

# The Westminster Confession of Faith in Modern English<sup>1</sup>

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### Chapter I. Of the Holy Scripture

- I. Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence manifest to such an extent the goodness, wisdom and power of God that men are left inexcusable, yet they are not sufficient to give the knowledge of God and His will, which is necessary for salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at various times and in different ways, to reveal Himself and to declare His will to His church, and afterwards to commit all this to writing for the better preserving and propagating of the truth and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corrupt nature and the malice of Satan and the world, which make the Holy Scripture to be most necessary, the former ways of God's revealing His will to His people having ceased.
- II. Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, which are these:  
    The Old Testament:  
    The New Testament:  
    (For list of the books see any Protestant Bible.)  
    All these books are inspired by God to be the standard for doctrine and practice.
- III. The books commonly called the Apocrypha, not being inspired by God, are not a part of the canon of Scripture; and therefore they have no authority in the church of God, nor are they to be approved or made use of in a manner different from other human writings.
- IV. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, does not depend upon the testimony of any man or church but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author of it; and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.
- V. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture; and the divine origin of the content, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the harmony of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full revelation it gives of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies and the entire perfection of it are arguments by which it abundantly gives evidence that It is the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible

- VI. The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation and for doctrine and practice, is either expressly mentioned in Scripture, or may by good and necessary inference be deduced from Scripture, to which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by so-called new revelations from the Spirit or by traditions from men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the inward illumination of the Spirit of God is necessary for the saving understanding of the things which are revealed in the Word, and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and the government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be regulated by the light of nature and Christian prudence according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.
- VII. All things in Scripture are not equally plain in themselves, nor equally clear to all; yet the things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded and revealed in some portion of Scripture or another that not only the learned but also the unlearned, by the proper use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them.
- VIII. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old) and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of the New Testament was the language most generally known to the nations), being directly inspired by God, and by His extraordinary care and providence kept pure in all generations, are therefore authoritative, so that in all controversies of religion the church is to appeal to them as the decisive authority. But because these original languages are not known by all the people of God, who have a right to and a share in the Scriptures and are commanded, in reverence to God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the popular language of every nation to which they are brought, that, through the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner and through patience and comfort from the Scriptures may have hope.

- IX. The infallible standard for the interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full meaning of any passage of Scripture (which passage has only one meaning, not many), it must be sought in and made known by passages that speak more clearly.
- X. The supreme Judge, by whom all controversies of religion are to be settled and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, teachings of men, and individual spirits are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be none other than the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

### Chapter II. Of God; Of the Holy Trinity

- I. There is only one living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without a body, without bodily parts or human passions, immutable, infinite, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own unchangeable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him; and, yet, most just and to be feared in His judgments, hating all sin and who will by no means clear from accusation the guilty.
- II. God has all life, glory, goodness and blessedness in and of Himself; and He is the only one who is in and to Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He has made, not deriving any glory from them but only manifesting His own glory in, by, to and upon them; He is the only fountain of all being, of whom, through whom and to whom are all things, and has most sovereign authority over them to do by them, for them or upon them whatever He pleases. In His sight all things are uncovered and exposed; His knowledge is infinite, infallible and not dependent upon the creature, so that nothing is to Him contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all His counsels, works and commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatever worship, service or obedience He is pleased to require of them.
- III. In the unity of the Godhead there are three Persons, the same in substance, equal in power and coeternal: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The Father is from no other Person or Persons of the Trinity: He is neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally

begotten by the Father; and the Holy Spirit is eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

### Chapter III. Of God's Eternal Decree

- I. God freely and unchangeably ordained from all eternity whatever comes to pass, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will — yet with the result that neither is God the author of sin nor is the will of the creatures violated, nor is the liberty or contingency of the creatures taken away, but rather established.
- II. Although God knows whatever may or can come to pass under all supposed conditions, yet He has not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future or as that which would come to pass under such conditions,
- III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated to everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.
- IV. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are expressly and unchangeably destined; and their number is so certain and definite that it can be neither increased nor decreased.
- V. Those of mankind who are predestinated to life, God (from all eternity, according to His eternal and unchangeable purpose and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will) chose in Christ to everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature as a condition or a cause moving Him to choose them — and all to the praise of His glorious grace.
- VI. As God has appointed the elect to glory, so has He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means to this end. Therefore those who are elected, having fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ; are effectually called to faith in Christ by His Spirit working in God's appointed time; are justified, adopted, sanctified and kept by His power through faith to salvation. None are redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified and saved except the elect only.
- VII. The rest of mankind, God was pleased (according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will by which He extends or withholds mercy as He pleases, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures) to pass by and to ordain to dishonor and wrath because of their sin — to the praise of His glorious justice.
- VIII. The doctrine of this heavenly mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care that men heeding the will of

God revealed His Word and yielding obedience to it may, from the certainty of their being effectually called to salvation, be assured of their eternal election. Thus this doctrine shall bring forth praise, reverence and admiration to God, and humility, diligence and abundant consolation to all who sincerely obey the gospel.

#### Chapter IV. Of Creation

- I. It pleased the Triune God (for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom and goodness) in the beginning to create or make out of nothing the world and all things in it, whether visible or invisible, in six days, and all in a very good state.
- II. After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with rational and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, according to His own likeness, having the law of God written in their hearts and power to fulfil it, and yet with a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and while they kept the command, they were happy in their communion with God and had authority over the creatures.

#### Chapter V. Of Providence

- I. God, the great Creator of all things, upholds, directs, uses and governs all creatures, actions and things, from the greatest to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge and the free and unchangeable counsel of His own will — to the praise of His glorious wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy.
- II. Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the First Cause, all things come to pass unchangeably and with certainty, yet, by the same providence, He directs them to come to pass necessarily, freely or contingently, according to the nature of second causes.
- III. God in His ordinary providence makes use of means; yet He is free to work without, above and against them, according to His pleasure.
- IV. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom and infinite goodness of God are manifested in His providence to such an extent that this providence extends even to the first sin, and to all other sins of angels and men — and this is not by mere permission but by such permission as has joined with it most wise and powerful bounds; and in

other ways He directs and governs the sins of angels and men, regulating them in numerous and varied ways suited to His own purposes; yet so that the sinfulness of sin proceeds only from the creature and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

- V. The most wise, righteous and gracious God often consigns for a time His own children to numerous and varied temptations and to the corruption of their own hearts to chastise them for their past sins or to disclose to them the hidden strength of the corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts that they may be humbled, and to arouse them to a closer and more constant dependence upon Him for their support and to make them more watchful against all future occasions for sinning, and for various other just and holy purposes.
- VI. From the wicked and ungodly men (whom God as a righteous Judge, because of their past sins, blinds and hardens) He not only withholds His grace by which they might have been enlightened in their minds and wrought upon in their hearts but also sometimes takes away the gifts which they had and exposes them to things which their corruption makes occasions for sinning; and also He gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world and the power of Satan, which results in their hardening themselves, even by the means which God uses for the softening of others.
- VII. As the providence of God in a general sense reaches to all creatures, so in a most special sense it takes care of His church and directs all things to its good.

#### Chapter VI. Of the Fall of Man, Of Sin, and Of the Punishment for Sin

- I. Our first parents being enticed by the subtilty and temptation of Satan sinned by eating the forbidden fruit. This sin God was pleased (according to His wise and holy counsel) to permit, having purposed to direct it to His own glory.
- II. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and thus became dead in sin and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of the soul and body.
- III. Since they were the first of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature was imparted, to all their posterity, descending from them by natural procreation.
- IV. From this original corruption (by which we are utterly disinclined to all good, disabled and made

opposite to all good and wholly inclined to all evil) proceed all actual sins.

- V. During this life, this original sin remains in those who are regenerated; and although it is through Christ pardoned and mortified, yet both it and all its inclinations are truly and properly sin.
- VI. Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God and contrary to it, brings, by nature, guilt upon the sinner, by which he is bound over to the wrath of God and curse of the law and thus made subject to death, with all spiritual, temporal and eternal miseries.

#### Chapter VII. Of God's Covenant with Man

- I. The distance between God and the creature is so great that although rational creatures owe obedience to Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any enjoyment of Him as their blessedness and reward except by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He has been pleased to express by means of a covenant.
- II. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works in which life was promised to Adam and in him to his posterity, conditioned upon perfect and personal obedience.
- III. Since man by his fall made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second covenant, commonly called the covenant of grace, by which He freely offers to sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him that they may be saved, and promising to give to all those who are ordained to life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.
- IV. This covenant of grace is frequently called in the Scripture a testament, with reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator and to the everlasting inheritance (with all things belonging to it) bequeathed in it.
- V. This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law from in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the Passover lamb and other types and ordinances delivered to the Jews, all of which foresignified Christ to come and which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the agency of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins and eternal salvation; and it is called the Old Testament.
- VI. Under the gospel (when Christ the reality was exhibited) the ordinances in which this covenant is administered are the preaching of the Word and

the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, in which, though they are fewer in number and administered with more simplicity and less outward splendor, the covenant is exhibited in more fullness, clearness and spiritual efficacy, to all nations: both Jews and Gentiles; and it is called the New Testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace differing in substance but one and the same under various administrations.

#### Chapter VIII. Of Christ the Mediator

- I. It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest and King; the Head and Saviour of His church; the heir of all things; and Judge of the world — to whom He gave from all eternity a people to be His seed and to be by Him in due time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified and glorified.
- II. The Son of God, the second Person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one nature with the Father and equal with Him, took to Himself, in God's appointed time, man's nature, with all the essential characteristics and common infirmities of this nature, yet without sin, being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her nature; so that two whole, perfect and distinct natures, the divine and the human, were inseparably joined together (without being changed, compounded or fused) in one Person. This Person is very God and very Man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.
- III. The Lord Jesus, in His human nature thus united to the divine, was set apart to His mediatorial office and anointed with the Holy Spirit beyond measure; having in Him all ere treasures of wisdom and knowledge in whom it pleased the Father that all the fulness of the Godhead should dwell bodily, so that, being holy, without guilt, undefiled and full of grace and truth, He might be thoroughly equipped to perform the office of a Mediator and Surety. This office He did not take it upon Himself to undertake but was called to it by His Father, who put all authority and judgment into His hand and gave Him the commandment to exercise authority and to execute judgment.
- IV. This office the Lord Jesus most willingly undertook; and that He might discharge it, He was born subject to the law and perfectly fulfilled it; He endured most grievous distresses directly in His soul and most painful sufferings in His body; was crucified, and died; was buried and

remained under the power of death — yet His body experienced no decay. On the third day He arose from the dead, with the same body in which He suffered, with which also He ascended into heaven, and there sits at the right hand of His Father, interceding; and He shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world.

- V. The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit once offered up to God, has fully satisfied the justice of His Father, and has purchased not only reconciliation but also an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all those whom the Father has given to Him.
- VI. Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy and benefits of it were communicated to the elect in all generations successively from the beginning of the world, in and by the promises, types and sacrifices in which He was revealed and signified to be the Seed of the woman, who should crush the serpent's head, and the lamb slain from the beginning of the world, being the yesterday, today and forever.
- VII. Christ in the work of mediation, acts according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet, because of the unity of the Person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the Person designated by the other nature.
- VIII. To all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption He certainly and effectually applies and communicates it, interceding for them and revealing to them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by His Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit; overcoming all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom, in such a manner and in such ways as are most consonant with His wonderful and unsearchable administration.

#### Chapter IX. Of Free Will

- I. God has endued the will of man with a natural liberty — a liberty that is neither coerced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature impelled, to good or evil.
- II. Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which is good and well-pleasing to God, but nevertheless subject to change, so that he might fall from his state of innocency.
- III. Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has wholly lost all ability to will any spiritual good accompanying salvation; therefore, a natural

man, being altogether averse from any spiritual good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself or to prepare himself to be converted.

- IV. When God converts a sinner and transfers him into the state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage under sin, and by His grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet with the result that (because of his remaining corruption) he does not perfectly nor only will that which is good but also wills that which is evil.
- V. The will of man is made perfectly and unchangeably free to do good alone in the glorified state only.

#### Chapter X. Of Effectual Calling

- I. All those whom God has predestinated to life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of the state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone and giving to them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, directing them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet with the result that they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.
- II. This effectual call is from God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive in the call until he is made alive and renewed by the Holy Spirit and is thereby enabled to answer this call and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.
- III. Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when, where and how He pleases. So also are all other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.
- IV. As for others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word and may in common grace be wrought upon by the Spirit, yet they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved — much less can men not professing the Christian religion be saved in any other way whatever, although they may be very diligent to fashion their lives according to the light of nature and the law of the religion they profess; and to assert and maintain that they can be saved by their own strength, which is very destructive and is to be detested.

## Chapter XI. Of Justification

- I. Those whom God effectually calls He also freely justifies, not by infusing righteousness into them but by the pardoning their sins and by reckoning and accepting them as righteous; not because of anything wrought in them or done by them but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other gospel-obedience to them as their righteousness but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ to them — their receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith (which faith they do not have of themselves; it is a gift of God).
- II. Faith, by which one receives and rests on Christ and His righteousness, is the only means of justification; yet it not by itself in the person justified but is always accompanied by all other saving graces, and is not a dead faith but works by love.
- III. Christ, by His obedience and death, fully paid the debt of all those who are justified by faith and made a proper, real and full satisfaction to His Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, because He was given by the Father for them and His obedience and satisfaction were accepted in their stead — and freely, not because of anything in those justified — their justification is solely of free grace, that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.
- IV. God decreed from all eternity to justify all the elect; and Christ, in God's appointed time, died for their sins and rose for their justification; nevertheless they are not justified until the Holy Spirit actually applies Christ to them in God's own time.
- V. God continues to forgive sins of those who are justified; and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may by their sins fall under God's fatherly displeasure and not have the light of His countenance restored to them until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg for pardon and renew their faith and repentance.
- VI. The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.

## Chapter XII. Of Adoption

- I. All those who are justified, God vouchsafes (in and for His only son, Jesus Christ) to make partakers of the grace of adoption by which they are received into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges, of the children of God;

have His name put upon them; receive the Spirit of adoption; have access to the throne of grace with boldness; are enabled to cry out, Abba, Father; are pitied, protected, provided for and chastened by Him as by a father; yet they are never cast out but are sealed until the day of redemption and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation.

## Chapter XIII. Of Sanctification

- I. Those who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are also sanctified really and personally by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the domination of the whole corrupt nature is destroyed and the various lusts of the corrupt nature are more and more weakened and mortified and the just are more and more enlivened and strengthened in all saving graces resulting in the practice of true holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.
- II. This sanctification is pervasive in the whole man; yet it is imperfect in this life: there still abide some remnants of corruption throughout from which arises a continual and irreconcilable war: the corrupt nature warring against the Spirit and the Spirit against the corrupt nature.
- III. In this war, although the remaining corruption may greatly prevail for a time, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part overcomes; and therefore the saints grow in grace, progressing toward perfect holiness in reverence to God.

## Chapter XIV. Of Saving Faith

- I. The grace of faith by which the elect are enabled to believe on Christ (resulting in the salvation of their souls) is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments and by prayer, it is increased and strengthened.
- II. By this faith a Christian believes to be true whatever is revealed in the Word because of the authority of God Himself, who speaks in it; and he acts in different ways upon that which each particular portion of the Word contains: obeying the commands, trembling at the threatenings and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come. But the principal parts of saving faith are accepting, receiving and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification

and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

- III. This faith differs in degrees: it may be weak or strong; it may be often and in many ways assailed and weakened, but it gains the victory, increasing in many persons to the attainment of a full assurance of salvation, through Christ, who is both the originator and object of our faith.

#### Chapter XV. Of Repentance to Life

- I. Repentance to life is a gospel-grace the doctrine of which is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ.
- II. By it a sinner, viewing and sensing not only the danger but also the filthiness and odiousness of his sins as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God and perceiving that He is merciful in Christ to those who repent, so grieves over and hates his sins that he turns from them all to God, determining and endeavoring to walk with Him in the way of obedience to His commandments.
- III. Although repentance is not to be rested in as a satisfaction for sin or as a cause of its being pardoned (the cause being the act of God's free grace in Christ), yet it is so necessary to all sinners that none may expect pardon without it.
- IV. As there is no sin so small not to deserve condemnation, so is there no sin so great that it can bring condemnation upon those who truly repent.
- V. Men ought not to be content with a general repentance; it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins especially.
- VI. As every man is obligated to confess his sins privately to God, praying for the pardon of his sins (he shall find mercy, conditioned upon confessing and forsaking his sins), so he who offends his brother or the church of Christ ought to be willing, by a private or public confession, with sorrow for his sin, to declare his repentance to those who are offended, who are upon such a declaration to be reconciled to him and in love are to receive him.

#### Chapter XVI. Of Good Works

- I. Good works are only those works which God has commanded in His holy Word, and not works which without warrant of God's Word are devised by men out of blind zeal or upon pretence of good intention.
- II. These good works, performed in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and living faith; and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen

their assurance of salvation, edify their brethren, adorn the vocation of the gospel, close the mouths of adversaries and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus to good works; that, bearing their fruit leading to holiness, they may obtain the object aimed at, eternal life.

- III. Their ability to do good works is not at all from themselves but wholly from the Spirit of Christ. And that they may be enabled to do good works, in addition to the graces they have already received there is required the actual power of the Holy Spirit to work in them to will and do for His good pleasure; yet are not therefore to become negligent, as if they were not obligated to perform any duty unless upon a special action of the Spirit, but ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them.
- IV. Those who, in obedience to God's commandments, attain to the greatest height which is possible in this life are so far from being able to do above and beyond what God requires that they fall short of much which in duty to God they are obligated to do.
- V. We cannot, by our best works, merit pardon of sin or eternal life from God, because of the great disparity that is between our works and the glory to come and because of the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom by our works we cannot benefit and to whom by them we cannot pay the debt of our past sins, but when we have done all we can, we have done only our duty and are unprofitable servants; and because (since they are good works) they come from His Spirit; and because they are performed by us, they are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment.
- VI. Yet, notwithstanding, because believers are accepted through Christ, their good works are also accepted in Him — not as though believers were in this life wholly unblameable and unproveable in God's sight, but that He, looking upon them in His Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, though it is accompanied by many weaknesses and imperfections.
- VII. Although works done by unregenerate men may, with reference to their content, be things which God commands and may be of good use both to them and others, yet because they do not come from a heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word, nor for a right purpose, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful and cannot please God or make a man fit

to receive grace from God. And yet their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing to God.

#### Chapter XVII. Of the Perseverance of the Saints

- I. Those whom God has accepted in His beloved Son, effectually called to salvation and set apart to Himself by His Spirit, can neither totally nor with finality fall from the state of grace but certainly persevere in it to the end and be eternally saved.
- II. This perseverance of the saints does not depend upon their own free will but upon the unchangeableness of the decree election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; upon the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them; and upon the nature of the covenant of grace — from all of which arise also the certainty and surety of the perseverance of the saints.
- III. Nevertheless they may (through the temptations of Satan and the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them and the neglect of the means by which they are preserved) fall into grievous sins and for a time continue in them, by which they incur God's displeasure and grieve His Holy Spirit; by which they are deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts; have hearts hardened and their consciences wounded; hurt and offend others and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.

#### Chapter XVIII. Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation

- I. Although hypocrites, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and with presumptions from their corrupt nature of being in God's favor and in the state of salvation (which hope shall come to nothing), yet those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus and love Him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace and may rejoice in the hope of the state of glory, which is from God (which hope shall never disappoint them).
- II. This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded in an uncertain hope, but a certain assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of the graces answering to these promises, the witness of the Spirit of adoption testifying with our spirits that we are the children of God, which Spirit is the surety of our

inheritance, by whom we are sealed until the day of redemption.

- III. This certain assurance does not belong to the essence of faith to such an extent that a true believer may not wait a long time and be confronted with many difficulties before he is a partaker of it; yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him by God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, by a proper use of ordinary means, attain to the assurance of salvation. And therefore it is the duty of everyone to be very diligent about confirming his calling and election, that thereby his heart may grow in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience — the proper fruits of this assurance, so far removed is this assurance from inclining men toward laxity.
- IV. True believers may in various ways have the assurance of their salvation shaken, diminished and made intermittent, such as by negligence in preserving it; by falling into some special sin, which wounds the conscience and grieves the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation; and by God's withdrawing the light of His countenance and allowing even those who reverence Him to walk in darkness and to have no light — yet they are never utterly destitute of the seed of God and life of faith, of love for Christ and for the brethren, of sincerity of heart and consciousness of duty, from which, by the working of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived, and by which, in the meantime, they are kept from utter despair.

#### Chapter XIX. Of the Law of God

- I. God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He put him and all his posterity under obligation to personal, entire, exact and perpetual obedience; He promised life upon the fulfilling of the law and threatened death upon the breaking of it; and He endued Adam with power and ability to keep it.
- II. This law, after Adam's fall, continued to be a perfect standard for righteousness and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai in ten commandments, and was written on two tablets of stone — the first four commandments containing our duty to God and the other six our duty to man.
- III. Besides this law, commonly called the moral law, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws containing several ordinances as types — some with reference to worship (prefiguring Christ,

His graces, actions, sufferings and benefits) and others prescribing various instructions relating to moral duties. All these ceremonial laws have been done away under the New Testament.

- IV. To the Israelites also, as a nation, He gave various judicial laws, which ceased along with the national character of the people of Israel and which are not binding upon any other people now beyond what the general equitableness of the people may require.
- V. The moral law forever puts an obligation upon all — upon justified persons as well as others — to obey it, and not only with reference to its content but also with respect to the authority of God, the Creator, who gave it. And Christ in the gospel does not in any way absolve this obligation but rather greatly strengthens it.
- VI. Although true believers are not under the law as a covenant of works to be justified or condemned by it, yet it is of great use to them as well as to others, because, as a standard for conduct making known to them the will of God and their duty, it directs and obligates them to walk in agreement with it; also it discloses the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts and lives, so that, examining themselves by it, they may come to greater conviction of, humility because of and hatred against sin, together with a clearer view of their need of Christ and His perfect obedience. The law is likewise of use to the regenerate to restrain their corruptions because it forbids sin, and its threatenings serve to show what even their sins deserve and what afflictions in this life they may expect because of them, although they have been freed from the curse of sin threatened in the law. The promises of the law, in like manner, show believers God's approbation of obedience and what blessings they may expect by obedience, although the blessings are not debts paid to them by the law as a covenant of works: so that a man's doing good and refraining from evil, because the law incites to good and deters from evil, is no evidence of his being under the law and not under grace.
- VII. Neither are the above-mentioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but agreeably comply with it — the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do freely and cheerfully what the will of God revealed in the law requires to be done.

#### Chapter XX. Of Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience

- I. The liberty which Christ has purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their

freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God and the curse of the moral law, and in their being set free from the present evil world, bondage to Satan and domination of sin, from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave and everlasting condemnation; also this liberty consists in their free access to God and their yielding obedience to Him, not from slavish fear but with a child-like love and willing mind. All this was common also to believers under the law; but under the New Testament, the liberty of Christians is further increased in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law to which the Jewish Church was subjected, in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace and in partaking of the free Spirit of God in greater fullness than was ordinarily the case with reference to believers under the law.

- II. God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from the teachings and commandments of men which are in any way contrary to His Word, or are in addition to it, in matters of doctrine or worship. Therefore to believe such teachings or to obey such commandments, conscientiously, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith and an absolute and blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.
- III. Those who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, practice any sin or cherish any lust destroy the purpose of Christian liberty, which is this: that, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear (in holiness and righteousness before Him) all the days of our life.
- IV. And because the authorities which God has appointed and the liberty which Christ has purchased are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and persevere each other, those who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful authority or the lawful exercise of it, whether the authority be civil or ecclesiastical, resist that which is appointed by God. And for their propagating such opinions or maintaining such practices as are contrary to the light of nature or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning doctrine, worship or conduct) or to the power of godliness; or for propagating or maintaining such erroneous opinions or practices as are by nature, or in the way they are propagated or maintained, destructive to the external peace and order which Christ has established in the church, they may lawfully be called to account and action may be taken against them by the church's exercising

discipline and by the civil magistrate's exerting his authority.

## Chapter XXI. Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day

- I. The light of nature shows that there is a God, who has lordship and sovereignty over all; who is good and does good to all; and who is therefore to be revered, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in and served, with all the heart and soul and might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Him and is so limited by His own revealed will that He may not be worshipped according to the schemes and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation or in any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.
- II. Religious worship is to be given to the Triune God and to Him alone — not to angels, so-called saints or any other creature, and, since the Fall, not without a Mediator, nor through the mediation of any other: but of Christ alone.
- III. Prayer, with thanksgiving, being a special part of religious worship, is required by God of all men; and, that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of His Spirit, according to His will, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love and perseverance; and, if audible, in a known language.
- IV. Prayer is to be made for lawful things and for all sorts of men who are living now or who shall be living later, but not for the dead, nor for those concerning whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin to death.
- V. The reading of the Scriptures with godly reverence; the sound preaching and the conscientious hearing of the Word, in obedience to God, with understanding, faith and reverence; the singing of psalms with grace in the heart; and the proper administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God — and also religious oaths, vows and solemn times of fasting and thanksgiving upon special occasions (which are, upon various suitable occasions, to be used in a holy and religious manner) are parts of the religious worship of God.
- VI. Neither prayer nor any other part of religious worship is, now under the gospel, either tied to or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed or toward which it is directed, but God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth; and as He is to be worshipped in individual

families daily and by each one by himself in private, so is He to be worshipped more solemnly in the public worship services, which are not carelessly or wilfully to be neglected or forsaken, when God, by His Word or providence, calls us to assemble publicly.

- VII. As it is of the law of nature that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for worshipping God, so, in His Word, by a positive, moral and perpetual commandment, obligating all men in all generations, has He particularly appointed one day out of seven for a sabbath to be kept holy to Him (which from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ was the last day of the week and which from the resurrection of Christ has been the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued until the end of the world), as the Christian Sabbath.
- VIII. This Sabbath is kept holy to the Lord when men, after properly preparing their hearts and putting in order their common affairs beforehand, not only observe a holy cessation all the day from their own labors, words and thoughts with reference to their temporal occupations and recreations but also are engaged the whole day in the public and private worship of God and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

## Chapter XXII. Of Lawful Oaths and Vows

- I. A lawful oath is the part of religious worship in which, at a proper time, the person uttering a solemn declaration calls God to attest what he asserts or promises and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he solemnly declares.
- II. It is only by the name of God that men ought to utter a solemn declaration, and in such a declaration the name of God is to be used with an holy fear and reverence; therefore to utter a solemn declaration to no purpose or rashly by that glorious and awe-inspiring name or to utter a solemn declaration under any circumstances by any other thing is sinful and is to be abhorred. Yet, since in matters of importance and moment an oath is warranted by the Word of God (under the New Testament as well as under the Old), therefore a lawful oath being imposed by lawful authority, with reference to such matters, ought to be taken.
- III. Whoever takes an oath ought duly to consider the importance of such a solemn act and in it ought to avow only what he is fully persuaded is the truth. Neither may any man obligate himself by an oath to do anything except what is good and just, and what he believes to be so, and what he

is able and resolved to perform. Yet it is a sin to refuse to take an oath concerning anything that is good and just, if it is imposed by lawful authority.

- IV. An oath is to be taken in the plain and usual meaning of the words, without equivocation or mental reservation. It cannot obligate a person to sin; but in anything not sinful, if it is taken, it obligates a person to perform it, although it may be detrimental to him; nor is an oath to be violated, even if it is made to heretics or unbelievers.
- V. A vow is like a promissory oath and ought to be made with the same religious concern and to be performed just as faithfully.
- VI. It is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone; and that it may be accepted, it is to be made voluntarily, out of faith and consciousness of duty, by way of thankfulness for mercy received, or for the obtaining of what we want; by vowing we more strictly obligate ourselves to the performance of necessary duties, or to the performance of other things so long as and to the extent that they may properly be conducive to the performance of such duties.
- VII. No man may vow to do anything forbidden in the Word of God or anything that would hinder the performance of any duty commanded in the Word of God, or anything which it is not in his own power to do and for the performance of which he has no promise or ability from God. With respect to this, Roman Catholic monastic vows of perpetual celibacy, professed poverty and regular obedience are so far from being steps to higher perfection that they are superstitious and sinful snares in which no Christian may entangle himself.

#### Chapter XXIII. Of the Civil Magistrate

- I. God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has appointed civil magistrates to be (under Him) over the people, for His own glory and the public good; and, with this in view, He has armed them with authority, for the defense and encouragement of those who are good and for the punishment of evil-doers.
- II. It is lawful for Christians to accept and perform the office of a magistrate, when called to this office — in the performance of which, just as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each nation, so, with a view to maintaining these, they may lawfully, now under the New Testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasions.
- III. The civil magistrate may not take it upon himself to administer the Word and the sacraments, nor

may he exercise ecclesiastical authority; yet he has authority, and it is his duty, to see to it that unity and peace are preserved in the church, that the truth of God is kept pure and intact, that all blasphemies and heresies are suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed and all the ordinances of God properly established, administered and observed. For the better effecting of this, he has authority to call synods, to be present at them and to make sure that whatever is transacted in them is according to the mind of God.

- IV. It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honor them, to pay taxes and other dues to them, to obey their lawful commands and to be subject to their authority for the sake of conscience. Unbelief, or a difference in religion, does not invalidate the magistrate's just and lawful authority, nor free the people from their obligation to obey him, from which ecclesiastical persons are not exempted — much less does the Pope have any authority or jurisdiction over magistrates in the territory they govern or over any of their people; and least of all does he have authority to take away from magistrates the territory they govern or to take away their lives, if he shall judge them to be heretics, or upon any other pretence whatever.

#### Chapter XXIV. Of Marriage and Divorce

- I. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman; neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband, at the same time.
- II. Marriage was appointed for the mutual benefit of husband and wife; for the increase of mankind with a legitimate offspring, and of the church with a holy seed; and for the prevention of unchastity.
- III. It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry who are able with discernment to give their consent; yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only among themselves. And therefore those who profess the true reformed religion should not marry unbelievers, Roman Catholics or other idolaters; neither should those who are godly be unequally yoked by marrying those who are notoriously wicked in their life or maintain condemnable heresies.
- IV. Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden in the Word, nor can such incestuous marriages ever be made lawful by any law of man or by the consent of those desiring to marry, so that those persons may live together as man and wife. The man may not marry any of his wife's relatives nearer in

blood-relationship than he may marry of his own relatives, nor may the woman marry any of her husband's relatives nearer in blood-relationship than she may marry of her own relatives.

- V. Adultery or fornication committed after an engagement to be married, if it is detected before marriage, gives just occasion to the innocent party to break the engagement. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue for a divorce and, after the divorce, to marry another person, as if the offending party were dead.
- VI. Although the corruption of man is prone to devise reasons to separate unduly those whom God has joined together in marriage, yet nothing except adultery, or such wilful desertion as cannot in any way be remedied by the church or civil magistrate, is sufficient reason for dissolving the bond of marriage, in which a public and orderly course of action is to be observed, and the parties concerned in the divorce proceedings are not to be left to their own wills and discretion in their divorce case.

#### Chapter XXV. Of the Church

- I. The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of all the elect who have been, are or shall be gathered into one organism, under Christ its Head; and it is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.
- II. The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law) consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion, together with their children; and it is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the household and family of God, outside which there is not ordinarily any possibility of salvation.
- III. To this catholic visible church Christ has given the ministry, Scriptures and ordinances of God, for the gathering and strengthening of the saints in this life, till the end of the world; and by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, He makes them effectual to the gathering and strengthening of the saints.
- IV. The catholic church has been sometimes more, sometimes less, visible. And particular churches, which are members of the visible church, are more pure or less pure, according to whether the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, the ordinances administered and public worship performed in a more pure or less pure manner in them.
- V. The purest churches on earth are subject both to admixture and error; and some have so degenerated that they have ceased to be churches

of Christ and have become synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall always be a church on earth to worship God according to His will.

- VI. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the church; the Pope of Rome cannot in any sense be its head: rather he is the antichrist, the man of sin and son of perdition, who exalts himself in the church against Christ and against all that is called God.

#### Chapter XXVI. Of the Communion of Saints

- I. All saints, who are united to Jesus Christ their Head by His Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection and glory. And being united to one another in love, they have fellowship in one another's gifts and graces; and they are obligated to perform the duties, public and private, which are conducive to their mutual good, both spiritually and physically.
- II. Saints, as saints, are obligated to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God and in performing such other spiritual services as are directed to their mutual edification, and also in bringing relief to one another in material things, according to their various abilities and necessities. This communion, as God gives opportunity, is to reach to all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.
- III. This communion which the saints have with Christ does not make them in any way partakers of the substance of His divine nature or to be equal with Christ in any respect, to affirm either of which is impious and blasphemous. Nor does their communion with one another, as saints, take away or infringe upon the title or right which each man has to his goods and possessions.

#### Chapter XXVII. Of the Sacraments

- I. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, instituted directly by God to represent Christ and His benefits and to confirm the right we have in Him and also to put a visible difference between those who belong to the church and the rest of the world and solemnly to pledge them to service for God in Christ, according to His Word.
- II. There is in each sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified, from which it results in the names and effects of the thing signified being attributed to the sign.
- III. The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any

power in them; nor does the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of the one who administers it, but upon the work of the Spirit and the declaration instituting the sacraments, which declaration contains, together with a precept authorizing the use of the sacraments, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers of the sacraments.

- IV. There are only two sacraments appointed by Christ our Lord in the gospel: baptism and the Lord's supper, neither of which may be administered by anyone other than a minister of the Word, who has been lawfully ordained.
- V. The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard to the spiritual things signified and exhibited by them, were, as regards substance, the same as those of the New.

#### Chapter XXVIII. Of Baptism

- I. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, appointed by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the person baptized into the visible church but also to be for him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his being ingrafted into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins and of his yielding himself to God through Jesus Christ to walk in newness of life; this sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His church until the end of the world,
- II. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, with which the person is to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, by a minister of the gospel, who has been lawfully called to the ministry.
- III. Dipping the person into the water is not necessary, but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person.
- IV. Not only those who actually profess faith in and obedience to Christ but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized.
- V. Although it is a great sin to despise or neglect baptism, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably connected with it that no person can be regenerated or saved without it or that all who are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.
- VI. The efficacy of baptism is not tied to the moment of time in which it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered but is also really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Spirit to those (whether of age or infants) to whom that grace belongs, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.
- VII. The sacrament of baptism is to be administered only once to any person.

#### Chapter XXIX. Of the Lord's Supper

- I. Our Lord Jesus, on the night in which He was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, called the Lord's supper, to be observed in His church until the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death, for the sealing of all the benefits of His death to true believers, for their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, for their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe to Him, and to be a binding force and a pledge of their communion with Him, and with one another, as members of His mystical body.
- II. In this sacrament Christ is not offered up to His Father, nor is any actual sacrifice made at all for the remission of sins of the living or dead; but rather there is only a commemoration of the one offering up of Himself, by Himself, upon the cross, once for all, and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise to God because of Christ's once-for-all offering up of Himself; therefore, the Roman Catholic sacrifice of the mass, as it is called, is most abominably injurious to Christ's once-for-all sacrifice, the only atoning sacrifice for all the sins of the elect.
- III. The Lord Jesus has, in this ordinance, appointed His ministers to proclaim to the people His declaration instituting the sacrament, to pray, and to bless the elements of bread and wine, and by this means to set them apart from a common to a holy use; and to take and break the bread, to take the cup and (they themselves partaking of the elements also) to give both the bread and the wine to the communicants, but to none who are not then present in the congregation.
- IV. Private masses, or receiving this sacrament by a so-called priest or by any other person in private — as well as withholding the cup from the people, worshipping the elements, lifting them up or carrying them about for adoration and the reserving of them for any pretended religious use — are contrary to the nature of this sacrament and to Christ's declaration instituting it.
- V. The outward elements in this sacrament, duly set apart to the uses appointed by Christ, have such a relation to Him crucified that they are truly, yet sacramentally only, sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, namely, the body and blood of Christ; however, in substance and nature they still remain truly and only bread and wine, as they were before.
- VI. The teaching which maintains that the substance of bread and wine is changed into the substance of Christ's body and blood (commonly called

transubstantiation) by consecration by a so-called priest, or in any other way, is repugnant not only to Scripture but also to common sense and reason. This teaching subverts the nature of the sacrament and has been and is the cause of many and varied superstitions, indeed, of great idolatries.

- VII. Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament, also at the same time inwardly by faith (really and truly, yet not bodily and physically but spiritually) receive and feed upon Christ crucified and all benefits from His death — the body and blood of Christ being not at that time physically or bodily in, with or under the bread and wine, yet as truly, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in this ordinance as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.
- VIII. Although uninformed and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament, yet they do not receive the thing signified by the elements; but by their coming unworthily to the Lord's supper they are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own condemnation. Therefore, all uninformed and ungodly persons, since they are unfit to enjoy communion with Him, are consequently unworthy to come to the Lord's table and cannot without great sin against Christ, while they remain unworthy, partake of these holy mysteries or be admitted to partake of them.

#### Chapter XXX. Of Church Discipline

- I. The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His church, has appointed in the church a government in the hands of church-officers, who are distinct from the civil magistrate.
- II. To these officers ecclesiastical authority is committed, by virtue of which they have the right to retain and remit sins respectively: to shut the kingdom of heaven against the unrepentant, both by the Word and discipline, and to open it for repentant sinners, by the ministry of the gospel and by absolution from discipline, as occasion shall require.
- III. Church discipline is necessary for the reclaiming and winning over of brethren who have offended; for deterring others from similar offences; for purging out the leaven which might infect the whole lump; for vindicating the honor of Christ and the holy vocation of the gospel; and for averting the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church, if they should allow His covenant and its seals to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.
- IV. For the better attaining of these ends, the officers of the church are to take action by admonition,

exclusion from the sacrament of the Lord's supper for a time and by excommunication from the church, according to the nature of the crime and offense of the person.

#### Chapter XXXI. Of Synods and Councils

- I. For the better government and increased edification of the church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils.
- II. As magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers and other qualified persons to give him counsel and advice concerning matters of religion, so if magistrates are overt enemies of the church, the ministers of Christ may (either by themselves, by virtue of their office, or with other qualified persons delegated by their churches) meet together in synods or councils.
- III. It pertains to synods and councils to settle ministerially controversies concerning doctrine and cases relating to conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better regulating of the public worship of God and government of His church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration and to settle authoritatively these cases — such decrees and settlements, if consonant with the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only because of their agreement with the Word but also because of the authority by which they are made, synods and councils being an ordinance of God appointed in His Word to settle controversies in the church.
- IV. All synods or councils since the Apostles' time, whether general or particular synods, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the standard for doctrine and practice but are to be used as a help in both.
- V. Synods and councils are to deal with or decide nothing except what is ecclesiastical; and they are not to interfere with civil affairs, which concern the nation, unless by way of humble petition in extraordinary cases, or by way of advice for the satisfaction of conscience, if they are required by the civil magistrate to give advice.

#### Chapter XXXII. Of the State of Men after Death; Of the Resurrection of the Dead

- I. The bodies of men after death return to dust and experience decay; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being immediately made perfect in holiness, are received into heaven,

where they see the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies; and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in great torment and utter darkness, kept in store for the judgment of the great day. Besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies there are none acknowledged in Scripture.

- II. At the last day, those who are found alive shall not die but be changed; and all the dead shall be raised up with the very same bodies (and not different bodies), although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls forever.
- III. The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonor; whereas the bodies of the just shall, by His Spirit, be raised to honor and shall be made conformable to His own glorious body.

#### Chapter XXXIII. Of the Last Judgment

- I. God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom all authority and judgment is given by the Father. In that day, not only shall the apostate angels be judged but also all persons who have lived upon earth shall appear before the judgment-seat of Christ to give an account of

their thoughts, words and deeds and to be recompensed according to what they have done in this life, whether good or evil.

- II. The purpose for God's appointing this day is to manifest His glorious mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect and His glorious justice in the condemnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then the righteous shall go into everlasting life and receive the fulness of joy and refreshment which shall come from the presence of the Lord; but the wicked, who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into hell to be eternally and greatly tormented and to be punished with everlasting death coming from the presence of the Lord and from His glorious power.
- III. As Christ would have us to be persuaded with certainty that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity, so would He have unknown to men when that day shall be, that they may shake off all security stemming from the corrupt nature and may be always watchful because they do not know at what hour the Lord will come, and that they may be always prepared to say: Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.