

Constitution

of the

Covenant

Reformed

Presbyterian

Church

Constitution of the Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church

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Constitution of the Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church

Preface

We believe that our doctrine, polity, and worship are strictly regulated by Scripture. Only circumstantial matters are to be determined by the light of nature and the general rules of the Word of God. Accordingly, we profess that the principles set out in this Constitution regarding Church Polity and Public Worship, being found in God's Word, are binding on us in the same way as are the historic confessions of faith, catechisms, and creeds of the church as listed below.

I. Doctrine of the Church

A. Confessions and Creeds

1. Westminster Confessional Standards

- a. Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)
- b. Westminster Larger Catechism
- c. Westminster Shorter Catechism

2. Three Forms of Unity

- a. Belgic Confession of Faith
- b. Heidelberg Catechism
- c. Canons of Dort

3. Creeds

- a. Apostle's Creed
- b. Nicene Creed
- c. Athanasian Creed

B. Exceptions and Clarifications

1. Exceptions

- a. one may hold and teach within our denomination that the pope is not *that Antichrist*, as the Westminster Confession asserts, though such a person and/or church or ministry must hold to the fact that the pope is *an* antichrist, and prelacy and Roman Catholicism are antichristian;
- b. variations of interpretations of confessional Sabbatarian practices are allowed as long as the principle of the first-day Sabbath is acknowledged.

2. Clarifications

a. Creation

Any position which denies a creation in six literal, contiguous calendar days, is out of accord with the Bible and the confessions; examples of such un-Biblical and anti-Confessional positions include: theistic evolutionary theory; uniformitarian geology (positing many millions of years for the earth and the universe); Framework Hypothesis or Analogical Day View (that is, any poetic or linguistical construct of Genesis which hermeneutically denies or refuses to affirm six literal, contiguous, calendar days); any position which denies the world wide scope of the Noahic Flood (which destroyed the entire earth in water and all mankind save Noah and his family and destroyed all the clean and unclean animal life on earth except that which Noah took aboard the ark or which naturally swam in the oceans);

b. Violations of the Ten Commandments

the following are considered to be violations of the ten commandments: bisexuality, homosexuality and lesbianism; abortion and infanticide; euthanasia; advocacy in the churches of a socialistic world view, and its consequent, redistributive (envy) mentality;

c. Statement on the love of God

We confess that God is love,¹ and that this describes His essential and unchanging nature, which is first of all and underlying all, a love for Himself.²

We confess that God's creation was declared by Him to be "very good"³ and that His essential goodness extends without change or alteration to all that He has created.⁴

Further, we confess that in Adam's fall all of his subsequent posterity sinned in and through him, and so all are liable to the just and righteous punishment due to his and their own sins.⁵ God might righteously have inflicted that punishment to His own greater glory⁶ in the vindication of His attributes of holiness⁷, righteousness⁸, and justice⁹ without any diminishing of His essential property of love.

We confess that God has been pleased to demonstrate His love nature by the sending and sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, to bear the just punishment of

¹ 1 John 4:8, 16.

² John 3:35; 7:26.

³ Gen. 1:31.

⁴ Ex. 34:6; Gen. 1:31.

⁵ Rom. 3:23; 5:12, 19.

⁶ Rom. 9:17-22.

⁷ Isa. 6:3 cp. 40:25; Rev. 4:8.

⁸ Psa. 145:17; Jer. 12:1.

⁹ Deut. 32:4.

His elect.¹⁰ This in no way diminishes His holiness, righteousness, or justice demonstrated in the deserved punishment of the sins of the reprobate.¹¹

Therefore we acknowledge and confess that the love of God which is demonstrated in the sending and sacrifice of Jesus Christ is unmerited,¹² discriminating,¹³ purposeful,¹⁴ covenantal,¹⁵ effectual,¹⁶ and exclusive to His elect people,¹⁷ and that no power in heaven or earth can separate them from it.¹⁸ As this is so, we confess that God regards all those outside the redemption and righteousness of the Son with His just hatred,¹⁹ and that His divine prerogative in love toward His elect and hatred toward the reprobate²⁰ is expressed to the end that He alone will be glorified in the fulfillment of His purpose by Jesus Christ.²¹

We also confess that, although God knows all of His elect individually from eternity,²² it has pleased Him to call them individually in time,²³ primarily by the means of the preached gospel.²⁴ Since men are not privy to His unrevealed will and decree of election,²⁵ it is His will that the gospel be preached to all men without distinction,²⁶ that the elect may be convicted of sin and converted,²⁷ and the reprobate hardened and rendered without excuse on the coming day of judgment.²⁸

d. Canon of Scripture.

The Canon of Scripture has been providentially preserved in the original languages via the Byzantine Majority Family of Greek texts (especially the Textus Receptus), and the Massoretic text of the Old Testament Hebrew. Such was the position of the Westminster Assembly. We therefore reject texts that omit passages from the canonical books of the Bible in the same way that we would reject the omission from or addition to the canonical books as asserted by the Roman Catholic Church's

¹⁰ Rom. 5:8; John 3:16; 2 Tim. 2:19; Rom. 2:5-9 esp. 7,10.

¹¹ Rom. 9:17-22; 2 Tim. 2:19-20; Jude 4; 1 Pet. 2:8; Rom. 2:5-9 esp. 8-9.

¹² Deut. 7:7,8; Rom. 5:6-8; 1 Jn. 4:10.

¹³ Rom. 9:11,12,15,18,21,23-24; Eph. 5:25,26; 1 Pet. 2:9; Matt. 13:11-16; WCF 3:3, 5-7. Since God is no respecter of persons, we reject racial discrimination in the church in all its forms.

¹⁴ John 3:16; Matt.18:11; 1 John 4:14; WCF 3:3,5-7.

¹⁵ 5. Deut. 7:8,9; Jer.31:33,34; Mk. 14:24; Gal. 3:15-29; Eph.5:25-32; Heb.9:11-22.

¹⁶ 1 John 3:1-3; Rom.8:29-30; WCF 10.

¹⁷ Deut. 7:7,8; Rom. 8:31-34; Eph. 5:25; Ps.1:6; WCF 3:5.

¹⁸ Rom. 8:31-39.

¹⁹ Ps. 5:5,6; Ps.11:5-7; John 3:36; Rom.9:11-22 ,esp. 13, 17-18, 21-22.

²⁰ Deut. 2:30; Prov.16:4; Rom. 9:11-13, 15, 18-23; 11:29; 1 Pet.2:7-8; 2 Pet.2:12; Jude 4.

²¹ Eph.1:6; Rom.9:22-24; Rom.11:28-36; WCF 3:5-7.

²² 1 Pet. 1:2; Eph. 1:4.

²³ Col. 1:21; 1 Cor. 6:11; Rom. 8:30.

²⁴ 1 Cor. 1:21; Rom. 10:14-15.

²⁵ Deut. 29:29.

²⁶ Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15.

²⁷ 2 Cor. 2:15-16; John 3:36; Mark 16:16.

²⁸ 2 Cor. 2:15-16; John 3:36; Rom. 1:18-32.

addition of the Apocrypha and other attempts to rethink the canonicity of the historically accepted canon of Scripture.

e. Nature of Scripture

“higher critical” teaching which denies the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, denies the inerrancy of the Scripture or postulates any position which makes any portion of Scripture the product of evolutionary development or redaction, and/or teaches that any portion of Scripture is “not profitable” for the church to teach, use or expound today, is out of accord with Scripture.

f. Charismatic movement and extra-ordinary spiritual gifts and office

We reject the charismatic movement including the use of extra-ordinary spiritual gifts and offices (which have ceased).

g. Distinctions of governments: family, church and civil

The Scriptures declare that civil magistrates are instituted by God for the good of both mankind and the church. We believe that God’s establishment of the family and the church as legitimate governments are distinct from the civil magistrate. Accordingly, we reject Erastianism.

h. Covenantal theology

We adhere to covenantal theology and reject dispensational theology.

i. Psalms and hymns

Use of biblically-based or biblically consistent hymns, singing from portions of the canon of Scripture other than the Book of Psalms, and modest use of musical accompaniment for the purpose of assisting congregational singing, are considered allowable practices in worship services. However, every church should agree that Psalms have been set forth in God’s word to be sung by His people and therefore, it is most desirable that they should be incorporated into worship in the churches.

j. Guarding the Lord’s Table

All churches must practice, in some manner, a guarding (“fencing”) of the Lord’s Table. Presbytery will not specify beyond this mandate. Thus, various means of guarding the Table are allowed: examination of visitors and members; closing of the communion to visitors; exhortation of the congregation concerning the Table. However, if the Table is closed in a particular CRPC church, the Table, nonetheless, will be opened to visiting members and officer-bearers of other CRPC churches and ministries.

k. Non-established practices

The following practices may vary from local church to local church but are not established by the broader assemblies. (It is understood that any member joining a local church will submit to the position of that church while a member even if they might transfer in from a church within the CRPC that held differently.)

- Specific age of communication at the Lord's Supper with the proviso that all communicants must pass examination by the congregational presbytery (also known as a "Session") for a credible profession of faith before admittance be allowed.
- Various interpretations of confessional Sabbath practices.
- Women teaching children in appropriate settings.
- In situations where the regular ministry of the word is not available, which male leaders may be authorized to lead in prayer, read Scripture, and/or read sermons (or administrate authorized taped sermons).

l. Subscription

All ministers in the CRPC are bound by oath to teach publicly only those things found to be in accord with the Constitution (as interpreted by the exceptions and clarifications herein stated). Those received who hold different views are bound not to teach them publicly or privately, though they may be discussed within the context of a broader assembly as provided by its rules and directories.

m. Vows and oaths

Vows and oaths which give the appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22) and which are secret and thus unable to be examined are considered to be "superstitious and sinful snares" (WCF 22:7) and therefore are to be avoided.

n. Conflict (real or apparent) amongst confessional statements

Where perceived or real conflicts exist between the Westminster Confessional Standards (including the Larger and Shorter Catechism) and the other Creeds listed above, the Westminster Confessional Standards shall prevail.

o. Differences on allowed diversity may not rise to the level of sin ²⁹

In all of the practices within the CRPC where different positions are allowed (e.g. headcoverings or non-use thereof, various Sabbath practices,

²⁹ This is a proposed addition to the constitution from 06-2007 American Presbytery, See Minutes XIV, 4, B for action and grounds. It was ratified by the 11-2007 American Presbytery. See minutes XIV A for that action.

exclusive psalmody and non-exclusive psalmody, etc.), or which are set forth as non-established practices (“k” above), it must be agreed by all officer-bearers that such differences of conscience on these teachings will exist whereby an office-bearer may believe it sinful for himself to practice something that is set forth in these areas mentioned above. However, every office-bearer, in agreeing with the form of government of this church in his oath of office is also agreeing with the following statement with regard to any of his beliefs and practices with respect to other beliefs and practices that are either allowed or not established within the CRPC: *(Note: Allowed diversities set forth in the Exceptions and Clarifications section of this Constitution shall hereafter be referred to as “allowed diversity”.)*

Acknowledging that “all things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all,” I confess and solemnly promise as follows:

There are positions that I hold which are listed among those set forth in this Constitution for allowed diversity within the CRPC, that are, to the best of my present understanding the teaching of Scripture.

Confessing these to be convictions I hold in my own conscience, I grant the legitimate possibility that other believers, according to their sincere conscience and good faith, may hold contrary positions.

Yet, I will not and do not judge the aforementioned believers to be in sin, whether the sin of ignorance, omission, or commission.

I will not seek to imply or infer that my position is less sinful or more pure than those who disagree with me, while always being willing to explain and account for my conviction when called upon to do so.

Finally, I will not seek to teach, advocate or promote any kind of class, caste-type system or higher/lower level of sanctification within or among the churches of the CRPC based on the position(s) I hold within the CRPC’s allowed diversity. Neither will I advocate or promote ecclesiastical unity, separation, divisive or political factions based on these beliefs and practices, but will by God’s grace seek only to advocate for and indeed, to lay down my life, in the interest of “those things necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation.”

In making this statement, it is not to be understood that others do not sin or that other sins may not arise which are worthy of rebuke, as there will always be sin in people with whom we are in fellowship which need rebuke. This pertains solely to allowed diversity within the CRPC as mentioned above.

Should any office-bearer become unable to maintain his assent, the procedures set forth in the DCO chapter on Exceptions/Scruples for Officer-bearers and Members (presently DCO 31) shall apply.

p. Clarification of the use of the words *Hades* vs. *hell* in WCF 32:1³⁰

The word *hell* in the original King James Version English is literally *Hades* in the Greek (see Luke 16:23, Acts 2:27) and *sheol* in Hebrew (see among others Psalm 9:17; 16:10; 49:15; 86:13) which speaks of the immediate state of a soul after death prior to the reunion with its body at the resurrection either unto eternal life or eternal death. In WCF 32:1, the word *hell* must be understood as referring to *Hades* so as not to confuse the intermediate state spoken of in WCF 32:1 with the final state spoken of in WCF 32:2-3.

II. Church Polity

A. The Head of the church

Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government is, whose name is called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace; of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end; who sits upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and justice, from henceforth, even for ever; having all power given unto him in heaven and in earth by the Father, who raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, far above all principalities and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all: he being ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things, received gifts for his church, and gave officer-bearers necessary for the edification of his church, and perfecting of his saints.³¹

B. The Church

There is one general church visible, held forth in the New Testament.³²

The ministry, oracles, and ordinances of the New Testament, are given by Jesus Christ to the general church visible, for the gathering and perfecting of it in this life, until His second coming.³³

Particular visible churches, members of the general church, are also held forth in the New Testament.³⁴ Particular churches in the primitive times were made up of visible

³⁰ This is a proposed addition to the constitution from 11-2007 American Presbytery. See minutes of this meeting (XIV B) for action. It was ratified by 07-2008 American Presbytery. See Minutes XIII A for action.

³¹ Isaiah 9:6, 7; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 1:20-23; cp. Ephesians 4:8-11 and Psalm 68:18.

³² 1 Corinthians 12.

³³ 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:4, 5, 10-16.

saints, *viz.* of such as, being of age, professed faith in Christ, and obedience unto Christ, according to the rules of faith and life taught by Christ and His apostles³⁵; and of their children.³⁶

C. The Officer-bearers of the Church

The officer-bearers which Christ has appointed for the edification of his church, and the perfecting of the saints, are, some extraordinary, as apostles, evangelists, and prophets, which are ceased³⁷; others ordinary and perpetual, as pastors, teachers, and other church-governors, and deacons.³⁸ Only men may be ordained to ecclesiastical office.³⁹

1. Ministers of the Word (commonly called Teaching Elders or Pastors)

The minister of the word is an ordinary and perpetual officer-bearer in the church,⁴⁰ prophesying of the time of the gospel.⁴¹ It belongs to his office:

- a. to pray for and with his flock, as the mouth of the people unto God⁴²;
- b. to pray for the sick, even in private, to which a blessing is especially promised; much more therefore ought he to perform this in the public execution of his office, as a part thereof⁴³;
- c. to read the Scriptures publicly⁴⁴;
- d. to feed the flock, by preaching of the word, according to which he is to teach, convince, reprove, exhort, and comfort⁴⁵;
- e. to catechize, which is a plain laying down the first principles of the oracles of God, or of the doctrine of Christ⁴⁶;
- f. to dispense other divine mysteries⁴⁷;
- g. to administer the sacraments⁴⁸;
- h. to bless the people from God⁴⁹;
- i. to take care of the poor⁵⁰;
- j. to exercise a ruling power over the flock as a pastor.⁵¹

³⁴ Galatians 1:21, 22; Revelation 1:4, 20; 2:1.

³⁵ Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 5:14; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 9:13.

³⁶ Matthew 19:13, 14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:15, 16; Acts 2:39; 1 Corinthians 7:14.

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:28; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:11.

³⁸ Exodus 19:7, 8; Joshua 24:1; Ruth 4:2; Acts 6:1-6; 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 5:17; Titus 1:5-9.

³⁹ Isaiah 3:12; Acts 1:16; 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 3:1, 2, 11.

⁴⁰ Jeremiah 3:15-17.

⁴¹ Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Peter 5:2-4.

⁴² Acts 6:2-4; 20:36.

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 14:15, 16; James 5:14, 15.

⁴⁴ Deuteronomy 31:9-11; Nehemiah 8:1-3, 13; Acts 6:2; 1 Timothy 4:13.

⁴⁵ 1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; Titus 1:9.

⁴⁶ Isaiah 28:10, 13; Hebrews 5:12.

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2.

⁴⁸ Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:23-25.

⁴⁹ Numbers 6:23-26; Revelation 1:4, 5.

⁵⁰ Acts 4:34-37; 11:30; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; Galatians 2:9, 10.

⁵¹ Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:7, 17.

2. Church Governors (commonly called Ruling Elders)

As there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church⁵²; so Christ, who has instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church, has furnished some in his church, beside the ministers of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church.⁵³ These officer-bearers are commonly called Elders.

3. Deacons

The Scripture does hold out deacons as distinct officer-bearers in the church, whose office is perpetual.⁵⁴ To this office it belongs not to preach the word, or administer the sacraments, but to take special care in distributing to the necessities of the poor.⁵⁵

D. Particular Congregations

It is lawful and expedient that there be fixed congregations, that is, a certain company of Christians to meet in one assembly ordinarily for public worship. When believers multiply to such a number, that they cannot conveniently meet in one place, it is lawful and expedient that they should be divided into distinct and fixed congregations, for the better administration of such ordinances as belong unto them, and the discharge of mutual duties.⁵⁶

The ordinary way of dividing Christians into distinct congregations, and most expedient for edification, is by the respective bounds of their dwellings.⁵⁷ In this company some must be set apart to bear office.⁵⁸

E. The Officer-bearers of a Particular Congregation

For officer-bearers in a single congregation, there ought to be one at the least, both to labor in the word and doctrine, and to rule.⁵⁹ It is also requisite that there should be others to join in government.⁶⁰ Furthermore, it is useful, advisable, and in accordance with Scriptural teaching that there be others to take special care for the relief of the poor.⁶¹ The number of each of which is to be proportioned according to the condition

⁵² 2 Chronicles 19:8-10.

⁵³ Romans 12:7, 8; 1 Corinthians 12:28.

⁵⁴ Acts 6:1-4; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8.

⁵⁵ Acts 6:1-4.

⁵⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:26, 33, 40.

⁵⁷ Deuteronomy 15:7, 11; Matthew 22:39.

⁵⁸ James 3:1.

⁵⁹ 1 Timothy 5:17.

⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:28.

⁶¹ Acts 6:1-3.

of the congregation.⁶² These officer-bearers are to meet together at convenient and set times, for the well ordering of the affairs of that congregation, each according to his office.⁶³

F. Church-Government, and the several sorts of Assemblies for the same

Christ has instituted a government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church: to that purpose, the apostles did immediately receive the keys from the hand of Jesus Christ, and did use and exercise them in all the churches of the world upon all occasions.⁶⁴

And Christ has since continually furnished some in his church with gifts of government, and with commission to execute the same, when called thereunto.⁶⁵

It is lawful, and agreeable to the word of God, that the church be governed by several sorts of assemblies, which are congregational, classical, and synodical.⁶⁶

1. The Power in Common of all these Assemblies

It is lawful, and agreeable to the word of God, that the several assemblies before mentioned have power to convene, and call before them, any person within their several bounds, whom the ecclesiastical business which is before them does concern. They have power to hear and determine such causes and differences as do orderly come before them. It is lawful, and agreeable to the word of God, that all the said assemblies have some power to dispense church-censures.⁶⁷

2. Congregational Assemblies, that is, the Meeting of the ruling Officer-bearers of a particular Congregation, for the Government thereof

The ruling officer-bearers of a particular congregation have power, authoritatively, to call before them any member of the congregation, as they shall see just occasion⁶⁸; to enquire into the knowledge and spiritual estate of the several members of the congregation⁶⁹; and to admonish and rebuke.⁷⁰

The ruling officer-bearers of a particular congregation have power authoritatively to suspend from the Lord's table a person not yet cast out of the church, because those

⁶² Acts 6:3; 14:23; 1 Corinthians 14:40; Titus 1:5.

⁶³ John 3:19; Ephesians 5:8-13; 1 John 1:7.

⁶⁴ Matthew 16:17-19; 18:15-20; John 20:22, 23.

⁶⁵ Ephesians 4:11.

⁶⁶ See proof texts, below, in Sections 2, 3, and 4.

⁶⁷ Deuteronomy 13:12-18; Matthew 18:15-20.

⁶⁸ Ezra 10:7, 8.

⁶⁹ Ezekiel 34:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13; Hebrews 13:17.

⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15; 1 Timothy 4:13; 5:20; Titus 1:10-13.

who have authority to judge of, and admit, such as are fit to receive the sacrament, have authority to keep back such as shall be found unworthy⁷¹:

First, Because the ordinance itself must not be profaned.⁷²

Secondly, Because we are charged to withdraw from those that walk disorderly.⁷³

Thirdly, Because of the great sin and danger, both to him that comes unworthily, and also to the whole church.⁷⁴ And there was power and authority, under the Old Testament, to keep unclean persons from holy things.⁷⁵

The like power and authority, by way of analogy, continues under the New Testament.

When congregations are divided and fixed, they need all mutual help one from another, both in regard of their intrinsic weaknesses and mutual dependence, as also in regard of enemies from without.⁷⁶

3. Classical Assemblies

A presbytery consists of ministers of the word, and such other public officer-bearers as are agreeable to and warranted by the word of God to be church-governors, to join with the ministers in the government of the church.⁷⁷

The Scripture does hold forth, that many particular congregations may be united in one presbyterial government. The matter is proven, by considering the church of Jerusalem.

- a. The church of Jerusalem consisted of more congregations than one:
 - (1) a multitude of believers is mentioned, both before the dispersion of the believers, and also after the persecution which caused the dispersion,⁷⁸ which fact mandates that there be more than one congregation;
 - (2) the fact that there were many apostles and preachers in the church of Jerusalem would mean that each apostle would preach but seldom, if there were but one congregation; but that would not consist with the fact that the apostles had given themselves to the Word of God;⁷⁹

⁷¹ Matthew 18:15-20.

⁷² 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.

⁷³ 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15.

⁷⁴ 1 Corinthians 5:5-13; 11:27-32.

⁷⁵ Numbers 15:31; 2 Chronicles 26:19-21.

⁷⁶ Numbers 32:20-32; 1 Corinthians 12; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Ephesians 3:15; 4:4, 5.

⁷⁷ Romans 12:7, 8; 1 Corinthians 12:28.

⁷⁸ Acts 2:41, 46, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 8:1.

⁷⁹ Acts 1:26; 6:2.

- (3) the diversity of languages among the believers argues for more than one congregation.⁸⁰
- b. All those congregations were under one presbyterial government:
 - (1) they were one church⁸¹;
 - (2) the elders of the church are mentioned⁸²;
 - (3) the apostles did the ordinary acts of presbyters, which proves a presbyterial church before the dispersion⁸³
 - (4) the several congregations of Jerusalem being one church, the elders of that church are mentioned as meeting together for acts of government, which proves that those several congregations were under one presbyterial government.⁸⁴

4. Synodical Assemblies

The Scripture does hold out another sort of assemblies for the government of the church, beside classical and congregational, all which we call *Synodical*.⁸⁵

Ministers of the word, and other church-governors, are members of those assemblies which we call *Synodical*, where they have a lawful calling thereunto.⁸⁶

Synodical assemblies may lawfully be of several sorts, as provincial, national, and ecumenical. It is lawful, and agreeable to the word of God, that there be a subordination of congregational, classical, provincial, and national assemblies, for the government of the church.⁸⁷

G. Ordination of Ministers

1. Touching the Doctrine of Ordination

No man ought to take upon him the office of a minister of the word without a lawful calling.⁸⁸

Ordination is always to be continued in the church.⁸⁹

⁸⁰ Acts 2:7-11; 6:1.

⁸¹ Acts 2:47; 5:11; 8:1; 12:5; 15:4.

⁸² Acts 11:30; 15:4, 6, 22; 21:17, 18.

⁸³ Acts 6:1ff.

⁸⁴ Acts 11:30; 15:4, 6, 22; 21:17, 18.

⁸⁵ Acts 15.

⁸⁶ Acts 15:2, 6, 22, 23. Members of said assemblies need not be construed so as to preclude, override or eliminate the possibility of membership in local churches.

⁸⁷ Deuteronomy 17:8-13; Isaiah 19:23-25. Such subordination is to be construed as being on the basis of a wider or broader consensus on the will of God in areas in determinative or advisory issues.

⁸⁸ Jeremiah 14:4; Romans 10:14, 15; Hebrews 5:4ff.

Ordination is the solemn setting apart of a person to some public church office. Every minister of the word is to be ordained by imposition of hands, and prayer, by those presbyters to whom it does belong.⁹⁰

It is agreeable to the word of God, and very expedient, that such as are to be ordained ministers, be designed to some particular church, or other ministerial charge.⁹¹

He that is to be ordained minister, must be duly qualified, both for life and ministerial abilities, according to the rules of the apostle.⁹²

He is to be examined and approved by those by whom he is to be ordained.⁹³

No man is to be ordained a minister for a particular congregation, if they of that congregation can show just cause of exception against him.⁹⁴

2. Touching the Power of Ordination

Ordination is the act of a presbytery. The power of ordering the whole work of ordination is in the whole presbytery, which, when it is over more congregations than one, whether these congregations be fixed or not fixed, in regard of officer-bearers or members, it is indifferent as to the point of ordination.⁹⁵

It is very requisite, that no single congregation, that can conveniently associate, do assume to itself all and sole power in ordination.⁹⁶

III. Public Worship

A. Of the Assembling of the Congregation, and their Behavior in the Public Worship of God

When the congregation is to meet for public worship, the people (having before prepared their hearts thereunto) ought all to come and join therein; not absenting

⁸⁹ Ephesians 4:11ff; Titus 1:5.

⁹⁰ Numbers 8:10; 1 Timothy 4:14.

⁹¹ Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5. Any ministerial charge other than that from a local church, must be a charge approved of and overseen in some agreeable fashion so that the work of the ministry is that of the church, rather than that of some non-church entity.

⁹² 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9.

⁹³ 1 Timothy 3:7, 10; 5:22. In the Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church, it is understood that such ordination is solely for ministry overseen by a local church.

⁹⁴ 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7.

⁹⁵ 1 Timothy 4:14.

⁹⁶ 1 Timothy 4:14.

themselves from the public ordinance through negligence, or upon pretence of private meetings.⁹⁷

Let all enter the assembly, not irreverently, but in a grave and seemly manner, taking their seats or places without adoration, or bowing themselves towards one place or other.⁹⁸ Additionally,

The congregation being assembled, the minister, after solemn calling on them to the worshipping of the great name of God, is to begin with prayer,⁹⁹ in which the following should be covered:

In all reverence and humility acknowledging the incomprehensible greatness and majesty of the Lord (in whose presence they do then in a special manner appear), and their own vileness and unworthiness to approach so near Him, with their utter inability of themselves to so great a work;¹⁰⁰ and humbly beseeching him for pardon, assistance, and acceptance, in the whole service then to be performed;¹⁰¹ and for a blessing on that particular portion of His word then to be read:¹⁰² And all in the name and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰³

The public worship being begun, the people are wholly to attend upon it, forbearing to read any thing, except what the minister is then reading or citing; and abstaining much more from all private whisperings, conferences, salutations, or doing reverence to any person present, or coming in; as also from all gazing, sleeping, and other indecent behavior, which may disturb the minister or people, or hinder themselves or others in the service of God.¹⁰⁴

If any, through necessity, be hindered from being present at the beginning, they ought not, when they come into the congregation, to betake themselves to their private devotions, but reverently to compose themselves to join with the assembly in that ordinance of God which is then in hand.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁷ Hebrews 10:25.

⁹⁸ James 2:1-9. With respect to “grave and seemly manner”, it should be noted that when the church gathers together, this is a weekly reunion of the family of God and is a joyful occasion—Acts 2:46. However, at the appropriate time prior to worship, all personal greetings and talking should cease in preparation for corporate worship.

⁹⁹ Philippians 4:6; Ephesians 5:20. The principle that prayer should begin our public worship, follows from the fact that our worship, which must be done only through a mediator, is performed in the name of Jesus, our High Priest.

¹⁰⁰ Isaiah 6:1-8; Habakkuk 1:13;

¹⁰¹ 1 Kings 8:22-66;

¹⁰² Nehemiah 8:5-8

¹⁰³ John 14:13-14; 15:16; Hebrews 2:11-18; 5:7; 1 John 2:1

¹⁰⁴ Nehemiah 8:1-5; Luke 4:20; Acts 20:7-12; Hebrews 4:11-12

¹⁰⁵ The principles of reverence which should characterize public worship are found throughout Scripture; the third commandment, in particular, instructs us to treat the Word of God with reverence and respect. Deuteronomy 12:5-8; Psalm 87:2; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20; Chapter 14 (esp. vs. 2-4,13, 17, 23);

B. The Elements of Public Worship

1. Of Public Reading of the Holy Scriptures

Reading of the word in the congregation, being part of the public worship of God (wherein we acknowledge our dependence upon him, and subjection to him), and one means sanctified by him for the edifying of his people, is to be performed by a minister of the word.¹⁰⁶

Howbeit, such as intend the ministry, may occasionally both read the word, and test their gift in exhorting (i.e. speaking words of edification)¹⁰⁷ in the congregation, if allowed by the presbytery thereunto.¹⁰⁸

All the canonical books of the Old and New Testament (but none of those which are commonly called *Apocrypha*) shall be publicly read in the vulgar tongue, out of the best allowed translation, distinctly, that all may hear and understand.¹⁰⁹

How large a portion shall be read at once, is left to the wisdom of the minister. It is requisite that all the canonical books be read over in order, that the people may be better acquainted with the whole body of the Scriptures.¹¹⁰

When the minister who reads shall judge it necessary to expound any part of what is read, let it not be done until the whole reading be ended; and regard is always to be had unto the time, that neither preaching, nor other ordinances, be straitened, or rendered tedious; which rule is to be observed in all other public performances.¹¹¹

Beside public reading of the Holy Scriptures, every person that can read, is to be exhorted to read the Scriptures privately (and all others that cannot read, if not disabled by age, or otherwise, are likewise to be exhorted to learn to read), and to have a Bible.¹¹²

2. Of Public Prayer¹¹³

The service of public worship is to begin with a prayer, invoking God's presence at and blessing upon the service itself.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁶ Deuteronomy 31:9-13; Nehemiah 8:1-3; 9:3-5; 1 Timothy 4:14.

¹⁰⁷ *Preaching* replaced by *exhorting* at 07-2009 American Presbytery. See Minutes, 13 B on Constitution.

¹⁰⁸ 2 Timothy 2:2.

¹⁰⁹ 1 Corinthians 14.

¹¹⁰ Nehemiah 8:2, 3, 5, 8.

¹¹¹ Luke 4:16-21.

¹¹² Psalm 119:97; John 5:39; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:14, 15.

¹¹³ An excellent format for prayer may be found in the *Directory for Publick Worship*, "Of Publick Prayer before the Sermon."

¹¹⁴ Exodus 20:24; Zechariah 2:5; Matthew 28:20; Revelation 21:3.

It is appropriate for there to be a pastoral prayer, in which the minister offers petitions on behalf of the congregation. According to the instruction of our Lord, it is most appropriate to utilize the Lord's Prayer as a pattern for this congregational prayer.¹¹⁵

3. Of the Preaching of the Word

Preaching of the word, being the power of God unto salvation, and one of the greatest and most excellent works belonging to the ministry of the gospel, should be so performed, that the workman need not be ashamed, but may save himself, and those that hear him.¹¹⁶

The minister of Christ is to be in some good measure gifted for so weighty a service, by his skill in such arts and sciences as are handmaids unto divinity; by his knowledge in the whole body of theology, but most of all in the Holy Scriptures, having his senses and heart exercised in them above the common sort of believers; and by the illumination of God's Spirit, and other gifts of edification, which (together with reading and studying of the word) he ought still to seek by prayer, and an humble heart, resolving to admit and receive any truth not yet attained, whenever God shall make it known unto him. All which he is to make use of, and improve, in his private preparations, before he deliver in public what he hath provided.¹¹⁷

Ordinarily, the subject of his sermon is to be some text of Scripture, holding forth some principle or head of religion, or suitable to some special occasion emergent; or he may go on in some chapter, psalm, or book of the Holy Scripture, as he shall see fit.¹¹⁸

If the text be long (as in histories or parables it sometimes must be), let him give a brief sum of it; if short, a paraphrase thereof, if need be: in both, looking diligently to the scope of the text, and pointing at the chief heads and grounds of doctrine which he is to raise from it.¹¹⁹

In analyzing and dividing his text, he is to regard more the order of matter than of words; and neither to burden the memory of the hearers in the beginning with too many members of division, nor to trouble their minds with obscure terms of art.¹²⁰

In raising doctrines from the text, his care ought to be, *First*, That the matter be the truth of God.¹²¹ *Secondly*, That it be a truth contained in or grounded on that text,

¹¹⁵ Luke 11:1-4; Philippians 4:6.

¹¹⁶ Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18-24; 2:4; 15:1-2; Colossians 1:5-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6; 2:13; 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 4:12.

¹¹⁷ 2 Timothy 2:15.

¹¹⁸ Luke 4:16-21; 24:44; Acts 8:27-35.

¹¹⁹ Habakkuk 2:2; 1 Corinthians 14:19, 2 Corinthians 3:12.

¹²⁰ Habakkuk 2:2; 1 Corinthians 14:19, 2 Corinthians 3:12.

¹²¹ Deuteronomy 18:20.

that the hearers may discern how God teaches it from thence.¹²² *Thirdly*, That he chiefly insist upon those doctrines which are principally intended; and make most for the edification of the hearers.¹²³

The doctrine is to be expressed in plain terms; or, if any thing in it need explication, it is to be opened, and the consequence also from the text cleared. It is best if the parallel places of Scripture, confirming the doctrine, are plain and pertinent, rather than many, and (it need be) somewhat insisted upon, and applied to the purpose in hand.¹²⁴

The arguments or reasons are to be solid, and, as much as may be, convincing. The illustrations, of what kind soever, ought to be full of light, and such as may convey the truth into the hearer's heart with spiritual delight.¹²⁵

If any doubt obvious from Scripture, reason, or prejudice of the hearers, seem to arise, it is very requisite to remove it, by reconciling the seeming differences, answering the reasons, and discovering and taking away the causes of prejudice and mistake. Otherwise it is not fit to detain the hearers with propounding or answering vain or wicked cavils, which, as they are endless, so the propounding and answering of them does more hinder than promote edification.¹²⁶

He is not to rest in general doctrine, although never so much cleared and confirmed, but to bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers: which albeit it prove a work of great difficulty to himself, requiring much prudence, zeal, and meditation, and to the natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant; yet he is to endeavour to perform it in such a manner, that his auditors may feel the word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that, if any unbeliever or ignorant person be present, he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest, and give glory to God.¹²⁷

In the use of instruction or information in the knowledge of some truth, which is a consequence from his doctrine, he may (when convenient) confirm it by a few firm arguments from the text in hand, and other places of Scripture, or from the nature of that common-place in divinity, whereof that truth is a branch.¹²⁸

In confutation of false doctrines, he is neither to raise an old heresy from the grave, nor to mention a blasphemous opinion unnecessarily: but, if the people be in danger

¹²² Luke 4:21.

¹²³ 1 Corinthians 14:5, 12, 26.

¹²⁴ Habakkuk 2:2; 1 Corinthians 14:19, 2 Corinthians 3:12.

¹²⁵ Psalm 119:129-131; Matthew 13:31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; 20:1; 22:2.

¹²⁶ 1 Timothy 4:7; 2 Timothy 2:23; Titus 3:9.

¹²⁷ Hebrews 4:12.

¹²⁸ 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

of an error, he is to confute it soundly, and endeavour to satisfy their judgments and consciences against all objections.¹²⁹

In exhorting to duties, he is, as he sees cause, to teach also the means that help to the performance of them.¹³⁰

In dehortation (dissuasion), reprehension, and public admonition (which require special wisdom), let him, as there shall be cause, not only discover the nature and greatness of the sin, with the misery attending it, but also show the danger his hearers are in to be overtaken and surprised by it, together with the remedies and best way to avoid it.¹³¹

In applying comfort, whether general against all temptations, or particular against some special troubles or terrors, he is carefully to answer such objections as a troubled heart and afflicted spirit may suggest to the contrary. It is also sometimes requisite to give some notes of trial (which is very profitable, especially when performed by able and experienced ministers, with circumspection and prudence, and the signs clearly grounded on the Holy Scripture), whereby the hearers may be able to examine themselves whether they have attained those graces, and performed those duties, to which he exhorts, or be guilty of the sin reprehended, and in danger of the judgments threatened, or are such to whom the consolations propounded do belong; that accordingly they may be quickened and excited to duty, humbled for their wants and sins, affected with their danger, and strengthened with comfort, as their condition, upon examination, shall require.¹³²

And, as he needs not always to prosecute every doctrine which lies in his text, so is he wisely to make choice of such uses, as, by his residence and conversing with his flock, he finds most needful and seasonable; and, amongst these, such as may most draw their souls to Christ, the fountain of light, holiness, and comfort.¹³³

But the servant of Christ, whatever his method be, is to perform his whole ministry:

- a. Painfully, not doing the work of the Lord negligently.¹³⁴
- b. Plainly, that the meanest may understand; delivering the truth not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect; abstaining also from an unprofitable use of unknown tongues, strange phrases, and cadences of sounds and words; sparingly citing sentences of ecclesiastical or other human writers, ancient or modern, be they never so elegant.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Titus 1:13, 14; 3:9.

¹³⁰ John 16:33; 2 Thessalonians 3:16.

¹³¹ Ezekiel 3:17; Acts 20:28-31; Hebrews 13:17.

¹³² 2 Timothy 4:2.

¹³³ Matthew 13:52.

¹³⁴ 2 Samuel 24:24.

¹³⁵ Colossians 2:2-4; 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6.

- c. Faithfully, looking at the honor of Christ, the conversion, edification, and salvation of the people, not at his own gain or glory; keeping nothing back which may promote those holy ends, giving to every one his own portion, and bearing indifferent respect unto all, without neglecting the meanest, or sparing the greatest, in their sins.¹³⁶
- d. Wisely, framing all his doctrines, exhortations, and especially his reproofs, in such a manner as may be most likely to prevail; showing all due respect to each man's person and place, and not mixing his own passion or bitterness.¹³⁷
- e. Gravely, as becomes the word of God; shunning all such gesture, voice, and expressions, as may occasion the corruptions of men to despise him and his ministry.¹³⁸
- f. With loving affection, that the people may see all coming from his godly zeal, and hearty desire to do them good.¹³⁹ And,
- g. As taught of God, and persuaded in his own heart, that all that he teaches is the truth of Christ; and walking before his flock, as an example to them in it; earnestly, both in private and public, recommending his labors to the blessing of God, and watchfully looking to himself, and the flock whereof the Lord hath made him overseer: So shall the doctrine of truth be preserved uncorrupt, many souls converted and built up, and himself receive manifold comforts of his labors even in this life, and afterward the crown of glory laid up for him in the world to come.¹⁴⁰

Where there are more ministers in a congregation than one, and they of different gifts, each may more especially apply himself to doctrine or exhortation, according to the gift wherein he most excels, and as they shall agree between themselves.¹⁴¹

4. Of the Administration of Baptism

Baptism, as it is not unnecessarily to be delayed, so it is not to be administered in any case by any private person, but by a minister of Christ, called to be the steward of the mysteries of God.¹⁴²

Nor is it to be administered in private places, or privately, but as part of public worship, and in the face of the congregation, where the people may most conveniently see and hear.¹⁴³

¹³⁶ Acts 20:27.

¹³⁷ Acts 20:31.

¹³⁸ 1 Timothy 4:12.

¹³⁹ 1 Thessalonians 2:7.

¹⁴⁰ 1 Timothy 4:12-16.

¹⁴¹ Philippians 2:3, 4.

¹⁴² 1 Corinthians 4:1.

¹⁴³ Acts 2:41.

Before baptism, the minister is to use some words of instruction, touching the institution, nature, use, and ends of this sacrament, showing, That it is instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ:¹⁴⁴ That it is a seal of the covenant of grace¹⁴⁵, of our ingrafting into Christ¹⁴⁶, and of our union with him¹⁴⁷, of remission of sins¹⁴⁸, regeneration¹⁴⁹, adoption¹⁵⁰, and life eternal¹⁵¹: That the water, in baptism, represents and signifies both the blood of Christ, which takes away all guilt of sin, original and actual¹⁵²; and the sanctifying virtue of the Spirit of Christ against the dominion of sin, and the corruption of our sinful nature¹⁵³: That baptizing, or sprinkling and washing with water, signifies the cleansing from sin by the blood and for the merit of Christ, together with the mortification of sin, and rising from sin to newness of life, by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ¹⁵⁴: That the promise is made to believers and their seed; and that the seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the church, have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it, and to the outward privileges of the church, under the gospel, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament¹⁵⁵; the covenant of grace, for substance, being the same¹⁵⁶; and the grace of God, and the consolation of believers, more plentiful than before¹⁵⁷: That the Son of God admitted little children into his presence, embracing and blessing them, saying, *For of such is the kingdom of God*¹⁵⁸: That children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers¹⁵⁹; and that all who are baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce, and by their baptism are bound to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh¹⁶⁰: That they are Christians,¹⁶¹ and federally holy before baptism, and therefore are they baptized¹⁶²: That the inward grace and virtue of baptism is not tied to that very moment of time wherein it is administered¹⁶³; and that the fruit and power thereof reaches to the whole course of our life¹⁶⁴; and that outward baptism is not so necessary, that, through the want thereof, the infant is in

¹⁴⁴ Matthew 28:19

¹⁴⁵ Romans 4:11; Colossians 2:11-12

¹⁴⁶ Romans 6:1-14

¹⁴⁷ Romans 6:1-14

¹⁴⁸ Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21

¹⁴⁹ Titus 3:5

¹⁵⁰ Galatians 3:26-27; 4:5

¹⁵¹ Romans 6:5

¹⁵² Revelation 1:5

¹⁵³ Ezekiel 36:25-27; John 3:6

¹⁵⁴ Hebrews 9:13-14; 11:28; 12:24; 1 Peter 1:2

¹⁵⁵ Acts 2:38-39; Genesis 17:7

¹⁵⁶ Colossians 2:11-12

¹⁵⁷ John 1:14, 16-17

¹⁵⁸ Mark 10:14, 24; Luke 18:16

¹⁵⁹ Acts 2:38-39, 41, 47

¹⁶⁰ Acts 3:19

¹⁶¹ The word "Christian" here is used in the covenantal sense, i.e., that the child was born of Christian parents who were members in good standing of a Bible-believing church. It is not used in the modern evangelical sense of a person having a "born again" experience, thus being a "Christian" without having any connection to the church.

¹⁶² 1 Corinthians 7:14

¹⁶³ John 3:5, 8

¹⁶⁴ Romans 6:1-4; 2 Peter 1:4-12

danger of damnation, or the parents guilty, if they do not condemn or neglect the ordinance of Christ, when and where it may be had.¹⁶⁵

Then after the appropriate admonitions to all involved, the minister is to call the name of the person being baptized, and pronounce:

*I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*¹⁶⁶

As he pronounces these words, he is to baptize the person with water: which, for the manner of doing of it, is not only lawful but sufficient, and most expedient to be, by pouring or sprinkling of the water on the head of the person, without adding any other ceremony.

This done, it is appropriate for him to give thanks and pray.

5. Of the Celebration of the Communion, or the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

The communion, or supper of the Lord, is frequently to be celebrated; but how often, may be considered and determined by the ministers, and other church-governors of each congregation, as they shall find most convenient for the comfort and edification of the people committed to their charge.¹⁶⁷

The ignorant and the scandalous are not fit to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.¹⁶⁸

Where this sacrament cannot with convenience be frequently administered, it is important that public warning be given the Sabbath-day before the administration thereof: something concerning that ordinance, and the due preparation thereunto, and participation thereof, be taught; that, by the diligent use of all means sanctified of God to that end, both in public and private, all may come better prepared to that heavenly feast.¹⁶⁹

When the day is come for administration, the minister, having ended his sermon and prayer, shall make a short exhortation:

Expressing the inestimable benefit we have by this sacrament, together with the ends and use thereof: setting forth the great necessity of having our comforts and strength renewed thereby in this our pilgrimage and warfare: how necessary it is that we come unto it with knowledge, faith, repentance, love, and with hungering and

¹⁶⁵ Luke 23:42-43; Acts 10:2, 4, 22, 31, 45, 47.

¹⁶⁶ Matthew 28:19; "Holy Spirit" may be substituted for "Holy Ghost."

¹⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:25-26.

¹⁶⁸ 1 Corinthians 5; 11:29

¹⁶⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:28-32; 2 Corinthians 13:5

thirsting souls after Christ and his benefits: how great the danger to eat and drink unworthily.¹⁷⁰

Next, he is, in the name of Christ, on the one part, to warn all such as are ignorant, scandalous, profane, or that live in any sin or offence against their knowledge or conscience, that they presume not to come to that holy table; showing them, that he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment unto himself: and, on the other part, he is in an especial manner to invite and encourage all that labor under the sense of the burden of their sins, and fear of wrath, and desire to reach out unto a greater progress in grace than yet they can attain unto, to come to the Lord's table; assuring them, in the same name, of ease, refreshing, and strength to their weak and wearied souls.¹⁷¹

After this exhortation, warning, and invitation, the table being conveniently placed, that the communicants may orderly sit about it, at it, or before it, the minister is to begin the action with sanctifying and blessing the elements of bread and wine set before him (the bread in comely and convenient vessels, so prepared, that, being broken by him, and given, it may be distributed amongst the communicants; the wine also in one or more convenient cups), having first, in a few words, showed that those elements, otherwise common, are now set apart and sanctified to this holy use, by the word of institution and prayer.¹⁷²

Let the words of institution be read out of the Evangelists, or out of the first Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians, Chap. 11, starting in verse 23. *I have received of the Lord, &c.*, which the minister may, when he sees requisite, explain and apply.

There should be prayer, thanksgiving, and blessing of the bread and wine.¹⁷³

The elements being now sanctified by the word and prayer, the minister, being at the table, is to take the bread in his hand, and say, in these expressions (or other the like, used by Christ or His apostle upon this occasion):

According to the holy institution, command, and example of our blessed Savior Jesus Christ, *I take this bread, and, having given thanks, break it, and give it unto you*; there the minister, who is also himself to communicate, is to break the bread, and give it to the communicants, saying, *Take ye, eat ye; this is the body of Christ which is broken for you: do this in remembrance of him.*¹⁷⁴

In like manner the minister is to take the cup, and say, in these expressions (or other the like, used by Christ or the apostle upon the same occasion):

¹⁷⁰ Ezekiel 43:10-12, 1 Corinthians 11:29-30, 32-34

¹⁷¹ 1 Corinthians 11:28-32; Matthew 11:28-30

¹⁷² Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-21; Mark 14:22-24; 1 Corinthians 10:21

¹⁷³ Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16; See "Celebration of the Communion" in the *Directory for Publick Worship* for wise format for prayer.

¹⁷⁴ Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24.

According to the institution, command, and example of our Lord Jesus Christ, I take this cup, and give it unto you; here he gives it to the communicants, saying, *This cup is the new testament in the blood of Christ, which is shed for the remission of the sins of many: drink ye all of it.*¹⁷⁵

After all have communicated, the minister may, in a few words, put them in mind of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, held forth in this sacrament; and exhort them to walk worthy of it. The minister is to give solemn thanks to God. If a collection for the poor is received upon the occasion of the observance of this sacrament, it is so to be ordered, that no part of the public worship be thereby hindered.¹⁷⁶

6. Of Singing in Worship

It is the duty of Christians to praise God publicly, by singing together in the congregation, and also privately in the family.¹⁷⁷

In singing, the chief care must be to sing with understanding, and with grace in the heart, making melody unto the Lord.¹⁷⁸

7. Concerning Public Solemn Fasting¹⁷⁹

When some great and notable judgments are either inflicted upon a people, or apparently imminent, or by some extraordinary provocations notoriously deserved; as also when some special blessing is to be sought and obtained, public solemn fasting (which is to continue the whole day) is a duty that God expects from that nation or people.¹⁸⁰

Before the public meeting, each family and person apart is privately to use all religious care to prepare their hearts to such a solemn work, and to be early at the congregation.¹⁸¹

So large a portion of the day as conveniently may be, is to be spent in public reading and preaching of the word, with appropriate singing, fit to quicken affections suitable to such a duty: but especially in prayer, to this or the like effect:

In all these, the ministers, who are the mouths of the people unto God, ought so to speak from their hearts, upon serious and thorough premeditation of them, that both themselves and their people may be much affected, and even melted thereby,

¹⁷⁵ Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:21; 1 Corinthians 11:26.

¹⁷⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:20-21

¹⁷⁷ Acts 16:25; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.

¹⁷⁸ Psalm 33:3; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.

¹⁷⁹ Additional wise and useful instructions may be found in the *Directory for Publick Worship*, "Of Publick Solemn Fasting."

¹⁸⁰ 2 Chronicles 20:1-4; Esther 4:16; Ezra 8:21-23; Joel 2:15; 2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:27.

¹⁸¹ Joel 2:12, 13.

especially with sorrow for their sins; that it may be indeed a day of deep humiliation and afflicting of the soul.¹⁸²

Special choice is to be made of such Scriptures to be read, and of such texts for preaching, as may best work the hearts of the hearers to the special business of the day, and most dispose them to humiliation and repentance: insisting most on those particulars which each minister's observation and experience tells him are most conducing to the edification and reformation of that congregation to which he preaches.¹⁸³

Before the close of the public duties, the minister is, in his own and the people's name, to engage his and their hearts to be the Lord's, with professed purpose and resolution to reform whatever is amiss among them, and more particularly such sins as they have been more remarkably guilty of; and to draw near unto God, and to walk more closely and faithfully with him in new obedience, than ever before.¹⁸⁴

He is also to admonish the people, with all importunity, that the work of that day does not end with the public duties of it, but that they are so to improve the remainder of the day, and of their whole life, in reinforcing upon themselves and their families in private all those godly affections and resolutions which they professed in public, as that they may be settled in their hearts for ever, and themselves may more sensibly find that God has smelled a sweet savor in Christ from their performances, and is pacified towards them, by answers of grace, in pardoning of sin, in removing of judgments, in averting or preventing of plagues, and in conferring of blessings, suitable to the conditions and prayers of his people, by Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁵

Besides solemn and general fasts enjoined by authority, we judge that, at other times, congregations may keep days of fasting, as divine providence shall administer unto them special occasion; and also that families may do the same, so it be not on days wherein the congregation to which they do belong is to meet for fasting, or other public duties of worship.¹⁸⁶

8. Concerning the Observation of Days of Public Thanksgiving

When any such day is to be kept, let notice be given of it, and of the occasion thereof, some convenient time before, that the people may the better prepare themselves thereunto.¹⁸⁷

The day being come, and the congregation (after private preparations) being assembled, the minister is to begin with a word of exhortation, to stir up the people

¹⁸² Nehemiah 9.

¹⁸³ Nehemiah 9:1-3.

¹⁸⁴ Ezra 10:1-5; Nehemiah 9:38.

¹⁸⁵ Ezra 10:1-5.

¹⁸⁶ Matthew 9:14, 15; Acts 13:3; 14:23.

¹⁸⁷ 1 Kings 8:1-11, 62-66.

to the duty for which they are met, and with a short prayer for God's assistance and blessing (as at other conventions for public worship), according to the particular occasion of their meeting.¹⁸⁸

Let him then make some pithy narration of the deliverance obtained, or mercy received, or of whatever has occasioned that assembling of the congregation, that all may better understand it, or be minded of it, and more affected with it.¹⁸⁹

And, because singing of psalms is of all other the most proper ordinance for expressing of joy and thanksgiving, let some pertinent psalm or psalms be sung for that purpose, before or after the reading of some portion of the word suitable to the present business.¹⁹⁰

Then let the minister, who is to preach, proceed to further exhortation and prayer before his sermon, with special reference to the present work: after which, let him preach upon some text of Scripture pertinent to the occasion.

The sermon ended, let him not only pray, as at other times after preaching is directed, with remembrance of the necessities of the Church and State (if before the sermon they were omitted), but enlarge himself in due and solemn thanksgiving for former mercies and deliverances; but more especially for that which at the present calls them together to give thanks: with humble petition for the continuance and renewing of God's wonted mercies, as need shall be, and for sanctifying grace to make a right use thereof. And so, having sung another psalm, suitable to the mercy, let him dismiss the congregation with a blessing, that they may have some convenient time for their repast and refreshing.¹⁹¹

But the minister (before their dismissal) is solemnly to admonish them to beware of all excess and riot, tending to gluttony or drunkenness, and much more of these sins themselves, in their eating and refreshing; and to take care that their mirth and rejoicing be not carnal, but spiritual, which may make God's praise to be glorious, and themselves humble and sober; and that both their feeding and rejoicing may render them more cheerful and enlarged, further to celebrate his praises in the midst of the congregation, when they return unto it in the remaining part of that day.¹⁹²

When the congregation shall be again assembled, the like course in praying, reading, preaching, appropriate singing, and offering up of more praise and thanksgiving, that is before directed for the morning, is to be renewed and continued, so far as the time will give leave.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ The principle that prayer should begin our public worship, follows from the fact that our worship, which must be done only through a mediator, is performed in the name of Jesus, our High Priest.

¹⁸⁹ Psalm 136.

¹⁹⁰ Psalms 100; 106:1-5; 136.

¹⁹¹ 1 Kings 8:12-61.

¹⁹² 1 Kings 8:57-61.

¹⁹³ 1 Kings 8:64.

At one or both of the public meetings that day, a collection is to be made for the poor (and in the like manner upon the day of public humiliation), that their loins may bless us, and rejoice the more with us. And the people are to be exhorted, at the end of the latter meeting, to spend the residue of that day in holy duties, and testifications of Christian love and charity one towards another, and of rejoicing more and more in the Lord; as becomes those who make the joy of the Lord their strength.¹⁹⁴

9. Of Religious Oaths and Vows

Oaths and vows are similar in nature, but are to be distinguished in this manner: that oaths chiefly concern our duty to our fellowman,¹⁹⁵ while vows more directly concern our duty to God.¹⁹⁶

Among the appropriate occasions for the taking of vows are the presentation of children by parents for baptism¹⁹⁷, assuming the duties of church membership¹⁹⁸, and ordination to ecclesiastical office.¹⁹⁹

C. The Appropriate Time for Public Worship

1. Of the Sanctification of the Lord's Day

The Lord's day ought to be so remembered before-hand, as that all worldly business of our ordinary callings may be so ordered, and so timely and seasonably laid aside, as they may not be impediments to the due sanctifying of the day when it comes.²⁰⁰

The whole day is to be celebrated as holy to the Lord, both in public and private, as being the Christian Sabbath. To which end, it is requisite, that there be a holy cessation or resting all that day from all unnecessary labors; and an abstaining, not only from all sports and pastimes, but also from all worldly words and thoughts.²⁰¹

That the diet on that day be so ordered, as that neither servants be unnecessarily detained from the public worship of God, nor any other person hindered from the sanctifying that day.²⁰² That there be private preparations of every person and family, by prayer for themselves, and for God's assistance of the minister, and for a blessing upon his ministry; and by such other holy exercises, as may further dispose them to a more comfortable communion with God in his public ordinances.²⁰³

¹⁹⁴ 1 Kings 8:65.

¹⁹⁵ Leviticus 19:2; Deuteronomy 10:20; 2 Chronicles 6:22, 23; 2 Corinthians 1:23.

¹⁹⁶ Psalms 66:8; 76:13, 14; Ecclesiastes 5:4-6; Isaiah 19:21.

¹⁹⁷ Joshua 24:15 cf. Ephesians 6:4

¹⁹⁸ Ruth 1:16-17

¹⁹⁹ Exodus 24:1-8; 1 Timothy 4:13-14; 2 Timothy 4:1-2

²⁰⁰ Exodus 16:22, 25-26, 29; 20:8; Nehemiah 13:19; Luke 23:54, 56.

²⁰¹ Isaiah 58:13-14; Matthew 5:17-18; Mark 2:27-28

²⁰² Exodus 16:22, 25-26, 29; 20:9-11; 23:12.

²⁰³ Ezekiel 22:26; Romans 15:30; Ephesians 6:19; 2 Thessalonians 3:1; Hebrews 10:25.

That all the people meet so timely for public worship, that the whole congregation may be present at the beginning, and with one heart solemnly join together in all parts of the public worship, and not depart till after the blessing.²⁰⁴

That what time is vacant, between or after the solemn meetings of the congregation in public, be spent in reading, meditation, repetition of sermons²⁰⁵; especially by calling their families to an account of what they have heard, and catechizing of them²⁰⁶, holy conferences²⁰⁷, prayer for a blessing upon the public ordinances²⁰⁸, singing of psalms²⁰⁹, visiting the sick²¹⁰, relieving the poor²¹¹, and such like duties of piety, charity, and mercy²¹², accounting the Sabbath a delight.²¹³

2. Touching Days for Public Worship

There is no day commanded in Scripture to be kept holy under the gospel but the Lord's day, which is the Christian Sabbath. Festival days, vulgarly called *Holy-days*, having no warrant in the word of God, are not to be continued.²¹⁴

Nevertheless, it is lawful and necessary, upon special emergent occasions, to separate a day or days for public fasting or thanksgiving, as the several eminent and extraordinary dispensations of God's providence shall administer cause and opportunity to his people.²¹⁵

²⁰⁴ Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:25

²⁰⁵ Psalm 1:1-2; 92; 95; Isaiah 56:3-7; Acts 1:10-12

²⁰⁶ Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Exodus 12:26-27; Ephesians 6:4

²⁰⁷ Acts 17:10-12

²⁰⁸ Matthew 26:26; 1 Corinthians 11:23

²⁰⁹ Psalm 92 (Title); Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16

²¹⁰ Mark 3:1-5

²¹¹ Mark 2:23-28

²¹² Luke 13:15-16; 14:5

²¹³ Isaiah 58

²¹⁴ Colossians 2:16, 17, 23.

²¹⁵ See the proof texts in Sections 7 and 8, above.

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