The state in which Christ in our flesh is raised in power and exalted in highest glory in heaven.

(Romans 5:10; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:43)

b. How many degrees do we distinguish in the state of exaltation?

Four: the resurrection, the ascension, the sitting at the right hand of God, and the return to judgment.

c. Did Christ rise with the same body which was laid in the grave?

Yes, but it was changed into a glorious and heavenly body. (1 Corinthians 15:42-49)

d. Through whose power did Christ arise?

Through His own power as the eternal Son of God, but He was also raised by the Father.

(John 2:19, Romans 8:11)

e. What is the significance of the resurrection of Christ?

It is the proof of our justification, the power of our spiritual resurrection, and a pledge of our final glory.

(Romans 4:25, Romans 6:4-5; 1 Thessalonians 4:14, HC 43-46)

f. How did Jesus ascend into heaven?

He ascended before the eyes of His disciples bodily and locally. (Acts 1:9, Luke 24:51)

g. What does it mean that Christ is seated at God's right hand?

That in heaven He is exalted to the state of highest glory and power and has a name above all names.

(Hebrews 1:3, Ephesians 1:20-22, HC 47)

h. What does Christ do in heaven?

He prepares a place for all His people, intercedes for them, and from heaven blesses them with all the blessings of salvation.

(Ephesians 1:3, John 14:2, Hebrews 9:24, HC 48-49)

i. What else does Christ do in heaven?

He rules over all, so that He may come again to establish forever the kingdom of God.

(1 Corinthians 15:24-28, HC 50-58)

j. When will Christ return?

When all things are finished according to the counsel of God. (WCF 33)

Lesson 10: The Covenant of Grace

The key distinctive of the Reformed faith³¹ is its understanding of the history of divine revelation which (as has already been pointed out in preceding lessons) is comprehended in the way God relates to man. God created the world and the known universe, and everything God had made pleased Him as good. All of Bible history is an account of God's redemptive works that began at the fall of man into sin and damnation, covers the redemption of man, and reaches its fullness in the final glorification of the resurrected and perfected man.

Deep within the fabric of history is the principle of truth. Truth is the foundation of trust. Fellowship and communion cannot exist without truth and trust. The history of the Old and New Testaments falls apart where there is no trust. God made with Adam and Eve a covenant of works, wherein obedience would secure life, and the result of disobedience being death. In this covenant eternal life and confirmed righteousness would be granted to Adam and his posterity on the condition of his perfect and perpetual obedience. Conversely, should he disobey he would receive the just wages of sin, which is death. (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23). God is merciful and spared Adam from his just wrath. Instead he killed an animal and clothed Adam and Eve with it, covering their shame. And then God gave a promise:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

Here we see clearly the covenant of grace³² in which the Triune God committed Himself to Satan's ultimate defeat, man's redemption, and the triumph of God's grace. In effect, man having broken the covenant of Works is redeemed by God in Christ Jesus who keeps the covenant of Works on our behalf. In this manner the covenant of Works is kept perpetually in Christ alone.

The covenant of grace is bound by legal³³ terms and conditions³⁴ expressed in laws that demand obedience. It is evident that God requires certain duties from all who are members of His Body. Both in the Old Testament administration, as well as in the New Testament era, there exist covenant rites and responsibilities. The responsibility to keep the faith is one of these (Romans 4:3, Habakkuk 2:4, Ezekiel 36:27). There exists a responsibility³⁵ to practice the faith and to do all necessary to avoid becoming a covenant breaker. Thus God imposes the requirement to repent and re-covenant as a normal cadence of life. This is nowhere better amplified than by Paul in Romans 9:4 "... and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises."

Members of Christ's covenant body are subject to its ministry. Covenant keepers therefore are to provide for (contribute to) the work of ministers (teaching elders), ruling elders, deacons, and the like so that the covenant community can function as she must. The church treats all its members as covenant children, offers them the signs and seals of the covenant, and exhorts them to a proper use thereof. The congregation shall know and understand their responsibilities in the covenant community through systematic preaching of the Word. (Matthew 8:12; Luke 14:16-24; Acts 13:46)

While the covenant is an eternal and inviolable covenant, which God never nullifies, it is possible for those who are in the covenant to break its ethical demands. Covenant members are in a legal relationship that requires covenant-keeping. Failure to meet the requirements of the covenant involves guilt and constitutes a breach of covenant (Jeremiah 31:32; Ezekiel 44:7). Covenant membership and election are not equivalent. There is no falling away of the elect, though there may be a temporary transgression. Recalcitrant breaking of the covenant is lawlessness which ultimately demonstrates exclusion from the covenant.

31 What It Means To Be Reformed, Tim Challies. <http://www.challies.com/articles/what-it-means-to-be-reformed>

32 The covenant of Grace, Calvin Knox Cummings. <http://www.opc.org/cce/covenant.html>

33 Covenant, Matt Slick, CARM, <https://carm.org/christianity/christian-doctrine/covenant>

34 Systematic Theology, Louis Berkhof, Banner of Truth Trust 1971, "Man in the covenant of Grace: The Dual Aspect of the covenant, p. 286. https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/berkhof/systematic_theology.html#dual

35 Ibid., p. 287. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/berkhof/systematictheology.iv.iii.iv.html>

Thus there exists a legal requirement to practice discipleship. The Lord rejected Eli, the priest of Israel, because he had failed to exercise Godly nurture and discipline (1 Samuel 2:27-36). The shepherds of Israel (the priests, the Levites, and the temple workers) were required to discipline (nurture) the flock. Their failure to nurture led to severe corrective action (Ezekiel 34:1-24).

Read:

Galatians 3:15-29, Jeremiah 31:31-40, WCF 7

Talking points:

- a) What is your part in keeping God's covenant?
- b) What is a testament?
- c) How was the covenant administered in the Old Testament?
- d) How is the covenant administered in the New Testament?
- e) What covenant does the believer make with God?

Questions

a. How do we know that God makes and keeps covenant?

God reveals Himself as living in fellowship, communion, and covenant. The covenant is established by the agreement of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to bring forth mankind. To bless him, and to delight in him. (Genesis 1:26, John 17:21-23, WSC 1)

b. How does God save His people?

By means of a living faith in the Mediator of the covenant, our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

c. What is the fruit of the work of Christ?

That God maintains, restores, and perfects His covenant through Him. (Jeremiah 31:33)

d. What is the covenant?

It is the gracious relation of living fellowship and friendship between God and His people in Christ, wherein He is their God and they are His people. (Genesis 17:7, Psalm 16:5, Psalm 33:22)

e. How many covenants has God made with man?

Two. All men are under the condemnation of the covenant of works whereby the Lord justly damns all those whom he has not called by election to adoption as heirs of grace (Romans 3:20). The covenant of grace, which is the same in both the Old and New Testaments, was established with God's people throughout all time. (Hebrews 11:39-40)

f. Did not Adam stand in a covenant relationship to God?

Yes, but he violated the covenant through his sin, so that the covenant must be restored through Christ. (Rom 5:12-21)

g. How does God establish His covenant?

God establishes His covenant by His own work of grace, whereby He takes (adopts) His people into His own covenant fellowship. (Ephesians 2:8, Leviticus 26:9-12; 40-46, WCF 12)

h. Does God establish His covenant of grace with all men?

No, He establishes His covenant of grace only with His elect people in the line of continued generations. (Galatians 3:16, Galatians 3:29)

i. What does God do for His people in that covenant?

He forms them to be His people, makes them partakers of all the benefits of Christ, and leads them on to eternal glory. (Ephesians 1:23)

j. Through whom does God make us partakers of all Christ's benefits?

Through the Holy Spirit, who dwells in Christ as the Head and in His people as members of His body. (Ephesians 1:23)

k. What was a key characteristic of Old Testament covenants between men?

Covenants between men involve a *mutual compact or binding agreement*. Abraham made a covenant with Abimelech (Genesis 21:27, 32). The Gibeonites make a covenant with Joshua (Joshua 9:6, 11, 15). David made covenant with Abner (2 Samuel 3:12-13, 21) and also with the elders of Israel at Hebron (1 Samuel 5:3). Solomon and Hiram made a covenant (1 Kings 5:12).

l. Are there examples of men making covenant with God?

Yes, Joshua and the people of Israel made covenant with God (Joshua 24:24-27). Jehoiada made covenant with the people of Israel unto the Lord (2 Kings 9:17), and Josiah and the people of Israel made covenant before the Lord (2 Kings 23:3). Likewise, Ezra and the people of Israel made covenant before the Lord (Ezra 10:3).

m. How does God establish the durability and certainty of His covenant promises?

Central to the covenant relationship is God's promise: "*I will be your God, and you shall be my people*" (Exodus 6:7, Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 37:27, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Hebrews 8:10, Revelation 21:3). This promise is linked to God dwelling among His people. "*I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.*" (Leviticus 26:11-12).

Lesson 11: Regeneration, Calling, and Saving Faith

The Lord declares sin to be a matter of the heart. Obedience is not possible without a right heart. The Lord says:

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

To receive a new heart a man must be re-born³⁶. We see this in the way the Jesus answered Nicodemus:

“Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” (John 3:3-7)

The addictive and compulsive nature of sin and the only remedy for man's woeful condition is shown here:

“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:3-7)

Both calling and regeneration are the work of God³⁷. Jesus says:

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me — not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.” (John 6:44-47)

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe. (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, ‘This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.’” (John 6:63-65).

Those who have been predestined to salvation will be saved, they will hear the Savior's voice for they know Him.

Read:

WCF 10-12, WCF 14, Romans 8:1-17, HC 20-23. HC 88-90

Talking points:

- a) What is regeneration? What is calling? What is faith?
- d) How does one obtain saving faith?
- e) What is meant by the expression: “The free offer of the gospel”?

³⁶ Regeneration – What does it mean to be born again?, Wayne Grudem, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/regeneration_grudem.html

³⁷ The Holy Spirit's Work of Calling and Regenerations, Herman Bavink, <https://www.monergism.com/holy-spirits-work-calling-and-regeneration-herman-bavink>

Questions

a. How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?

We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 4:30, Galatians 4:6, WCF 11)

b. How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling. (Romans 8:30, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, WCF 10)

c. What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?

They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them. (WCF 12)

d. How is this salvation worked in the elect sinner?

Christ, who is the fullness of our salvation, works it efficaciously by His Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:4-5)

e. What is the first work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the elect sinner?

The work of regeneration, (John 3:3): *“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

f. What is regeneration?

It is that work of the Spirit whereby He implants the new life of Christ in the heart of the sinner. (Ephesians 2:1, Ezekiel 36:26-27, John 3:8, HC 88-89)

g. Is there more than one sense in which Scripture speaks of regeneration?

Yes, Scripture speaks of regeneration in a narrower and a broader sense. (see next two questions)

h. What is regeneration in the narrower sense?

It is the first change of heart through Christ’s life in the heart of the totally depraved sinner. (1 Peter 1:23)

i. What is regeneration in the broader sense?

It is equal to conversion and is that act of God whereby He enlightens the mind, softens the will, and brings the sinner to repentance. (1 Peter 1:3)

j. What is conversion?

It is the mortification of the old man of sin and the quickening (imparting new life to) of the new man in Christ, whereby a sinner turns from his wicked way and towards God. (Colossians 3:5, HC 88-90)

k. What is the fruit of conversion?

A thankful walk in obedience to God for the salvation which is ours through faith in Christ. (2 Corinthians 7:10, HC 91)

l. Does the sinner cooperate in his own regeneration?

Not at all; it is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. (Acts 16:14)

m. What is meant by calling?

It is that work of God’s grace whereby the sinner is called out of darkness into God’s marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

n. How does God call His people?

Externally through the preaching of the gospel and internally through the operation of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. (2 Timothy 1:9-10)

o. What is the external call of the gospel?

It is the indiscriminate proclamation of the gospel by the church through her called and ordained ministry. (Romans 10:13-14)

p. What is the internal call of the Spirit?

It is the efficacious work of the Spirit whereby the truth of the gospel is worked in the hearts of those called. (Matthew 13:16, 1 Corinthians 2:10-12, Ephesians 1:18)

q. Whom does God call efficaciously?

Only the elect. (Romans 8:30): *“Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called.”*

r. But does not the call of the gospel come also to others besides the elect?

Yes, for many are called but few are chosen. (Matthew 22:14)

s. Where is the gospel preached?

To all those to whom God in His good pleasure sends it. (Matthew 28:18ff)

t. What is the significance of the call of the gospel for the elect?

It is the means by which God gathers His church from all nations of the earth. (Ephesians 1:17)

u. What is the significance of the call of the gospel for the reprobate wicked?

It is the sincere and genuine call of God who desires for all men to repent and come to a knowledge of the truth. It also reveals the perversity of the reprobate's sinful heart as they reject the gospel, and it aggravates their judgment.

(Ezekiel 18:23; 1 Tim 2:4; Matthew 11:24, John 8:24)

v. What is the first fruit of God's calling in the heart of the sinner?

The activity of saving faith in him. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

w. What is saving faith?

It is a certain spiritual knowledge of and hearty confidence in God through Christ as the God of our salvation. The Holy Spirit works such faith in my heart, but the word of God. (1 Peter 1:21, HC 21, WLC 72)

x. Is faith more than this?

Yes, it is also the means whereby we are ingrafted into Christ and receive all His benefits as adopted members of His body (the church).

(John 15:1-7, Ephesians 1:5, Romans 9:4-5)

y. What is the spiritual knowledge of faith?

It is the knowledge that all that God has revealed in His Word is true and that salvation in Christ is our possession. (HC 20-23)

z. What is the confidence of faith?

It is complete reliance upon and trust in Christ as the fullness of all our salvation.

(HC 20-23)

aa. Who works this faith in us?

The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ.

(Ephesians 2:8-10)

ab. In whom does God work this faith?

Only in the elect. (Romans 8:29-30)

Lesson 12: Justification and Sanctification

Understanding the difference and relation between justification and sanctification is very important.

Justification is the act of God where the righteousness of Jesus is reckoned to the sinner, so the sinner is declared by God as being righteous under the Law³⁸ (Romans 4:3, Galatians 2:16, 3:11). This righteousness is not earned by any effort of the person who is saved. Someone who does work as a hired person expects to be paid. The compensation paid for his work is owed to him (Romans 4:4). However, in the case of someone who labors without expectation of reward but rather trusts only Him who for the merit of another (Jesus Christ) declares him (the ungodly) righteous, his trust (faith) is counted to him as righteousness (Romans 4:5).

Abraham was accounted righteous before he was circumcised (the Old Testament equivalent of baptism) (Romans 4:10) and he received the sign and seal of faith (circumcision) through faith he had while still uncircumcised. This happened so that he could be the father of every uncircumcised person who trusts Jesus the Messiah, and thus has righteousness (justification) credited to him (Romans 4:10-11).

If righteousness (justification) were the result of a legalistic practice (keeping the Law), then faith is pointless and promise has no significance (Romans 4:13-15).

Justification is an instantaneous³⁹ gift with the result being eternal life. It is based completely on the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ and upon His sacrifice on the cross (1 Peter 2:24) and is received by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). No works of man are necessary whatsoever to obtain justification. Otherwise, it is not a gift (Romans 6:23) – justification is an act of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, we are justified by faith alone (Romans 5:1-2,9).

Sanctification⁴⁰ is the process of being set apart to glorify God and to be conformed to the image of Christ. This conforming to Christ involves the work (determination, dedication, and commitment) of the person, but sanctification is wrought of God in the believer to produce the godly character and life in the person who has already been justified (Philippians 2:13). Sanctification is not instantaneous - it is the work of Holy Spirit gradually changing the will, mind and spirit of the saved. The justified person is actively involved in submitting to God's will, resisting sin, fleeing from sin, seeking holiness, and working to be more godly (Galatians 5:22-23). Significantly, sanctification has no bearing on justification. That is, even though we don't live a perfect life, we remain justified in Christ.

Justification is a legal declaration that is forensic and instantaneous; **sanctification** is a life-long process. Justification comes from outside of us – it comes from God. Sanctification comes from God within us by the work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we contribute to sanctification through our efforts. In contrast, we do not contribute to our justification through our efforts, but rather significantly, our efforts are the fruit of sanctification. Sanctification is technically an act of God, our efforts or good works are the result and fruit of the sovereign act of God, and the work of the Holy Spirit (James 2:14-26). To sanctify also means to set apart for holy use.

The Scriptures teach us that we are to live holy lives and avoid sin (Colossians 1:5-11). Just because we are saved and eternally justified before God (John 10:28), that is no excuse to continue in the sin from which we were saved. Of course, we all sin (Romans 3:23), but the war within the saved over sin is continuous (Romans 7:14-20), and it won't be until the return of Jesus that we will be delivered from this body of death (Romans 7:24). To seek and desire sin continually and use God's grace to excuse it later is to trample the blood of Christ underfoot (Hebrews 10:29) and to reveal the person's true sinful, unsaved nature (1 John 2:4, 2:19).

38 God Justified the Ungodly, John Piper, Desiring God, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/god-justified-the-ungodly>

39 Why is justification by faith such an important doctrine?, <https://www.gotquestions.org/justification-by-faith.html>

40 What is Sanctification?, Nathan W. Bingham, <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-sanctification/>

Scripture declares expressly that there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins (1 Kings 8:46, Ecclesiastes 7:20, James 3:2). It should therefore be clear that mortal man is in no way able to perfectly obey God's Laws, even after he has been justified. We remain by nature sinners until the day we enter the joy of rest with the Lord. Believers (those who trust in Jesus Christ, and seek to be faithful in their conduct) must confess their sins to each other, again and again plead for the intercession of Christ. Jesus intercedes for His elect children (Hebrews 7:25) and forensically declares them righteous.

One of the effects of sanctification is the **mortification** of sin. The mortification of sin consists in the putting to death, the subduing of, and the establishment of a whole-hearted determination to subdue sin. The mortification of sin leads to vivification (to make more lively and intense, to enliven). Paul says (Romans 8:13) *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”* The new life is a life of walking with God according to His Law. The redeemed elect forgiven (justified) sinner learns to walk by the work of the Spirit with fidelity through sanctification (the work of the Holy Spirit:

“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:1-4).

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:5–11).

Read:

WCF 9-13, Romans 8, Psalm 25, Isaiah 64, Hebrews 12:14, 1 Peter 1:14-16, and 1 Peter 2:21-22

Talking points:

- a) Explain Isaiah 64:6 – what does this tell us about sin?
- b) What disposition towards sin does Psalm 25 teach us?
- c) Which is the key verse in John 3:16-21?

Questions

a. What is the first benefit of saving faith?

That the believer is justified before God.
(Romans 3:22-28, HC 59)

b. What is justification?

Justification is a gracious judgment of God whereby He declares the elect sinner righteous before Him.
(Romans 8:33-34, HC 60)

c. What is the deepest cause of our justification?

God's eternal counsel, according to which He chose in Christ all His people and made them one with Him.
(Ephesians 1:4, HC 61)

d. What is the meritorious ground of our justification?

Only the perfect obedience of Christ as the Head of all His people. (Romans 5:19, HC 62-64)

e. What is the objective proof of our justification?

The resurrection of Christ, because it is the seal of God on Christ's perfect obedience on the cross.
(Romans 4:25)

f. Why do we say that we are justified by faith?

Because faith is the bond that unites us with Christ, and by faith we become conscious of our justification.
(Romans 5:1, Philippians 3:9, HC 65)

g. Are we then not justified in any way by our works?

Not at all, for all our good works are but the fruit of God's work within us.
(Titus 3:5, 2 Timothy 1:9, Philippians 2:13, 2 Thessalonians 2:13)

h. What benefits are implied in justification?

Forgiveness of sin, perfect righteousness, peace with God, adoption unto children, the right to eternal life.
(Psalm 32:1, Romans 5:1, Romans 8:15-17)

i. What is sanctification?

It is that work of God whereby we are delivered from the dominion and pollution of sin and transformed according to the image of Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

j. What is the relation between justification and sanctification?

Justification is the ground of our sanctification, so that the one can never be present without the other.
(Titus 2:14)

k. What difference is there between justification and sanctification?

Justification is a judicial act of God and frees us from the guilt of sin; sanctification the spiritual-ethical work of God in us whereby he removes from us the pollution of sin.
(Romans 6:6, Romans 8:13, HC LD23, HC 88-91)

l. How does God perform this work in the believer?

By the Spirit of the exalted Christ, who cleanses us from all sin. (2 Thessalonians 2:13)

n. Is the believer made perfectly holy in this life?

No, even the holiest of God's children have only a small beginning of the new obedience.
(Isaiah 64:6, Philippians 3:12, Romans 7:18)

o. How does sanctification manifest itself in the life of the believer?

The believer more and more hates and flees from sin, and begins to live according to the will of God in all good works. (HC LD33)

p. What are good works?

Only those that proceed from a true faith, are done in accordance with God's law, and are directed to His glory. (Romans 14:23)

r. Must a Christian do good works?

Certainly, for good works are the purpose of his salvation, that God may be glorified in him; and without holiness it is impossible to see the Lord.
(Matthew 5:16, Hebrews 12:14, HC 63-64)

s. What is the relation between sanctification and preservation?

Those whom God sanctifies He preserves in holiness until their final salvation. (John 10:27-29, 1 Peter 1:5)

Lesson 13: The Church and the means of grace

Genesis 4:26 explains when covenant public worship of God began. The Church is the faithful covenant people of God. It consists of all who as adults convert to the faith of the covenant-keeping God, and also those adults who embrace with understanding the faith of covenant-keeping fathers. Infants born into the church are members of the Church even though there are many who object to this assertion.

Mount Zion, the mount of the Lord, was near Jerusalem. Zion is often used to refer to the city of Jerusalem. Zion was the location of the Old Testament temple of the Lord. The term Zion means *marked* or distinctive or *differentiated*. Zion was known as the place where God dwelt with His people in a very close relationship. The book of Judges makes reference to the congregation in several places (Judges 20:1, 21:5, 21:10, 21:13, 21:6), and also of the assembly (Judges 20:2, 21:8). Deuteronomy 31 instructs the people to gather so that they may hear, learn and fear the Lord, and observe to do all the words of His law.

The Psalms of David provide a rich insight into the role of the church. The church assembly is mentioned in Psalms 22:22, 22:25, 35:18, 40:9, 68:26, 89:5, 107:32, 111:1, 116:18, 149:1. The assembly is shown as a place where the faithful gather to retell of God's mighty works of old, a place of true judgment, a place of singing, a place to renew covenant vows before the Lord. Those who assemble as the Lord's people must worship Him - "*Let them extol Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the assembly of the elders.*" (Psalm 107:32) The assembly of the elders is also rendered as the leaders' council. Thus we see also that the role of elders pre-dates the New Testament era, and was clearly not a recent invention.

From the Greek word *ekklesia* we obtain the English word for assembly or congregation. This is also the word from which we obtain the English word *ecclesiastical*⁴¹, meaning relating to the christian church or its clergy. The word *ekklesia* can be translated as meaning "*the called out assembly*" - since *ek* means *out of* and the word *kaleo* (root of *klesia*) means *called*. Thus we see continuity in use of the same term in the Old Testament as is also used in the New Testament to refer to the elect, the faithful followers of Christ.

The word *qahal* is used in Genesis 48:4 where God promises to make for himself a multitude of people to whom He will give an everlasting possession. In Numbers 14:5 reference is made to the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. Also, in 1 Samuel 17:47, David declares, "*and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you [the Philistines] into our hand.*"

As it was in the Old administration, so it is in the New administration, the public assembly of God's people serves as a means of inculcating faithful practices in the light of the Word of the Lord⁴². The preaching of the Word by which God's people hear His Word, learn His laws, and gather their fear of the Almighty, thus gain strength and orientation to live and walk according the God's Law. Preaching of the Word and the use of the sacraments can be regarded as means of grace, that is, as objective channels which Christ has instituted in the Church, and to which He ordinarily binds Himself in the communication of His grace⁴³. Of course these may never be dissociated from Christ, nor from the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, nor from the church which is the appointed organ for the distribution of the blessings of divine grace. They are in themselves quite ineffective and are productive of spiritual results only through the efficacious operation of the Holy Spirit.

41 Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ecclesiastic>

42 Means of Grace, Ligonier Ministries, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/means-of-grace/>

43 <https://www.monergism.com/means-grace-general>

Church membership

Church membership is for baptized sinners who know the mercy of God, the forgiveness of sin in the blood of Christ, and who seek to faithfully follow Jesus. Believers are obligated to show evidence of living under the discipline of God's Word resulting in holiness unto God and charity towards each other.

Some people claim to be Christians yet they do not believe in church membership⁴⁴. This is evidenced in the home church movement and also in those churches and denominations that have little or no formal practice of membership – some churches even claim that membership is a man-made invention. All who are in Christ live as part of His body. There is an explicit relationship that members have with each other. In that relationship there is a mutual sharing and caring, there is mutual nurture, mutual feeding on the Word of God. Doctrine and practice actively binds together the community or assembly of believers. Being an active member necessitates a common understanding of doctrine and practice, hence in the Reformed family of churches the confessional standards act as a guard against heresy and false practices.

Within the churches of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church new members follow the practice of making a vow⁴⁵ before the Lord and His local church that they recognize the necessity to preserve our common understanding as set out in the Confessions. Preservation of the relationship we have with one another takes continuous effort. The membership vows amplify the need to stick with the local church through thick and thin - to become and to remain one body that is committed to holiness and to harmony among all members of the church. Both locally and in unity with all faithful churches.

Read:

WCF 25, WCF 26, Revelation 2:2-7; Ezekiel 34:1-10; Acts 20:26-30, BCF 28, BCF 29

Talking points:

- a) Describe the type of church that a believer should be a member of.
- b) Read 1 Timothy 3:2-12. then list the qualifications for elders and deacons.
- c) What are the responsibilities of believers within the covenant community?
- d) What were the responsibilities of teachers in the Old Testament? What were teachers called?
- e) Describe the government of the Old Testament church (congregation) and that of the New Testament church.

44 We Invite You, OPC Booklet, http://opc.org/books/eBooks/We_Invite_You.pdf

45 The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Directory for Worship, Section IV, "Public Reception of Church Members", 2015 Edition, p. 156-166.

Questions

a. What is the church?

The church is the elect body of Christ, which is revealed on earth as the gathering of elect believers and their seed. (Ephesians 1:23, 1 Peter 2:9)

b. How does the New Testament describe Israel's 40 years of wondering in the desert?

The Apostle Steven refers to the people of Israel as *the congregation in the wilderness*. (Acts 7:37-38)

c. What promises did God make in respect of His faithful congregation?

God said: *“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”* (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

d. What is the hallmark of a true Jew?

“For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.” (Romans 2:28-29)

e. How is the church gathered?

Christ gathers His church by His Word and Spirit. (Ephesians 5:26-27, Ephesians 2:13-17)

f. How can the church be distinguished?

As the church militant on earth in her struggle against sin, the church triumphant in heaven, and the church latent which must still be born. (Ephesians 6:11-12, 2 Timothy 4:7-8)

g. How can the church militant on earth be distinguished?

As the church visible and the church invisible. (WLC Q61, WLC 62)

h. What is meant by the church visible?

The church as it is revealed in the world, in the ministry of the Word and sacraments, and in the confession and walk of her members. (WLC 62)

i. What is meant by the church invisible?

The church from the viewpoint of her internal spiritual

life of regeneration, faith, and the other blessings of salvation. (WLC 64)

j. What does it mean to be a member of Christ's Church?

The body does not consist of one member but of many. ... God arranged the members in the body. ... There are many parts, yet one body. ... God has so composed the body, ... that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ... If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. You are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27, WCF 26)

k. What are the marks of the true church?

The pure preaching of the Word of God, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Christian discipline. (John 8:31, John 8:47)

l. What offices did Christ institute in His church on earth?

The offices of minister, elder, and deacon. (Acts 6, Ephesians 4:11-12)

m. What are the keys of the kingdom?

The preaching of the Word and the exercise of Christian discipline, by which the kingdom is opened to believers and shut to unbelievers. (John 20:23, HC 83)

n. Who belong to the church visible on earth?

All confessing believers who walk according to their confession, and their children. (John 8:43, Acts 2:39, Genesis 17:7)

p. What is to be understood by the means of grace?

The means which the Holy Spirit employs to apply to us the salvation which God has prepared in Christ. (John 17:17, Acts 2:42, WLC 69, WLC 104, WLC 195)

q. What are the means of grace?

The preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and faithful discipline. (BC 29)

r. How is the preaching of the Word a means of grace?

By means of the preaching, the elect are called to faith and spiritually nourished, so that they grow in the grace of God. (Romans 10:17, 1 Peter 2:2)

Lesson 14: Baptism

God sealed unto His elect the covenant promise of grace and mercy. God declares that children who are born of the household of faith (the covenant community) are holy (set apart unto the Lord) just as their parents are holy. As members of the covenant community they are to be nurtured in the faith.

Anyone who denies covenant nurture to children of believing parents, must bear the burden of proof that in the New Testament church God excludes children from church membership. Inherent in the assertion of the exclusion of infants is a presupposition that faith is purely personal and individual. In other words – only those who have converted to faith are church members. Many thus assert that it is a primary responsibility of the church to evangelize and pursue conversions. They in-effect argue that only those who have been regenerated are members of the church, with loss of the distinction of the visible versus the invisible church.

The Scriptures do not declare that the responsibility of the church is principally to seek converts. Paul makes the case for persuasion (2 Corinthians 5:11-20) we ought to implore all men to be reconciled to God. Teaching and training are the key tools for persuasion. The covenant community is charged to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20) by way of teaching, training, catechizing, leading, and disciplining God's people to grow and mature as citizens of Christ's Kingdom. God's holy people faithfully make use of the means of grace: prayer, preaching/teaching the Word, the Sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion), and church discipline to inculcate the practices of a living faith. The Sacraments consist of signs and seals of the promises of God's covenant of grace.

The covenant entry rite

The sign and seal of entry into the old covenant community was circumcision. In the new covenant administration baptism has replaced⁴⁶ circumcision as the new Rite of entry into the covenant community. In both dispensations the Rite of covenant entry is to be administered to:

- All born into the household of faith,
- To all converts to the household of faith.

Baptism has taken the place of Old Testament circumcision as the rite of covenant entry. Baptism shall be applied to the family (household) of believers⁴⁷ - Paul specifically mentions baptism in the case of Stephanas and his household (1 Corinthians 1:16). When the Philippian jailor confessed faith in Christ he and his household were baptised (Acts 16:33). Believers are adopted members of God's family, and He is our head, thus it is fitting that the believer and his family should receive the rite of covenant entry.

Faith is prerequisite of baptism, just as circumcision was a sign and seal in the flesh, so baptism is a veritable visible witness of the work of the Holy Spirit. Covenant children require instruction⁴⁸ which is commanded as a parental responsibility. The visible sign⁴⁹ was never intended to be considered apart from the inward reality. It is a mistake to make a distinction between Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism. Both are intended as outward signs of the inward reality. But there was also, just as with baptism, an acknowledgment that not all who bore the sign would be in possession of the reality. To use New Testament terms, there would be tares among the wheat in Israel (Matthew 13:24-30). There is in Old Testament Israel a separation identical to that of the visible and invisible church recognizing that not all who received the sign and the seal of covenant entry are of

46 Circumcision and Baptism, Ligonier Ministries, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/circumcision-and-baptism/>

47 The Sacrament of Baptism, <http://www.moravian.org/faith-a-congregations/the-sacrament-of-baptism/>

48 The Rod and Reproof – The loving discipline of Covenant children, Steven Key, Protestant Reformed Church, http://www.reformedspokane.org/Life%20and%20walk/Family%20pages/Rod_and_Reproof.html

49 Baptism as a sacrament of the Covenant, Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Reformed Theological Seminary, http://thirdmill.org/articles/ric_pratt/th.pratt.baptism.html

the elect. Paul, says in Romana 1:17, quoting from Habakkuk 2:4, says: “*but the righteous shall live by his faith.*”

Profession of faith

Covenant children need to be trained and nurtured in the faith until they demonstrate by their life’s walk a necessary level of maturity. Until such point, they are not entitled to the benefits of full communion (which includes participation in the Lord's Supper). Dr. David Engelsma provides a cogent summary that is agreeable to the Westminster Confession and is consistent with practices from the time of Calvin's Geneva. Dr. Engelsma⁵⁰ wrote:

Neither is the conversion of the children of the covenant as a rule a sudden, dramatic change in teenage years, or even in later life. The history of the conversion of the penitent thief and of Saul is not the norm for elect children born and reared in the covenant. Usually, they are converted from earliest childhood. This is the implication of the fifth commandment of the law. From earliest years, the children are converted to God so that they are able to honor their parents from the motive of the fear of Jehovah God Who has redeemed them from sin and death through the blood of Jesus Christ. This is also expressed in Psalm 71. God is the trust of the covenant child, as the rule, from his or her youth (v.5), for God has taught him or her from youth (v. 17). The covenant relationship goes back, in fact, to conception and birth (v.6).

Reformed and Presbyterian churches recognize in 1 Corinthians 11 that participants in the Lord’s Supper must be able to examine themselves and discern the body of Christ. This means there must be some reasonable level of spiritual, doctrinal, and intellectual maturity. It is special duty and responsibility⁵¹ of parents to prepare covenant children to walk by faith. A covenant child is to make a credible profession⁵² of faith.

Baptism of adults, who have not previously received the rite of covenant entry, make a public profession⁵³ of faith together **at their baptism, not in their baptism**. Adults who come to faith should be examined for their understanding and walk and should thereby make profession of faith. Their profession grants them admission to the Lord’s table. Baptism is not an instrument that originates the work of grace in the heart of the sinner., it is a sign and seal of covenant membership.

Read:

WCF 27, WCF 28, Romans 4:1-12, Romans 6:1-11, Galatians 3, Colossians 2:11-14, 1 Peter 2:9-10, BC 34, Matthew 19:13-15, HC 66-74

Talking points:

- a) Is infant baptism the same as Christening? If not, why not?
- b) In what way are circumcision and baptism alike?
- c) In what manner is baptism superior to circumcision?
- d) What is a rite? Discuss examples of rites from daily life.
- e) What is the relationship between rites and rights?

50 The covenant of God and the Children of Believers, Professor David J. Engelsma, http://www.pcca.org/pamphlets/pamphlet_51.html

51 For more information see: “Bringing the Gospel to covenant Children”, Joel R. Beeke, ISBN: #1-892777-63-0

52 OPC Book of Church Order, Directory for Worship, IV:A.8, p. 94, 2015 Edition.

53 On Profession of Faith and Communion, The Heidelberg, <http://heidelberg.net/2015/01/on-profession-of-faith-and-communion/>

Questions

a. What is the status of children within the household of faith?

They are covenant members of whom God requires faithfulness. God bound Himself in covenant with Abraham and his offspring (Genesis 17:7-8). God seeks covenant faithfulness of the children of covenant community members (Malachi 2:15-16). Paul declares that the children of believing parent/s are holy unto the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:14) thus declaring that the children are heirs of covenant promises. (HC 74)

b. What are the sacraments?

The visible signs and seals of the covenant of grace instituted by God for the church, by which the faith of the elect is strengthened.

(Genesis 17:7, Colossians 2:11-12, HC 66, WLC 162 - 163)

c. How are the sacraments means of grace?

They signify and seal covenant promises that depend upon the righteousness which is in Christ.

(HC 67, WLC 161)

d. How many sacraments did God institute for the church of the new dispensation?

Two: Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. (HC 68, WLC 164)

e. What was the rite of entry into covenant membership in the old dispensation?

The rite of covenant entry in the Old Testament was circumcision which was an outward sign and seal of the reality of what the Lord does inwardly. The outward sign and seal was a reminder that God's covenant community are holy and set apart unto the Lord who alone does circumcise the heart so that we and our children may love the Lord our God with all our being. (Deuteronomy 30:6, 1 Peter 2:9-10)

f. How is Holy Baptism a sign?

The sprinkling of the water signifies the washing away of our sins through the blood of our Savior. Baptism signifies that we have been buried with Christ and that we have been resurrected in Christ.

(1 Peter 3:18-22, HC 66, WLC 165)

g. How is Holy Baptism as seal of God's grace?

Baptism seals unto us the cutting off of the old sinful nature (Colossians 2:9-14), dedication unto holiness in the Lord (Colossians 2:6-7, Genesis 17:13-14), and a declaration that we are set apart from those who are defiled by sin.

(Deuteronomy 10:12-16, Deuteronomy 30:6, 1 Peter 2:9-12)

i. What do the sacraments seal?

That the believer by faith is righteous before God in Christ. (HC 67, WLC 165)

j. Are the sacraments grace for all who receive them?

No, but only for such as receive them by a true and living faith. (HC 72)

k. Of what is baptism a sign and seal?

Of the washing away of sins in the blood of Jesus Christ. (Acts 2:38, HC 69, WLC 165)

l. Who must receive baptism?

All adult believers who confess their sins and their faith in Christ, and their children. (HC 71, WLC 166)

m. Why must infants be baptized?

Because they as well as their believing parents are comprehended in the covenant of grace.

(Genesis 17:7, Acts 2:39, HC 74)

n. How can they be comprehended in that covenant?

Because God establishes His covenant in the line of continued generations.

(Genesis 3:15, Genesis 17:7, Acts 2:39, WLC 167)

o. Prove from Scripture that God establishes His covenant with His people in the line of generations.

"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." (Genesis 17:7, Ezekiel 36:22-32)

p. Who are Abraham's seed?

All believers, because Abraham is called the father of those who believe.

(Romans 4:12-16, Galatians 3:9, HC 54)

q. Are all baptized children, then, elect?

Certainly not, for they are not all Israel that are of Israel. (Romans 9:6)

r. In presenting children for baptism what responsibility do parents acknowledge?

In presenting a child for infant baptism parents acknowledge the covenant duty to prepare children to make a sound profession of faith.

(Ephesians 6:4, 1 Timothy 6:12, HC 74)

s. Does not God, then, seal in baptism that which He does not always bestow?

Not at all, for baptism, like circumcision, seals the righteousness which is by faith.

(Romans 4:11, HC 73)

t. What obligation follows from being baptized?

To love the Lord our God with all our heart and to walk in a new and holy life (Micah 6:8). The new life is a necessity (Titus 3:5), as is union with Christ.

(Romans 6; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2)

u. What may be deduced from Jesus's blessing of children in Matthew 19:13-15?

The Abrahamic pattern unifies redemptive history. It includes believers, their children, and the Gentiles (those who were far off) – indeed all whom the Lord should with effect call to faith. Thus, we may rightly appeal to Matthew 19:13-15 for support of the theology, piety, and practice of infant baptism. (Acts 2:38-39)

Lesson 15: Holy Communion

The Lord's Supper is a covenant rite by which the church partakes of the sign and seal of the mercies of God, His works of redemption throughout history, and the works of God through which He establishes His inheritance in the household of faith.

The connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper is an inescapable witness to the continuity of God's redeeming grace. The lesser pointed to the greater. The greater is the ultimate testimony to the faithfulness of God. While the New Covenant Lord's Supper is rich, its richness is only evident when taken in the context of redemptive history. The Passover precedes but is superseded by Christ who fulfilled the promise and in so doing gives the New covenant rite of Covenant continuity its fullest power. To treat of the Lord's Supper apart from what it has superseded is to weaken the argument against the pure memorial nature of this gift to the Church. That which has been fulfilled is key to comprehending the covenant of Grace as illustrated in the Lord's Supper.

The covenant continuity rite

Word and sacrament combine to great effect. The Gospel proclaims the promise of salvation, the sacraments confirm the promise in indelible signs and seals. Every participation in the sacraments involves a sign and seal⁵⁴ of faith. The signs are attached to the reality they represent. Christ is really and truly present, given, and received in the signs. Every celebration of the Lord's Supper is a partaking in Christ's death, redemption and resurrection unto eternal life and therefore is a time of great joy. Under the old administration the Lord established the Passover as a continually renewed sign and seal of deliverance from the slavery of Egypt.

The old covenant rite

The Passover was in the first place a sacrifice of atonement. "... *It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.* ..." (Exodus 12:27). Not only is it called a sacrifice, but in the Mosaic period it was also connected with the sanctuary (Deuteronomy 16:2). The spotless lamb was slain by the Levites, and the blood was manipulated by the priests, (2 Chronicles 30:16, 2 Chronicles 35:11, Ezra 6:19). Thus the Passover rite signified *covenant renewal*⁵⁵.

The sacrament of the Passover was instituted as a communal covenantal meal that was to be celebrated by all of Israel at the same time: "... *when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.*" (Exodus 12:6). Foreigners to the congregation of Israel were not to partake (Exodus 12:43), and thus it is clear that only *members* of the congregation (covenant community) could partake. This covenant meal was reserved only for the household of faith, if a stranger wanted to partake he had to be admitted to the community by receiving the sign of the covenant, circumcision (Exodus 12:48). Though the Passover is first of all a sacrifice⁵⁶, it is also a communal meal in which the roasted lamb is eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, (Exodus 12:8-10). The sacrifice passed into a meal which in later times became far more elaborate than when it was at first instituted..

The new covenant rite

The New Testament ascribes to the Passover a typological significance, (1 Corinthians 5:7), and thus sees in it not only a reminder of the deliverance from Egypt, but also a sign and seal of the deliverance from the bondage of sin, and of communion with God in the promised Messiah. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in connection with the

54 Of the Sacraments, Westminster Standards, Western Reformed Seminary, John A. Battle, http://wrs.edu/Materials_for_Web_Site/Courses/Westminster%20Standards/WCF_27--Sacraments.pdf

55 The Lord's Supper and covenant Children, New Horizons, Stuart R. Jones. http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=552

56 Systematic Theology, The Doctrine of The Church, V. The Lord's Supper, Louis Berkhof, p. 644

paschal meal. By using the elements present in the former Jesus effected a very natural transition to the latter.

The grace received in the sacrament does not differ in kind from that which believers receive through the instrumentality of the Word⁵⁷. The sacrament merely adds to the effectiveness of the Word, and therefore to the measure of the grace received. It is the grace of an ever closer fellowship with Christ, of spiritual nourishment and quickening, and of an ever increasing assurance of salvation.

In the New Testament the term seal is used in the sense of a guarantee⁵⁸. God seals the elect. Paul writes, “*Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His’*” (2 Timothy 2:19). Paul tells the believers at Corinth, “*For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 9:2). When John the Baptist spoke of Christ’s revelation of God he said, “*Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.*” (John 3:33 ESV; the NKJV says “*certified*”).

The term “*seal*” when applied to the sacraments refers to the fact that they seal, confirm, or certify God’s promises in the covenant of grace and Christ’s love to the church—the elect. At the institution of the Lord’s supper Jesus said, “*Do this in remembrance of Me*” (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24). Our Lord gave the ordinance a personal character. He made it a seal or token of His love. He wanted us to have a visible sign to certify his love of us and our loving remembrance of Him. Communion certifies our participation in the covenant of grace, our union with Christ and our saving relationship with the triune God.

Once we understand the Lord’s supper as a sealing ordinance we begin to fathom the seriousness of being barred from communion as an act of church discipline. Unbelievers, heretics and scandalous persons are not permitted to partake of the certification of our love and fellowship with Christ. Professing Christians who have a deep understanding of this sacrament tremble with fear at the thought of being cut off from the table. Sadly, today many believers take communion for granted as rather quaint, unimportant ritual.

In the sacraments God by sensible signs promises to give us the benefits of the covenant of grace and further sanctify us as we trust Him and live in accordance with our faith in Christ. When we receive the sacraments we actively assume all of the obligations of Scripture that are part of salvation in the broad sense of the term. We bind ourselves to fulfill them.

Read:

WCF 29, BC 35, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, WLC 168-177, HC 75-82

Talking points:

- a) Is the Lord's Supper the same as Communion? Explain your answer.
- b) Who should be admitted to the Lord's table?
- c) What were the sacraments of the Old Testament?
- d) In what way are the sacraments of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament alike?

57 The Lord’s Supper, Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/berkhof/systematictheology.vii.ii.v.html>

58 The Sacraments: A Reformed Perspective, Brian A. Swertley, http://www.reformedonline.com/uploads/1/5/0/3/15030584/the_sacraments_a_reformed_perspective.pdf

Questions

a. Why is a proper understanding of sin necessary in comprehending the significance of the Lord's Supper?

Sin consists in any and all departure from the Law of God. The just penalty of sin is death. Those who partake of the Lord's Supper must take note of the gravity of sin and the significance of Christ's atonement upon the cross. The Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ Himself exhortation in these words: *"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord."* 1 Corinthians 11:27.
(see also: WLC 23 – 30, HC 82)

b. What are the consequences of sin?

Adam having violated the Covenant of Works brought sin into the world. Through Adam sin has passed to all generations of man. When Christ returns the punishment of sin will be revealed in eternal separation from the presence of God, and everlasting torment.
(WLC 24 – 29, WLC 152 - 153)

c. With whom did God make the Covenant of Grace?

The Covenant of Grace was made in Christ, the second Adam, and His seed. (WLC 31)

d. Do the rites of the Covenant of Grace under the Old administration (Testament) relate directly to the rites of the New?

No. The Covenant of Grace is administered differently under the New Testament than it was under the Old.
(WLC 33, 2 Corinthians 3:6-9)

e. How was the covenant of grace administered under the Old administration?

From the first Adam, until the last Adam (Christ), the covenant of grace was administered through types and shadows (signs and symbols/seals) pointing forward to Christ. These included **promises, prophecies, sacrifices, rites** (circumcision and the Passover), **feasts and other ordinances**. These were used to enrich the elect in faith and trust that their sins were covered in the promised messiah who was represented in the paschal lamb. These were communicated through the teaching

and repetition of the Word, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and through covenant nurture.
(WLC 34, Psalm 51:11)

f. How is the covenant of grace administered under the New administration?

From the resurrection of the last Adam (Christ) until His second coming the Covenant of Grace is now administered through the preaching of the Word, the rites of the sacraments, and covenant nurture. These are set forth in great fulness since the work of Christ has been completed as has been testified to by eye witnesses. The greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost seals unto us the certainty of our salvation.
(WLC 35-36, WLC 168, 169)

g. Of what are the bread and wine signs?

Of the broken body and shed blood of Christ by which Christ made atonement for our sins.
(1 Corinthians 11:24-26, HC 75, WLC 169)

h. How is Christ present in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper?

He is spiritually present by His grace and Spirit because the bread and wine signify and seal His body and blood.
(1 Corinthians 10:16, HC 76, HC 77)

i. Within the Lord's Supper do the bread and wine change in substance?

In no way! The bread and wine remain unchanged since they are symbols presented to the congregation in temporal forms that serve as a testimony (seal) of the Spiritual reality that God's elect are partakers in Christ's body and blood by the operation of the Holy Spirit.
(John 6:51-55, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, HC 79)

j. How do the partakers eat and drink Christ at His table?

Spiritually, and only by a true and living faith.
(1 Corinthians 11:27-29)

k. To whom must the supper be administered?

To all baptized Christians who reveal themselves in confession and walk as true believers. The Lord's Supper is intended: *“For those who are truly displeased with themselves for their sins and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ, and that their remaining infirmity is covered by His passion and death; who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life.”* (HC 81).

From these words it appears that the Lord's Supper was not instituted for all men indiscriminately, nor even for all those who have a place in the visible church of Christ, but only for those who earnestly repent of their sins, trust that these have been covered by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, and are desirous to increase their faith, and to grow in true holiness of life. (WLC 170)

l. What is necessary before we come to the table of the Lord?

We must rightly examine ourselves whether we are worthy partakers of the table of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 11:28, WLC 171, HC 81)

m. What must we examine in ourselves?

Three things: whether we are truly sorry for our sins; whether we believe that our sins are forgiven in Christ; and whether our faith is revealed in a holy walk. (2 Corinthians 13:5, WLC 172 – 173)

n. How does baptism differ from the Lord's supper?

The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper differ, in that baptism is to be administered once only, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ. Baptism is also to be administered to infants.

The Lord's supper is to be administered often, in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him, and only to those who are of an age and ability to examine themselves. (WLC 177)

Lesson 16: Nurture and discipline in the church

As it was in the early Christian church, so it is today. There are quarrels, disputes, and there are many who are more than willing to condemn both churches that are faithful along with those that are unfaithful. Tension within the church has a long history, for example a dispute arose in Acts 6:1-7. This complaint arose because widows did not receive due ministry of care which is a responsibility of the church. The local church elected seven men of good repute (this implies qualification for candidates for the role of deacon), men of the Spirit who were appointed to the ministry of temporal care thus permitting the disciples to devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. This context of both the diaconal care and of the ministry of the word were instituted to serve the saints. Throughout the Bible the role and purpose of prophets, ministers, elders, and deacons, is to serve the people of God. Congregations choose from among themselves men who are qualified for their respective offices.

When people hear of *church discipline* all too often they react and shudder because of discipline gone wrong or misunderstood. Sadly, there are casualties of improper church discipline. Our hearts break over this, particularly because our Lord Jesus himself established discipline for the good of his people. The book of Hebrews tells us, “*the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.*” (Hebrews 12:6). Discipline and nurture work together to express God’s love for the Father’s redeemed children. Church discipline consists in more than corrective discipline it includes gentle nurture.

Sunday worship, hearing the preached word, partaking of the sacraments, and confessing sin are all part of healthy church discipline. This is how God positively reinforces his faithfulness and love towards us in Jesus Christ. Through these we hear and trust our father’s word, forsake our sin, and feed on spiritual food. The love of God should naturally overflow into corrective discipline. Our heavenly father pursues those who have wandered from his fold, we ought to do this also. The purpose of corrective church discipline is recovery and restoration.

Discipline is the process of making disciples (followers). Elders are charged with the responsibility of both covenant nurture and covenant correction. There are multiple safe-guards in the Reformed practices of covenant discipline. The ruling elder is charged with oversight of the covenant discipleship needs of the pastor (minister), just as the pastor is charged with oversight of discipline of the ruling elders. The Session must always act in unison in its work of oversight of the congregation.

Discipline is a life-long process of nurture and correction. The primary motivating principle of all discipline is mercy and kindness. This motivating principle needs to be present both in the positive aspects of covenant nurture, but particularly in covenant correction. When the wayward person at length refuses to be counseled and at last rejects correction it becomes necessary for the church to cut off that individual from the covenant community so as to protect the flock. Even when this action is taken the operating principle is the exercise of mercy and kindness towards the flock – it is done to protect the church, to redeem the offender, and to vindicate the church.

There is a rightful process by which we are admonished to resolve conflict within the church. That process is described in Matthew 18:15-20, and it provides a step-wise process for escalation of concerns for one who has sinned, or one who has strayed - which is the sin of breaking fellowship. Psalm 51:17 says: “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*” Our covenant-keeping God does not despise the penitent sinner, rather promising mercy and kindness to all who come before him in humility to ask for pardon. The oversight of the church of Christ is a duty to work tirelessly with the flock to recover the lost, to win back those who stray using kind words and deeds and by gentle but firm persuasion. Elders must be vigilant in prayer with and for those over whom they are God's appointed watchmen. We all know that no matter how hard elders labor, it is not their craft and skill that wins back the lost, but the work of the Holy Spirit alone that can (and does) change hardness of heart into willing compliance to repent and seek to be restored in grace.

The work of overseers is a super-natural task and also the most critical to the maintenance of good conduct and holiness within the church of Christ. When disciplinary action is not taken in a timely manner the flock languish and increasing lawlessness is seen. Such fruit brings disgrace and ill repute upon the church of Christ within the community.

Safe-guarding of communion

Another example of godly discipline can be seen in the safe-guards the Lord has set for the most loving and intimate testimony He gives His elect – communion at the Table of the Lord. Here too we ought to see the covenantal continuity of God’s care for His relationship with the redeemed.

Fencing practices - old

Covenant community membership in Israel was required, and fencing of participation in the Passover was also demanded. Covenant community members who neglected the Passover were *to be cut off from his people*: “*But if anyone who is clean and is not on a journey fails to keep the Passover, that person shall be cut off from his people because he did not bring the Lord’s offering at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin.*” (Numbers 9:13). The notion of being *shut out or cut off* necessitates membership in the covenant community of Israel. The saints of the Old Testament church were to guard the practice of the rite of the Passover. Only those who had been circumcised were to be admitted to the Passover meal (Exodus 12:43-49). Full participation required appropriate evidence of maturity in the faith (Genesis 21:8, Proverbs 2:1-5).

The Passover was first established in Egypt on the night before taking hasty flight from the land of bondage. The Passover was celebrated in the wilderness until a more suitable formal practice could be established. “*You may not offer the Passover sacrifice within any of your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, but at the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name dwell in it, there you shall offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, at the time you came out of Egypt.*” (Deuteronomy 16:5-6).

Fencing practices - new

Those who hold the keys of the Kingdom⁵⁹ are responsible to determine if a person has the requisite spiritual, doctrinal, and intellectual maturity to partake of the Supper. The elders of the church have the duty to fence the Lord’s table. Fencing is necessary to keep covenant breakers from profaning the presence of the Lord at His table. The fact that we who are many are one body establishes that the Lord’s Supper is a covenant community meal, as was the Passover that it supersedes.

The Lord’s Supper is intended for believers only⁶⁰ it is not an instrument that originates the work of grace in the heart of the sinner. The work of the grace of God in the hearts of the elect precedes their baptism. Jesus administered the Lord’s Supper to His disciples only; according to Acts 2:42,46 they who believed continued steadfastly in the breaking of bread; and in 1 Corinthians 11:28,29 the necessity of self-examination before partaking of the Lord’s Supper is stressed. The participants of the Lord’s Supper must be repentant sinners⁶¹, who are ready to admit that they are lost in themselves. They must have a living faith in Jesus Christ, so that they trust for their redemption in the atoning blood of the Savior. Furthermore, they must have a proper understanding⁶² and appreciation of the Lord’s Supper, must discern the difference between it and a common meal, and must be impressed with the fact that the bread and wine are the tokens of the body and blood of Christ. And, finally, they must have a holy desire for spiritual growth and for ever-increasing conformity to the image of Christ.

59 The Keys of the kingdom of heaven, John Fairley, Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Glasgow, May 1, 1816, http://www.truecovenanter.com/kirkgovt/fairley_keys_of_the_kingdom.html

60 Systematic Theology, The Doctrine of The Church, V. The Lord’s Supper, Louis Berkhof, p. 654

61 Fencing the Table, Ken L. Gentry, Aquila Report, <http://theaquilareport.com/fencing-the-table-part-2/>

62 Ibid., p.656

Thus fencing of the Lord's table is not a new invention but rather a necessary practice as part of faithful worship. Paul reminds us that one cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons, thus we ought not to provoke the Lord to jealousy (1 Corinthians 10:14-22). The Lord's Supper is intended for sinners, therefore the penitent sinner should not be held back from participating in the sacrament, neither by himself, nor by the elders of the church. The keys of admission to the Lord's Supper (the new covenant community rite) are held by the elders of Christ's Church.

Arguments against Paedocommunion

The following discussion was provided by Dr. Glen J. Clary – this has been added to address the prevalence of admission of children to the Lord's table in some areas:

Paedocommunion maintains that “a child's membership in the visible church is sufficient to admit him” to the Lord's Table (Waters 11). Proponents of paedocommunion have set forth four principal arguments for their position (cf. Venema, Children 4–8). First, paedocommunion conforms to the practice of the ancient church. Second, covenant membership is the only requirement for admission to the Table. Third, covenant children were admitted to the Passover, the Old Testament counterpart to the Lord's Supper. And fourth, the traditional arguments against the practice of paedocommunion from 1 Corinthians 11 are invalid. Since the historical argument from the customs of the ancient church, though important, is not determinative, we will not address it here but focus on the biblical and theological arguments for paedocommunion (see Venema, Children 11–26; Waters 145–61).

The argument from covenant membership can be stated as follows: since (a) the children of believers are members of the covenant, and (b) the privileges of the covenant—including the Lord's Supper—belong to all covenant members, then (c) the children of believers should be admitted to the Table. The fallacy of this argument is in the second premise, which assumes that the sole ground of admission to the Table is covenant membership.⁶³ Even if, as paedocommunionists have observed, 1 Corinthians 11 is not directly addressing the issue of paedocommunion, Paul is, nevertheless, instructing members of the covenant to examine themselves before they eat and drink of the Lord's Supper. If covenant inclusion is the only requirement for admission to the Table, then why does Paul enjoin self-examination? The sin of the believers at Corinth led Paul to warn them not to partake of the sacrament even though they were members of the church. Hence, membership in the visible church does not necessarily grant someone the privilege of taking Communion. While our children may not be guilty of the sin condemned in 1 Corinthians 11, they, nevertheless, like all other members of the visible church, are required to examine themselves before they eat and drink of the sacrament.

The argument for paedocommunion from covenant membership fails to take account of the differences between baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism automatically confers to the recipient the benefit of membership in the visible church. By baptism, he is engrafted into the body of Christ in its visible aspect whether or not he has faith.⁶⁴ Long before our children are able to profess their faith, they are joined to the church through baptism. But what benefit is given to the recipient of the Lord's Supper apart from faith? The mouth by which we feed on Christ in the Supper is the mouth of faith (WCF 29:7; WSC 96; BC 35). “Only by a spiritual eating and drinking by the mouth of faith does the sacrament work to communicate Christ to his people” (Waters 137). Baptism is the sacrament of initiation. Communion is the sacrament of “continual confirmation, nourishment and strengthening of the faith of believers” (Ibid. 131). In baptism, “the recipient is passive with regard to the water applied to him and to the words said about him” (Ibid. 81). In the Lord's Supper, the recipient is active. He examines himself, discerns the body and blood of Christ, takes and eats the bread and wine, and remembers and proclaims the Lord's death (1 Cor. 11:24–29; cf. Bavinck 4: 583). The nature, use, purpose, and grounds of admission to baptism are simply not identical to those of the Supper. If they were, paedobaptism and paedocommunion would necessarily

63 This assumption is an example of the “logical fallacy, *petitio principii*, or ‘begging the question’” (Waters 22).

64 It is important here to distinguish between the visible and invisible aspects of the church. A failure to properly distinguish them can often be detected in arguments for paedocommunion as well as in arguments against paedobaptism. Paedocommunionists and credobaptists both tend to have an over-realized eschatology in their doctrine of the church, which, in turn, influences their doctrine of the sacraments.

entail each other. To practice the former without the latter would be a glaring inconsistency. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, however, are not the same, and the differences between them account for why we baptize our children but do not serve them Communion until they profess their faith (WLC 177).

The argument from the analogy of Passover maintains that since Israelite children were "admitted to the old covenant feast anticipating the death of the Christ yet to come," children "under the new covenant ought to partake of the feast celebrating the finished death of Christ" (Waters 16). "There is no basis, paedocommunionists claim, for denying children under the new covenant a privilege that was extended to their counterparts under the old covenant" (Ibid.). However, even if Israelite children were admitted to the Passover, which is not altogether clear, that does not necessarily prove that the children of believers should be admitted to the Lord's Table. The Passover is not a direct type of the Lord's Supper; it is a type of "Christ, our Passover lamb" who "has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7). The Lord's Supper, though it was instituted during Passover, is not the fulfillment of Passover; Christ is. The Lord's Supper is not, strictly speaking, the new covenant counterpart to the Passover except in the sense that both ordinances are covenant meals that signify the death of Christ. There is not, however, a one-to-one correspondence between them. Hence, the terms of participation in the one do not necessarily determine the terms of participation in the other (cf. Waters 17, 57).

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul explicitly specifies the requirements for participation in the Lord's Supper. The Corinthians were observing the sacrament in a manner that created divisions in the church (v. 18). By observing the sacrament in "an unworthy manner," they were "guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27). Paul instructs them to examine themselves with respect to their sinful behavior before they eat and drink (v. 28). Self-examination is enjoined because they were sinning against the body of Christ. "Paul's prevailing concern in this passage is the unity of the body of Christ" (Waters 18). Paedocommunionists argue that since Paul is correcting a specific error in the church at Corinth (namely, factionalism or divisiveness), we should not interpret his instructions regarding self-examination as a general requirement for admission to the Table. Hence, the traditional arguments against paedocommunion from 1 Corinthians 11 are invalid.

However, Paul's instructions regarding self-examination cannot be restricted to the problem at Corinth. His "discussion of the Supper is occasioned by the divisions and factions within the Corinthian church. His principles, however, are not determined by those divisions and factions" (Waters 21). Paul's warnings regarding the abuse of the sacrament in verses 27–29 are expressed in general terms and cannot be limited to the particular problem at Corinth. Paul moves from one particular abuse "to a general statement"; he moves "from one instance to an entire class. There was one fault that prevailed among the Corinthians. He takes occasion from this to speak of every kind of faulty administration or reception of the Supper" (Calvin, 1 Corinthians 385). In brief, the Lord's supper is to be administered "only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves" (LC 177). And no one should come to the Lord's Table "without examining himself carefully, lest 'by eating this bread and drinking this cup he eat and drink to his own judgment'" (BC 35; 1 Cor. 11:28–29).

Read:

Ephesians 4, HC 81-85, WCF 30, WCF 31, BCO Form of Government chapters 1-11

Talking points:

- a) How are disputes and contentions within the church to be settled?
- b) Does the Law of God require forgetting as well as forgiving of sin?
- c) Are we to shun sinners?
- d) Describe different roles within the office of elder. How do these relate to each other?
- e) How does the office of elder relate to the office of deacon?
- f) Why are church councils, synods, and general assemblies important in the life of church?
- g) Describe the role of the regional church. Does the regional church over-rule the local session?

Questions

a. How does the Lord God govern His church?

The Lord Jesus is the King and Head of His church and has appointed a government, in the hands of church officers who are distinct from civil authorities. (Isaiah 9:6, Colossians 1:18, Acts 20:17, John 18:36, WCF 30.1)

b. What are the responsibilities of the officers of Christ's church?

Officers have the responsibilities of nurture and care for the people of God. Elders have been given the keys of the kingdom, by which they must exercise their powers to protect and nurture Christ's flock. Deacons are charged with the ministry of meeting the earthly needs of the flock.

(Acts 20:28, Matthew 28:18-20, Hebrews 13:7, Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Corinthians 12:28, BC 31, Matthew 16:19, Matthew 18:17-18, WCF 30.2, 2 Timothy 2:14-15)

c. How shall the people of God treat their shepherds?

The people of God are exhorted to respect those who care for their well-being, to pray for them, to obey them in the Lord, and to make their burden light. (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 1 Timothy 5:17)

d. What offices has Christ appointed for His church?

Three: Teaching and ruling elders, and deacons. (2 Timothy 4:1-5, 1 Corinthians 12:27-31, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9, Acts 6:2-4, BC 27)

e. Which New Testament event sets the precedent for church councils and synods?

The Jerusalem Council at which the apostle and the elders of multiple churches gathered to address a doctrinal matter. (Acts 15)

f. What are the keys of the kingdom?

The preaching of the Word and church discipline. (Matthew 16:19, John 20:21-23, HC 83)

g. What is the function of the keys of the kingdom?

The faithful preaching and teaching of the Word of God, by the work of the Holy Spirit, opens the way to salvation to those who hear and obey. Those whose hearts are hardened are shut out from the kingdom of God. (John 3:31-36, HC 84)

h. How shall the elders of the church deal with the wayward?

They are to gently lead, teach, reprove, admonish, and by patient persuasion to lead the wayward back to the way of life. (Luke 15:20-24, 2 Corinthians 2:6-11, Matthew 18:15-20, HC 85, WCF 30.4)

i. How is the work of elders be prioritized?

The work of elders in Christ's church is an urgent work at all times. Men weigh what they see, God counts as precious what men often fail to see. A lost sheep, a lost coin, a straying son, upon recovery yield tears of joy in the eyes of our savior. (John 15:7, John 15:10, John 15:32)

j. Were elders appointed in the Old Testament?

Yes. The Lord caused Moses to appoint 70 elders to assist with his work in a division of labor. (Numbers 11:16-30)

k. How do elders gain their authority?

God ordained elders through Moses (Exodus 18:25, Deuteronomy 1:15) and Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 19). God equips elders with His Spirit just as God gave the seventy elders of the spirit that was upon Moses (Numbers 11:17, 25). In the Old Testament, just as in the New, the chief qualification of the elders is that they are to be God-fearing, believing men. Still today, the work of elders is to administer the law of God, pronouncing upon penitent sinners the word of forgiveness and grace that God pronounces, and upon impenitent sinners the word of judgment that God Himself speaks. In doing this work elders exercise the keys of the kingdom. (HC 84, 85)

l. What are the consequences when elders fail in their duties?

God judges elders who fail in their duties in His own way and time. When elders fail and falter the sheep suffer and stray. God treats recalcitrant failure very seriously. (Ezekiel 34:1-24, Revelation 2:4-5)

m. How are Christians to deal with conflict or to settle grievances in the church?

By telling an offender about his fault and seeking to resolve the matter with great forgiveness. (Matthew 18:15-20)

Lesson 17: The Future

According to the Scriptures the soul of man is immortal. The body is mortal and returns to dust after death, but the soul has a conscious existence independent of the body, and awaits the morning of the resurrection to be reunited with the body. *“Do not fear them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.”* (Matthew 10:28). In 2 Corinthians 5:8 and in Philippians 1:22-24 Paul defines death as a departing of the soul, a going to be with Christ. *“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the Spirit shall return to God who gave it.”* (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

The doctrine⁶⁵ of the immortality of the soul is a preeminent article of faith. We believe in a continual and future existence after death, because God has declared that we would ever exist. Our faith does not exist based on scientific proofs that are outside of the Word of God, but instead depends in full and unambiguous trust upon the very Word of God above all else.

Many have proposed that the concept of immortality⁶⁶ was produced in the human heart out of the natural desire to live, to fear death, to desire reward and out of dread of punishment, love of relatives, and by other considerations. This concept of immortality would be no more than the result of wishful thinking and mere imagination. It is too superficial for refutation. The universal hope of mankind and all the heroic deeds of history refute this theory. In reality, the expectation of immortality is natural as the faith of the soul in the existence of God. This is simply explained because of the impressions God has created within us since we were made in His image and after His likeness. Reprobate men will deny this fact (Romans 1:18-23).

The Sadducees believed there is no resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:27). Jesus informed⁶⁷ them that:

“But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.” (Luke 20:37-38).

This plainly shows that there is conscious life on the other side of death. Thus Jesus establishes that the resurrection is imperative.

“When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’” (Revelation 6:9-10).

This demonstrates that the soul is immortal and is conscious beyond the present life.

Whatever we may apprehend regarding the future, our primary focus in life should be bounded by faithfulness in our walk, content with the knowledge that there will be a resurrection. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and His elect are risen in Him because He is the first-fruit of the resurrection. The Apostle Paul describes (1 Corinthians 15) the central importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus is not the promised Messiah of Isaiah 53 and if He has not been raised from the dead our faith would be a futile and destructive deception.

The gospel message is that Jesus Christ is the promised seed of Abraham, He is the second Adam, and He did take upon Himself the punishment for the sins of the elect unto the death, and He was raised from the dead a victor over sin and death, therein alone is hope for a resurrection glory for all who believe and are in Christ.

65 Exposition of Reformed Doctrine, Rev. Menno J. Bosma, Chapter VIII. The Doctrine of the Last Things, The State of the Soul after Death, p. 284

66 Ibid., p. 283

67 Ibid., p. 287

The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, section 9, says:

*“The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about **the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one)**, it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”*

Scripture speaks of One God who made man and revealed how man shall live. Scripture defines the things that should occupy our minds and that shall temper how we shall live. These things set the stage for how we shall occupy⁶⁸ ourselves until Jesus returns at the resurrection of all.

Any significant confusion on a point of doctrine should therefore be resolved by seeking out the voice of God in His revealed Word. This applies also to any confusion or doubt we may have regarding the future, also known as *the end times*. The study of the end of time (the last things) is known as *eschatology*. Sadly, some churches place eschatology at center stage in their teaching. Though they may do this simply out of a focus on watching for the signs of the imminent return of Christ, the effect is nevertheless a distraction from faithfulness of walk.

History consists in the progressive unfolding of the decrees of God. The Bible describes, among other things, the redemption of Christ's elect (Ephesians 3:7-13). Jesus is the center-point and climax of redemptive history. If we have any concern regarding the approaching return of Jesus Christ and how we shall occupy ourselves until His return, let us take heart in Jesus words:

25 *“Therefore I tell you, **do not be anxious about your life**, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 **Therefore do not be anxious**, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. **Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.** (Matthew 6:25-34)*

We should strive to put out of mind all anxiety, concern, or fear of what is happening in the world around us. Our best energy is to be spent on walking according to the living Word. Jesus said we should not be anxious for each day has sufficient challenges and troubles⁶⁹. Let the believer therefore focus on the love and kindness of our Savior who said: *‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments.’* (John 14:15). The whole of God's Law and the teaching of the prophets points to loving God and our fellow man (Matthew 22:34-40). We would do well to mind our own business regarding how the Lord will unfold the last days of mankind's walk in the evil present age, remembering that our God is covenant-keeping and ever faithful to His children.

That Jesus has risen from the dead is proof that He will return. When He returns there will follow a final judgment. We may keep this in mind, but it is not our focus point! In the present world justice is often perverted and abused, however ultimately God's justice will prevail. Knowing how good the Lord is to His elect, we ought to strive to put and end to sin in our lives. Instead of concerning ourselves with speculative end-times theories, perhaps we can take heart from the Scriptures. It is natural for man to have concerns over the events of life, but let us not give them cause to occupy our minds and our hearts to an excessive degree. Instead, we would do well

68 See Luke 19, particularly verse 13.

69 Today's Mercies for Today's Troubles, John Piper, Desiring God, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/todays-mercies-for-todays-troubles>

to practice the discipline of mind and heart seeking wisdom from the Lord and giver of life, so that we may fan into flame the gift of God. God gave us a gift of power and love and self-control. We may be sure to lay hold of these by following sound teaching, holding to the faith of our fathers, the love of Christ Jesus, and by treasuring the deposit that has been entrusted to us.

“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, 7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. ... Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”

(2 Timothy 1:6-7, 13-14)

The End Times

When will the end of the world be? That is a common question asked by both Christians and unbelievers. It is an age-old question as to whether or not there even will be an end. The Bible speaks about the beginning (at creation) and the end of the age, or the world. But what exactly that means has been the cause of much debate in the history of the Christian Church.

There are those who hold to a view of the end times (called eschatology) which is filled with more drama, hysterics, and fiction than biblical evidence. They say that Christ will return before what we call “the millennium” (from Revelation 20 it means “the thousand years”). There are some who believe Christ will “rapture” off the earth those who are Christians and then a period of seven years will occur in which unbelievers will suffer terribly on the earth called “the great tribulation” (this is a view commonly referred to as pre-millennialism). Many of them will become Christians. And then Jesus will return to the earth and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and reinstitute the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. And then he will judge the living and the dead, and Jewish believers will reign and live forever on the earth while non-Jewish Christians will live forever in heaven. Depending on the specific advocate of this view the details will be different, but that is the position in a nutshell.

One of the other views, almost exactly opposite of this view, is that Jesus will return after the millennium (often called post-millennialism or a-millennialism). There are differences of opinion as to whether the 1000 years are a literal 1000 years or if it denotes a long period of time. A-millennialists believe that the 1000 years referred to in Revelation is a metaphor for the entire time between Christ's first and second coming. Based on this view the “end times” begins with Christ's first coming and ends with his second coming. At his second coming Christ will bring judgment on the earth, casting into eternal damnation (i.e., hell) those who are not Christians and bringing to himself in the New Heavens and New Earth all those for whom he died, consisting of all believers whether Jew or Gentile.

Read:

WCF 32, WCF 33, Deuteronomy 18:10-11, 1 Samuel 28, HC LD22

Talking points:

- a) What does the Heidelberg Catechism LD22 say about notions of soul sleep?
- b) Should Christians consult palm readers? Why or why not?
- c) Should Christians practice the divination of spirits?
- d) Prove from John 5:28, 29 that all men shall be raised from the dead.
- e) What does Revelation 21:3-4 say regarding the new heavens and the new earth?

Questions

a. Must all men die?

Yes, except those believers who are still living at the coming of Christ.
(Psalm 89:48, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Hebrews 9:27)

b. What happens at the death of the wicked?

They are separated from all the things of this life and go into everlasting hell. (Luke 16:22-23)

c. But why must believers also die?

The last tie that connects them with things sinful and corruptible must be severed.

d. Could not they go immediately into glory with both body and soul?

No, this must wait until Christ comes again to raise their bodies and make a new heaven and a new earth.

e. From what do believers separate when they die?

Their new man in Christ is separated from the earthly house of this tabernacle and from their old man of sin. (2 Corinthians 5:1, WCF 32)

f. Where do they go when they die?

They go immediately into a conscious state of glory with Christ in heaven.

g. What scriptural proof is there for this?

Jesus said to the repentant thief on the cross, "*Verily I say unto thee, Today thou shalt be with me in paradise.*" (Luke 23:43)

h. Is there more proof?

Yes, Asaph expected to go to glory after death (Psalm 73:24-26), and Paul knew he would be with Christ (Philippians 1:23).

i. How will this world come to an end?

By the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Revelation 1:7)

j. When will the Lord come again?

The day and the hour we know not, but all things must first be fulfilled according to God's counsel. (Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32)

k. Do we know what things must first be fulfilled before the Lord will come?

We do in general, for God has revealed them to us in order that we may watch and pray. (Matthew 24:42)

l. How has God revealed these things to us?

He has told us in Scripture what are the signs of Christ's coming.

m. Mention some of these signs that appear in creation.

Famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in many places. (Matthew 24:7)

n. Mention some signs that appear in the church.

The gospel must be preached to all the world; there will be terrible apostasy from the faith; and the church will be persecuted. (Matthew 24:9-23)

o. Mention some signs that appear in the history of the world.

There will be terrible wickedness, and Antichrist shall reign over the whole world. (2 Thessalonians 2:7, Revelation 13)

p. How will the Lord come?

He will come personally and in the body, visible to all, and with great power and glory. (Matthew 24:30, 1 Thessalonians 4:16)

q. What is the church's calling while she waits for Christ's return?

To watch and pray and to live in the hope of her final salvation. (2 Peter 3:13-14)

r. What will take place when the Lord comes again?

The resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the renewal of all things.

t. Who shall be raised from the dead?

All who have died, the godly to the resurrection of life and the ungodly to the resurrection of eternal hell. (John 5:28-29)

u. With what bodies will we be raised?

With a spiritual body raised in incorruption, glory, and power. (1 Corinthians 15:42-43)

v. Who shall stand in judgment?

All rational, moral creatures: men, angels, and devils.
(Matthew 25:32, 1 Corinthians 6:2-3, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Revelation 20:12-15)

w. What will be the punishment for the wicked?

Eternal suffering in hell in body and soul.
(Matthew 25:41-46)

x. What will be the reward for the people of God?

Everlasting life and glory in the presence of God in heavenly perfection. (Revelation 21:3)

y. Will there be difference of degree in punishment and reward?

Yes, for all shall be judged according to their works.
(Luke 19:17, 1 Corinthians 3:8)

z. Will the present world be destroyed?

Yes, we expect a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell. (2 Peter 3:10-13)

aa. What is the blessedness of the new heaven and the new earth?

To dwell without sin in the blessedness of God's everlasting covenant of grace. (Revelation 21)