

Councils, Confessions, Creeds, and Catechisms

The Westminster Contributions

Background:

- 1638 – Citizens of Scotland sign the National Covenant. This document:
1. Represented the Calvinistic Presbyterianism that was popular in Scotland
 2. Opposed Episcopalianism being forced by King Charles I of England
- 1643 – The Solemn League and Covenant is agreed upon. This document:
1. Allied the Scottish church with the British parliament (opposing the king)
 2. Was born of parliaments growing frustration with the Church of England
 3. Invited the Scots to assist in establishing new church polity and doctrine
- 1643-1653 – The Westminster Assembly is convened.
1. 8 representatives are on hand from Scotland, but act as consultants only
 2. 120+ from English parliament, pastors, and theologians gather at Westminster Abby in London to purposefully reform the church of England.
 3. The central principle which drove the discussion was Covenant Theology.
 4. They worked to produce non-denominational documents
 5. Proof texts were added to the texts begrudgingly because they understood the temptation of “proof-texting.”
 6. The following four works were the result of the assembly:

The Westminster Confession:

- Chapter 1 – The Holy Scriptures (authoritative as God’s own communication)
- Chapter 2 – God and The Holy Trinity (sovereign God is trinitarily unified)
- Chapter 3 – God’s Eternal Decree (God’s ordination of all that happens)
- Chapter 4 – Creation (God’s activity of creation, including that of good humanity)
- Chapter 5 – Providence (God’s interaction with His creation)
- Chapter 6 – The Fall, Sin, and Sins Punishment
- Chapter 7 – God’s Covenant With Man (works, pre-fall, and grace, post-fall)
- Chapter 8 – Christ The Mediator (As Christ, The Son is the one who saves men)
- Chapter 9 – Free Will (We were free before the fall, but not free afterward)
- Chapter 10 – Effectual Calling (God saves those whom He has elected to save)
- Chapter 11 – Justification (God pardons men on the bases of atonement)
- Chapter 12 – Adoption (God includes the saved in His family)
- Chapter 13 – Sanctification (Positionally and progressively we are made holy)
- Chapter 14 – Saving Faith (God gives faith by His grace, being fed as we mature)
- Chapter 15 – Repentance Unto Life (God’s people must live daily repentant lives)
- Chapter 16 – Good Works (Obedience to God’s Word, not according to society)
- Chapter 17 – The Perseverance of The Saints (The saved will not walk away)
- Chapter 18 – The Assurance of Grace and Salvation (You know your salvation)
- Chapter 19 – The Law of God (God’s standard of righteousness from creation)
- Chapter 20 – Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience (Free to do right)
- Chapter 21 – Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day
- Chapter 22 – Lawful Oaths and Vows (Make and keep oaths in God’s name)
- Chapter 23 – Civil Magistrates (Must be obeyed as God’s appointed legal authority)
- Chapter 24 – Marriage and Divorce (Divorce and remarriage allowed for adultery)
- Chapter 25 – The Church (A universal and local body of the elect)

- Chapter 26 – Communion of the Saints (Fellowship with Christ and each other)
- Chapter 27 – The Sacraments (A physical means of grace, though not to salvation)
- Chapter 28 – Baptism (A sign of our covenant relationship [pouring and infants])
- Chapter 29 – The Lord’s Supper (Partaking of elements in reminder only)
- Chapter 30 – Church Censures (Church discipline is vital to its health)
- Chapter 31 – Synods and Councils (Church leaders meeting on church matters)
- Chapter 32 – Human State After Death and The Resurrection From The Dead
- Chapter 33 – The Last Things (A final judgement awaits all mankind)

The Shorter Catechism

See handout.

The Larger Catechism

Larger by number – Shorter – 107 questions; Larger – 196 questions

Larger by details – EG

Q. 7. What is God? Vs. Q. 4 in the shorter catechism.

A. God is a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth

Q. 14. How doth God execute his decrees? Vs. Q. 8, Shorter catechism

A. God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence; according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will.

Q. 120. What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment, the more to enforce it?

A. The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment, the more to enforce it, are taken from the equity of it, God allowing us six days of seven for our own affairs, and reserving but one for himself, in these words, Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work; from God’s challenging a special propriety in that day, The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: from the example of God, who in six days made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: and from that blessing which God put upon that day, not only in sanctifying it to be a day for his service, but in ordaining it to be a means of blessing to us in our sanctifying it; Wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Larger in theology – Covenant vs. Dispensational

Not denominational distinctives

(Presbyterians tend to be more covenant, Baptists tend to be more dispensational.)

Not eschatological distinctives

(Covenant theology tends toward postmillennialism, but doesn’t guarantee it. Dispensationalists tend toward premillennialism, but can differ.)

Why? Covenant theology generally sees the church as the replacement of Israel, so the church age is growing, progressing, and coming to maturity as God’s people, Israel. Dispensationalists commonly see a clear distinction between Israel and the church.

The Directory for Public Worship

The Preface.

This section establishes the historical, ecclesiological, and theological context for this work.

Of the Assembling of the Congregation.

The solemnity of worship must capture us before we assemble, and must maintain with a genuine desire of the people to exalt Almighty God.

Of Publick Reading of the Holy Scriptures.

God's Word must be read in an understandable translation.

Of Publick Prayer before the Sermon.

This prayer centers on leading God's people to acknowledge their sin, confess it, and repent thereof, as well as a genuine plea for understanding what is to come.

Of Preaching of the Word.

God's Word is to be expounded by one of skill, ability, and knowledge, and to follow the prescribed means and methods.

Of Prayer after Sermon.

A suitable prayer for application of the sermon, for continuation of grace, and for commitment of the people to faithfulness.

Of the Sacrament of Baptism.

This is done through pouring or sprinkling, and only by an ordained elder. It is done to both new believers, and infants of believing parents as a covenant sign.

Of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is to be observed in gravity and reflection, with the minister presiding, the people correctly partaking, and the Holy Spirit leading.

Of the Sanctification of the Lord's Day.

Days of worship are intended for just that. They are sacred, purposeful, and full.

Of the Solemnization of Marriage.

A marriage ceremony is to reflect sound Bible doctrine, exhortation, exposition, and application so that all in attendance, especially the couple, understand.

Of the Visitation of the Sick.

It is the responsibility of pastors to tenderly and wisely pastor their people in times of distress and even death.

Of the Burial of the Dead.

A short prescription for that which is to be done with the dead.

Of Publick Solemn Fasting.

Times, methods, and descriptions of fasting are outlined for observation by those in seasons of present, or possible distress.

Of the Observation of Days of Publick Thanksgiving.

Any day selected by the elders for the observation of giving thanks to God are to be ordered, formal, and purposeful.

Of Singing of Psalms.

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

An Appendix touching Days and Places of Publick Worship.

Christian Sabbath is any day set aside for worship of God. Holi(y)days are to cease, but celebrations of certain events is encouraged and condoned.