

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRIST THE KING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A CLASS FOR THOSE WHO DESIRE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT CHRIST
THE KING PCA BEFORE CONTEMPLATING MEMBERSHIP

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AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRIST THE KING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PART 1: LOVED BY GOD - *THE GOSPEL* *OF GOD'S GRACE*

I. THE HISTORY OF CHRIST THE KING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Christ the King Presbyterian Church has its genesis in the prayers of God's faithful few and a pastor's desire to begin a church in which Biblical worship would reign supreme. For several years a faithful little band of believers who were members of Christ Community Presbyterian Church in Clearwater prayed for a Presbyterian Church in America congregation to be established in the Seminole area. Concurrent to their prayers, Peter La Pointe, pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in North Tampa, was praying how God could best use his gifts in ministry. God seemed to be leading him toward the possibility of starting a new church. As a past chairman of the Presbytery of Southwest Florida's Mission to North America (MNA - responsible for planting new churches), Peter saw the needs of Pinellas county, and approached the new MNA chairman with the idea of planting a new church.

God seemed pleased to bring the two together and it was determined that a new church should be organized in Seminole. Support was raised from the presbytery, the denomination, interested churches and individuals. Peter was approved by the presbytery and invited by the core group to begin the work. In 1999 the core group began to meet, eventually moving from a house to an office complex where it met on Sunday evenings during the summer of 1999. After God dramatically provided our first meeting place at the gymnastics and dance academy, a date was established to begin morning services - September 19th. Since then God has opened the doors for worship to be moved to the Chapel at Keswick Christian School for a time and then in February 2004 to the beautiful little SUMC historic Chapel where we are much more visible to the community. CKPCA has been richly blessed as many who have a desire for simple, biblical worship have become a part of the family.

From the very beginning the focus of Christ the King PCA has been upon worship. It continues to be our purpose to express biblical worship to God in every area of the life of God's people. This is perhaps best summarized by our purpose statement.

Christ the King Presbyterian Church exists to glorify God through biblical worship, and by extending and strengthening the kingdom of Christ in greater St. Petersburg and the world through apologetic* outreach, loving relationships and faithful discipleship.

****From 1 Peter 3:15; "But sanctify Christ as Lord of your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense (apologia) to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with gentleness and reverence . . ."***

It is our conviction that God has called the church into being primarily as a body of those who have been given a great purpose in life - to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Therefore, our priority is upon the right worship of God. Everything we do is to that end. In our outreach to the community, we are seeking to fulfill Jesus' mission to gather a worshipping community. In our relationships with one another, we are seeking to enable others to live lives characterized by worship. And in our discipling ministry, again, we are investing our energies toward teaching our families a theology which leads to doxology.

These four spheres of ministry can be easily remembered as follows:

W*orship*
O*utreach*
R*elationships*
D*isciplineship*

In participating in this class, you are demonstrating an interest in this church - perhaps even expressing a desire to unite formally with this church through membership. In what follows, you will be introduced to Christ the King Presbyterian Church. We will look at the four areas of ministry mentioned above in detail. But before we do, we need to examine why the church exists. What is it that draws people together to form local churches, which, in turn, constitute the universal church, known as the Kingdom of God and the Bride of Christ?

The short answer is - *the Gospel of God's Grace*. The long answer is as follows:

II. WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Gospel simply means "good news". The gospel is the basic message of the Bible and is the reason there is a church. Were it not for the good news, the news would be bad indeed. It is our fundamental belief that this good news which God gives to us is alone able to transform lives and places and times. It has done so throughout history, and the power remains to do so to this day.

A. A Loving God Created Man with Original Holiness and Righteousness

At its core, the message of the Bible is one of good news/bad news/good news. First, the good news. God created man in His own image. We were created by God not because God was in any way lonely or incomplete. Rather, out of His mere good pleasure and in

complete and absolute freedom He created us and provided us with a life-sustaining environment. In this time/space continuum He sustains us to this day. Therefore we are, technically, the sole property of the Creator. As such, we owe our existence to Him, and are completely dependant upon Him for everything. The sum purpose of our existence has been succinctly phrased by the Westminster Confession of Faith Catechism question: What is man's chief and highest end? Answer - The chief and highest end of man is to glorify God and fully to enjoy Him forever. The original good news is that God created us and gave us everything we needed to live happy and productive lives. He created us as His image bearers - stamped with His seal of approval in every way. We were created in tremendous dignity and honor by a super-intelligent Master Designer who is supremely good. But, alas, the bad news . . .

B. Man Has Fallen From His Original Innocence into an Estate of Rebellion against God

The bad news is that our original parents, Adam and Eve, as perfect representatives for their progeny, failed to live in humble obedience to their Creator. God lovingly created a paradise sanctuary for them in which to live. But He also gave them a single prohibition - they were forbidden to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Tempted by the devil and seduced by a desire to be like God, they rebelled against Him and plunged themselves and everyone whom they represented into an estate of sin and death. This rebellion had eternal consequences. Instead of being holy and happy, they became sinful and miserable creatures under God's wrath and curse. As Isaiah says in chapter 59:2, "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from You, so that He does not hear." Sin, in any form, eternally severs any possible relationship with a holy God.

We don't understand this very well. We think to ourselves "couldn't God simply overlook our sins and receive us anyway?" The simple answer is - not and still be God. It is God's goodness which is the barrier. Because God is perfectly good, He must judge evil. Because He is perfectly good, He cannot tolerate the presence of sin. The bad news is that we all are sinners. As Paul puts it in Roman 3:23 "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." And again in Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death . . ." We are not sinners because we sin, rather, we sin because we are sinners - it is in our nature. This sinful nature is perhaps the most empirically verifiable truth presented to us in the Scriptures. A cursory survey of human history is all that is required to remove all doubt. Because sin is so overwhelming a force in our lives, we can not reform ourselves. Our only hope is a transformation, a new beginning - a new nature. Thanks to a merciful and gracious God, sin and death are not the final word for all of Adam's children.

C. Jesus Christ is God's Merciful Provision Toward Sinners

The Good News - the Gospel of Jesus Christ - is God's answer to man's rebellion. God decreed that Adam would be the perfect representative for all mankind in the Garden of Eden. He established a covenant - a formal agreement with Adam by which he might live happily ever after. Adam broke this covenant (formally called the Covenant of Works or the Covenant of Creation) by refusing to obey God. Rather than immediately destroying man, God established another covenant - the Covenant of Grace or the Covenant of Redemption. Technically, this too is a covenant of works. In this covenant God has provided a second Adam - a perfect representative who would act on behalf of all His chosen people. Jesus Christ is the Second Adam who, as both infinite God and sinless human, perfectly kept God's Law for all those whom the Father had given Him. In what is known as His active obedience, Jesus Christ kept the law of God for sinners. By giving to sinners (imputation) His perfect record, He gives to them His righteousness. Not only this, but, in what is known as His passive obedience, He submitted to death on the cross. In His death the demand of physical and spiritual death (the wages of sin) was completely satisfied. As II Corinthians 5:21 says, "For He (God the Father) made Him (God the Son) Who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

In the cross of Christ a marvelous transaction takes place. God lays on Christ all of the sins of His people, to whom He then freely gives His Son's assets - the righteousness of God (Romans 5). See Isaiah 53 for a beautiful account of this.

D. Repentance and Faith Alone Unite us to Christ and Secure Our Salvation

Does this mean that every sinner escapes God's just punishment? No. Only those who become aware that they are sinners in God's sight, repent of their sin, and trust in Christ alone for their salvation, will escape the wrath of God. This awareness of sin which leads to repentance and faith in Christ is the gift of God's grace. Repentance is a change of mind and heart which enables one to recognize the horrible nature of sin, and one's total inability to free oneself from its power. Faith is the other side of the coin. It is a turning to Christ - a casting of oneself upon Him as one's only hope for reconciliation with God. The first two chapters of Ephesians speak of God's electing love - a love which has determined that some of fallen humanity would be lavished by God's grace and given life from spiritual death, through faith in Christ. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves - it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, lest anyone should boast" - Ephesians 2:8-9.

The important question for you is this - Are you aware that you are a sinner in God's sight, justly deserving His wrath and displeasure for your sin? If so, have you then asked God to forgive you of your sin, and are you trusting in Christ alone as your only hope of eternal life? Asked by his jailor what he must do to be saved, Paul responded, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

E. Only Those Who Trust in Christ May Become Members of Christ's Church

If you are trusting in Christ alone for your salvation, you are invited to the membership of Christ the King Presbyterian Church. One must be a Christian in order to belong to the church of Jesus Christ. If you are unsure of your relationship with God, please continue to sit under the ministry of the Word of God and enjoy the fellowship of His people. The pastor is always available to you for consultation.

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRIST THE KING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PART 2: LOVING GOD - *WORSHIP*

Question: What is your chief and highest end?

Answer: My chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy Him forever.

A famous and often quoted part of the Westminster Confession of Faith² is the first question and answer of the Catechism: *What is the chief and highest end of man?* The simple and profound answer is: *Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy Him forever.* This means that man was created by God for the express purpose, in every facet of life, of bringing honor and homage to his Creator. In so doing, he is the recipient of inestimable joy and felicity as he increases in his knowledge of God. Those who were bequeathed the inheritance of the Protestant Reformation launched by Martin Luther in 1517 have consistently believed and taught that all of life ought to be lived as an expression of worship. No longer satisfied with the Medieval concept of sacred/secular, the reformers and we who follow in their footsteps believe that a life surrendered to God is sacred. Work, recreation, family, government and church are all to be expressions of thanksgiving to a benevolent God who has gifted man with salvation through Jesus Christ, His eternal Son. If, then, all life is to be an expression of worship, certainly that day which God has specifically called holy ought to be characterized by worship.

I. WHAT IS WORSHIP?

Worship comes from the old English “weorthescype”; to ascribe worth to a greater. Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer PCA in Manhattan, defines worship as “seeing the worth of God, and giving Him that of which He is worthy”. Jonathan Edwards states that worship is “setting the affections” on God. Our affections are those things which drive and compel us. They are what the Bible refers to as our hearts - that seat of the soul, emotions, thoughts and will which animates us. Man was created for worship - and worship he must.

II. THE NECESSITY OF WORSHIP.

²The doctrinal standard of the Presbyterian Church in America, the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms is perhaps the most comprehensive teaching tool ever produced. Composed of mostly Anglican and Presbyterian divines, the Westminster Assembly was called by the English Parliament in 1643 to produce a faithful biblical standard for the church

Before God created Adam and Eve He created a sanctuary in which they could live and enjoy union and communion with Him. This garden paradise was specially designed by God to be a place where man would be safe, secure and free from care under God's gracious oversight. The garden was like a sanctuary in which man enjoyed the immediate fellowship of his Creator. Genesis 3:8 tells how God walked with his happy couple in the cool of the day. When the Adam and Eve rebelled against God they were expelled from church - excommunicated!

After the fall, as God reestablished communion with man through the Covenant of Redemption, He gave them other special places for union and communion - the ark, altars, the tabernacle and then the temple. These became symbols of the garden - places where God celebrated communion with His people (see I Kings 6:29ff.). God did all of this in part because the creature He created has a basic need to worship Him. Thus God accommodated His special creature's need by providing the place and opportunity for him to have union and communion with Him

Eventually, in the eternal state as depicted by Revelation 21:1-3, God will recreate this fallen world order and dwell with man in perfect communion again in a beautiful garden-like setting. The entire message of the Bible is a story about worship lost, worship regained - the sacred garden lost, the sacred garden restored. Perhaps this is why the garden of Gethsemane was one of Jesus' favorite places to meet with His disciples.

A. Everybody Worships - Everybody!

Because we are made in the image of God we are hard-wired for worship - it is in the genetic make-up of our souls. Therefore, being the religious creatures that we are, everyone worships. But not everyone worships their creator, the one true God. Fallen man quite naturally exchanges the glory of God for anything and everything else (Romans 1:18ff). Only those who have been changed by the Gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ are able to know and worship Him. All others are left to their own devices and are creatively and vigorously worshipping the false gods of religion, work, self, money, material possessions, power autonomy, nature, or _____ (you fill in the blank!).

B. The First Commandment - Idolatry

Since God created man a worshiping being, he cannot escape the urge to worship, or devote himself, to something - whether it be an ideal, material possessions, self or someone else. And since the Bible clearly states that man is a sinful being, (that sin permeating every aspect of his "heart" - soul, mind, will, emotions), it naturally follows that his worship takes the form of idolatry. Since he refuses to worship God, he will worship a substitute more suitable to his liking (cf Romans 1:18 ff.). It is not until God delivers the sinner from bondage to sin and gives him a new heart (cf Ezek. 11:19, John 3) that he is able to know and worship God.

What one worships sets the course of one's life. If you change the object of worship, the life will follow.

C. So What Is Worship?

Worship is facilitated by a covenantal relationship established by God between Himself and fallen creatures. It is the loving romance between the Bridegroom and the Bride. Corporate worship is the scripted communication of our love and devotion to our Redeemer. Therefore, worship is a very high priority which we rightly feel very strongly about. It touches the core of our being and our relationship with God. So how do we know we are worshiping right? It is a great mystery, and unless God had shown us how to worship Him, we would be in the dark.

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1. Corporate Worship is the primary means by which God is glorified by His Covenant People.
 2. Corporate Worship is the primary means by which God blesses His Covenant People.
 3. Corporate Worship is the means by which we respond to God's grace; express our faith, devotion and love to Him; thank Him for His favorable dispensation toward us; express gratitude for past providential care; seek His favorable dispensation for the future; dedicate ourselves to His glory and service.
 4. Corporate Worship is humble submission to God through prayer, song, giving, attention to His Word, confession of sin, confession of faith and spiritual enrichment through His appointed sacraments.
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III. GOD'S WILL MUST DIRECT OUR WORSHIP

A. God Takes His Worship Seriously

Exodus 34:14, in its context, teaches us that God is jealous for His name. This means He will not share the glory of His attributes with anyone or anything else. Leviticus 10:1-7 shows the deadly presumption of any who take God's worship lightly, as Nadab and Abihu are devoured by the fire of the altar for having profaned it. II Samuel 6:6-7 shows how dangerous it is to presume upon God (the ark was to be carried by the Levites with poles, and not to be touched!). And, lest we think that these are merely Old Testament expressions, remember Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Then there is Hebrews 12:28-29 "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, For our God is a consuming fire." Note also the warning associated with not discerning the Lord's body rightly in I Corinthians 11:30.

B. God Has Shown Us What Pleases Him in Worship

We have probably all heard someone say something like; "I don't need to go to church on Sunday to worship God. I can worship him just as well - maybe better -

by going to the park or beach or out on the Gulf or golf course.” Of course, the worship of God is not limited to a certain place - there should be frequent times when we spontaneously break forth in worship whenever God’s handiwork reminds us of His glory and power. But God has specifically set forth principles in His Word which spell out how He desires to be worshiped by His people in local assemblies established for that purpose. These biblical principles for worship have come to be known in the church as ***Regulative Principles***. Every church that takes God’s Word and worship seriously has certain criteria for worship informed, to a greater or lesser extent, by the Word of God. But there remains, especially in this day, a great deal of confusion about what is proper for the corporate worship of God. This is, in part, due to the fact that churches do not all agree on the same regulative principles.

C. The Contemporary Confusion

Much of what passes for biblical worship is being justified by a rather loose understanding of the regulative principle. There are basically three positions:

1. God has given man a creative nature which, in Christ, allows him to determine what is appropriate for worship (and belief!) apart from the constraints of the Word of God.
2. God allows many elements in worship which are not specifically forbidden by the Bible (e.g., drama, special effects, etc.)
3. God allows in worship only those elements which are specified by or, by good and necessary consequence, must be deduced from Scripture.

The teaching concerning the regulative principle which came out of the Protestant Reformation and has been the dominant historical position of nearly all biblically conservative churches is most closely aligned with number three. It was not until the rise of the modern evangelical movement with its unapologetic apprehension of secular principles for evangelism and worship that the modern confusion over worship emerged. Many unbiblical principles, like some popularized by Charles Finney in 1824 and following in his “revivals”, were incorporated into the doctrine and worship of the church. These devices sought to manipulate people into making an emotionally charged decision for Christ. Finney himself taught that he could create the right atmosphere for even the most hardened soul to embrace Christ. The net result for the church is tendency to focus upon saving the lost in worship. This replaced the right emphasis upon believers worshiping God. The church service became a platform for evangelism rather than the means for God to receive worship from His people.

Perhaps the best summary of reformational teaching concerning worship is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith XXI.1:

“But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devises of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.”

Believing that this represents our best hope of worshiping God as He is pleased to be worshiped, what do the Scriptures principally teach on the subject?

IV. THE ELEMENTS OF BIBLICAL WORSHIP

Biblical Worship is given by God to be our ordinary means of grace. This simply means that God has chosen corporate worship to be the vehicle by which He most abundantly blesses His Covenant Community - the church. There is one overarching principle to be considered first, then 12 elements which the Bible presents as integral parts of the corporate worship of God.

A. The Principle of the One in Seven

The Bible records for us, in the creation account, the sanctification of one day in seven as holy to God. Genesis one teaches that on the seventh day, God rested from all His labors. Obviously, God doesn't need to rest. Rather, He intentionally put into the record of creation the high-light of the importance of a sacred rest from work. The “one in seven” principle is commonly referred to as a *creation ordinance*. It comes before the Law is given as a part of the created order of things.

When God gave Moses and the people of Israel the Law of God, He codified in ten commandments the law of the Sabbath rest, again pressing into our minds the importance of this tremendous principle. There is much confusion, if not a little ignorance and rebellion, being exhibited by many who associate themselves with the church today. Many believe that these were simply Old Testament stipulations - having no legal bearing upon the church of the New Testament. Others believe that Jesus *is* the fulfillment of the Sabbath, having become our Sabbath rest, and that there is no longer a requirement to keep the Sabbath principle.

Genesis 2:1-3

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Still others hold that the Lord's Day has replaced the Sabbath and its requirements, but that the day ought to be set aside for rest and worship. The Puritans held a very austere view of the Lord's Day, often requiring only worship, devotions, Scripture memorization and allowing for only works of necessity to be accomplished on that day. The sanctification of the Lord's Day will be debated by members of Christ's church until He returns. ***But at the very least, we should set this day aside from our regular avocations and recognize corporate worship as our supreme privilege and responsibility.***

B. Twelve Elements of Biblical Worship

Below are listed twelve distinct elements of Biblical Worship which can be found in various passages of Scripture dealing with the worship of the early apostolic church.

1. Corporate Prayer - Acts 2:42; I Tim. 2:1; I Cor. 14:16
2. Scripture Readings - I Tim. 4:13; I Thes. 5:27; II Thes. 3:14; Col. 4:15, 16; II Peter 3:15, 16
3. Preaching - I Tim. 4:13; Luke 4:20; II Tim. 3:15-17; 4:2
4. Table Fellowship - Acts 2:42; 20:7
5. Congregational Singing - Eph. 5:19; Col 3:15; I Cor. 14:15, 26; I Tim. 3:16; Rev. 5:9-13
6. Diaconal Service - II Cor. 9:11-15; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:16; Acts 6:1-6; Rom. 12:8, 13
7. Confession of Faith - I Tim 6:12; I Pet. 3:21; Heb. 13:15
8. Reception of God's Blessing (Benediction) - II Cor. 13:14; Luke 24:50
9. Sacraments - Baptism (Matt. 28:18-20) and Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11) [apparently the Lord's Supper was celebrated at every worship service]
10. Confession of Sin - I Pet. 3:21
11. Thanksgiving - I Cor. 11:24
12. Fellowship - Heb. 10:25; Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 16:20; I Thes. 5:26; I Pet. 5:14

V. THE ORDER OF OUR WORSHIP SERVICES

If you look closely at our bulletin, you will see that there is an order to our worship services - a “Gospel logic” (cf Isaiah 6). The service is designed to reflect a biblical pattern for how we are to approach God as His Covenant People. Basically, there are four cycles in our worship service. They are as follows:

A. *A Cycle of Praise* - entering the presence of God

1. The Call to Worship. The call to worship, usually a psalm set to a responsive reading, is designed to gather God’s people together - in heart and mind - for the purpose of worshipping God.
2. The Invocation/prayer of adoration. It is our invitation to God and humble request that our worship might be empowered by God, purified by Christ and pleasing in His sight.
3. The Hymn of Worship. This hymn is typically one which exalts the Triune God as Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of life. It often combines elements of praise with prayers of invocation. God’s character and attributes are celebrated.

B. *A Cycle of Confession* - recognizing our unworthiness of His grace and favor

1. A Corporate Prayer of Confession of sin. As we consider the character and attributes of God, one stands out clearly - His holiness. Whenever sinful man comes into the presence of a holy God there is the danger of personal, spiritual disintegration, such as Isaiah experienced in Isaiah 6. Our only hope is in God’s grace to forgive us of our sins, and we must seek from Him this blessing in prayer.
2. The Assurance of Pardon. The pastor relieves the weary soul of the sinner by reading the promise of the Gospel from any number of passages dealing with God’s readiness to forgive all who present themselves to Him through the merit of Christ.
3. Confession of Faith. Throughout the ages the church has used a variety of confessions designed to promote purity of doctrine and belief. Through the right use of these confessions, we preach truth to our own hearts, our friends and neighbors in worship, and even to the lost who might be in attendance. Also, God is pleased to hear His truth from the lips of His people - especially when we are enthusiastically giving thought to the words we say!

C. ***A Cycle of Employing the Means of Grace*** - Word, Sacrament and Prayer

1. The Preaching of the Word of God. More than through any other means, God has promised to speak to His people through the formal exposition of His Word by men He has set apart and gifted for that purpose. The sermon is God's primary means of getting the "whole counsel of God" into the mind, heart and soul of His Covenant People.

2. The Sacraments. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are intended to be visible reinforcements to God's Word in the sermon. God graciously gives us not only a book with words, but one with pictures as well. The sacraments visibly point to Christ - what He has done and what He has promised to do for His people.

3. Congregational Prayer. On behalf of God's people, the pastor presents, in an organized and orderly manner, the prayers and petitions of God's people, while the people participate in praying with the pastor and add their "amen" to the prayer.

D. ***A Cycle of Thanksgiving and Blessing*** - God's Blessings Acknowledged by His People and Pronounced Upon His People

1. The Offering. Having received God's great blessing, the congregation is given the opportunity to worship Him through the faithful and sacrificial giving of the first fruits of their labors.

2. The Hymn of Response. The closing hymn is selected to give God's people the ability to thank God for His many blessings, to rededicate their lives to His service, and consecrate their entire being toward His glory.

3. The Benediction. The pastor, on behalf of God, pronounces the good words - the benediction of God - upon the people. This benediction is intended by God to send His church out into the world with the assurance of His covenant promises, protection and providential care.

VI. THE GOAL OF OUR WORSHIP SERVICES

The goal of our worship services is to enter into the very presence of God at His gracious invitation, acknowledge Him for who He really is, acknowledge our need for His grace and blessings, seek His face for our pardon, sing His praise for His mighty works, listen to Him speak through His Word, partake of the sacraments, give Him our fear and awe, love and devotion - in short, to reclaim that union and communion with God which was lost by Adam in the garden.

VII. How Do I Know When I Have Worshiped God?

- A. When you have obeyed the Scriptural requirements for worship
- ◆ Vocalized your praise to Him
 - ◆ Confessed your sin to Him
 - ◆ Listened to Him speak by His Word
- B. When you have given God the glory due His name
- ◆ Have worshiped Him, not self, preacher, accompanist, building or the excitement of the crowd
 - ◆ Have not sought what worship did for you
 - ◆ Have sought rather what worship meant to God
- C. When your affections have been redirected toward God
- ◆ The things of this world grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.
 - ◆ You can sing these words and really mean them:

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine inheritance, now and always:
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure Thou art.⁴

⁴From the hymn Be Thou My Vision; ancient Irish poem, ca. 8th century; trans. By Mary E. Byrne, 1905 and versified by Eleanor H. Hull, 1912. Traditional Irish melody, arr. by David Evans, 1927.

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PART 3: LOVING OTHERS - *OUTREACH*

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42, 46-47

I. LOVING YOUR NEIGHBORS

While we believe that worship is primarily designed by God to be the means by which He communicates grace to His church, and that it also serves as a vehicle for the church to experience union and communion with her King and Head, nevertheless, worship does also produce the by-product (intentionally God-ordained) of evangelism. Therefore, it is incumbent upon every worshiper to seek out and invite to church those who are a part of one's sphere of influence. There are several reasons why this is a primary means of outreach.

1. God's Word is the primary means by which, accompanied by the Holy Spirit's life giving influence, men, women and children are gathered in from the world. The preaching of that Word is powerful in convicting sinners of their need for Christ.
2. Though the worship service is primarily for the believer, there is no better witness for the unbeliever than to see God's family enjoying union and communion with their heavenly Father. Observing authentic worship makes quite an impression upon folks (this is why we believe it is so important for children to be a part of the worship service).
3. The liturgy of the service impresses the lost with a sense of the loftiness and holiness of God, thereby creating a vacuum in the soul which can only be filled by Christ.

However, this benefit is only made available to those who avail themselves to the invitation to visit church on Sunday. Truthfully, very few non-Christians are inclined to go to churches where the whole counsel of God is being preached faithfully Sunday after Sunday (though many do attend churches where their ears are being tickled by a self-help, moralistic gospel). Therefore, the church will only be able to have a dramatic impact upon the lost through other God-ordained means of outreach.

A. The Few, the Bold, the Marines

Have you ever been cornered by the chairman of the outreach committee and forcibly guilted into serving the church by going out and canvassing neighborhoods in the hopes of sharing the gospel? If so, you probably have been suffering from a spiritual self-esteem problem. Outwardly you may keep up the good front for a while, but inwardly you would rather go to the dentist than to knock on a perfect stranger's door. If this describes you then listen closely:

At CKPCA you will never, ever be called upon to knock on the door of a perfect stranger in order to share your faith

This alone ought to be reason enough for you to want to join this church. Believe it or not, there is a very good theological reason for this position. The Bible nowhere tells anyone in the church to exercise a gift that one does not possess. The Scriptures plainly teach that there are many gifts, not all of which are given to everyone universally. Everyone is called upon by God to exercise their God-given gifts in ministry. But not everyone is called upon to be an evangelist. Only those who are given the gift of evangelism are called to do the work of an evangelist. Hear what the Scriptures say in Ephesians 4:11-16:

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, **some evangelists**, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head-- Christ-- from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

According to this passage Jesus Christ, as King and Head of the church, dispenses gifts to individual members of His church as He sees fit. We can't expect to receive every gift, and the church should never call upon its members to use gifts that are not given to them. You may possess the gift of evangelism. If so, you must use that gift within the context of the body of Christ. And you will be given opportunity to use that gift at Christ the King PCA. For the rest of us, though, don't think for a moment that this truth lets you off the hook!

B. What? Me? A Martyr?

The very last words of Christ to His fledgling church, just before He ascended into heaven to take His place at the right hand of the Father, are recorded in Acts 1:8:

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

These words, taken together with the great commission of Matthew 28:18-20, constitute the church's marching orders. Jesus has left us here in order to accomplish a tremendous task. He has promised us that this task will be accomplished. He has gifted His church to that end. What is this task? To bear witness to the truth. Whom has He chosen to accomplish this task? All who claim Christ as Lord and church as home. How, then, has Jesus Christ primarily chosen to accomplish this task? The answer lies in the word "witness".

In a court of law, a witness is someone who is able to testify to an event of some sort - usually a crime. A witness for Christ is someone who has been brought into a personal relationship with Him, knows Him intimately, and can give accurate information about Him to others. In this sense, a witness is able to "give a defense for the hope that is in you, with gentleness and respect". These opportunities come when our neighbors become intrigued by our values and the way we live our lives - as those who have hope. When they ask us about our lives, or when they seek us for advice, it is because of our witness. We then continue by simply telling them why our values are different from the world's. Often this kind of witness leads to what might be called, "soft evangelism". We might be given the opportunity to share the gospel - having "earned the right" through a trusting, personal relationship with someone.

In the early church many were called upon to bear testimony to Jesus Christ in a rather hostile environment. As Christians were arrested for their faith - especially under wicked Roman rulers such as Nero and Domician - they were able to stand for Jesus Christ and, if need be, to die for Him. Paul was executed under Nero, as was Peter. Gradually the Greek word for witness (marturion) became interchangeable with the idea of giving testimony through death to Christ. So many paid the ultimate price for their testimony that they became known as martyrs - the very word from which we get "witness". When Jesus said "you shall be my witnesses", He knew very well that this would often involve pain, suffering and even death. Did Jesus not consistently tell His follows about the sufferings and persecutions they would have to endure for His name's sake?

So how does this all relate to us in our twentieth century, relatively safe and comfortable setting? We are not called upon to give our lives as a testimony to Christ are we? Are we? As was said before, we are not to think that we are off the hook just because we are not gifted evangelists. There is a sense in which evangelism is almost an easier calling than that of the simple, ordinary witness. Consider the words of Christ in Luke 9:23-24:

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."

At the very core of the message of the gospel is this singular truth - in order for anyone to live to God, he must die to self. The grace that God gives in redeeming any person from bondage to sin and self is the ability to die to sin and self. Here is where the rubber meets the road in the life of the Christian. As witnesses of Jesus Christ, we are to die every day - die to self, in order that we might live to Christ. The life of the Christian is a life lived in unconditional surrender to Christ. In Christ, our values, priorities, desires, attitudes and actions are turned upside down. Though we do not pretend to live the perfectly surrendered life, nevertheless we do live in such a way as to run head on with the world. How we handle our money, how we raise our children, how we entertain ourselves and others, how we love one another and those around us - all of these give testimony to our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Essentially, witnessing is not so much an activity as it is a way of life.

Our desire at Christ the King Presbyterian Church is to equip men, women and children with the necessary skills, tools and mindset as to be able to live out the implications of the gospel of God's grace in a fallen world. A life transformed by grace through faith in Christ is God's most dangerous weapon in the struggle for the souls of lost people.

C. Reaching Out Through Ministry

There are at least four ways the local church can, collectively, reach out into the community.

1. **Mercy Ministry.** The church has, historically, been at the forefront of providing aid and assistance to communities through loving service. Nearly all of our older hospitals, children's homes and soup kitchen missions were begun by churches devoted to reaching the lost through ministry. God has given us unique opportunities to be involved in service ministries in greater St. Petersburg. Examples of these ministries include:

crisis pregnancy centers and homeless shelters

2. **Fine Arts.** Music, art, crafts and the like are often great media for bringing people together. The church needs to reclaim its role in promoting art and music which glorifies God and edifies people.
3. **Evangelistic programs.** From time to time CKPCA will sponsor special programs geared toward the lost or those who are not necessarily comfortable with showing up on Sunday morning. These will typically be presentations which entertain and give a clear gospel message, or help parents to raise children, or give hope to those who are struggling with the various pressures of life.
4. **Fellowship Activities.** More will be said about these later, but for now keep in mind that a great way to break the ice with non-believers is through rather innocuous church sponsored activities intended to do nothing more than build bridges with those who wouldn't be caught dead in a worship service.

Our hope is that Christ the King will use every creative means of God's appointment to weave our ministry into the hearts and minds of people throughout Seminole and greater St. Petersburg. Such a ministry will take time to build and will require concerted commitment by our members, but by God's grace it would produce much fruit. But even having done all this, there is much more to do. We are not only commanded to take care of Jerusalem and Judea, but to go to the farthest reaches of the world.

II. LOVING BEYOND YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

A very important distinctive of the Presbyterian Church in America is its commitment to missions. In fact, this commitment is written right into our denominational motto:

*True to the Scriptures, the Reformed Faith, and
Obedient to the Great Commission*

Since the inception of the PCA in 1973, we have grown from just under a hundred churches to nearly two thousand. And though our membership of nearly 335,000 qualifies us to be considered a small denomination, nevertheless the PCA is making a huge impact upon the world through its aggressive and massive missions force. By God's grace we are planting hundreds of new churches in North America and currently have over 600 full time long term foreign missionaries in every continent in the world. This literally sets the standard among

denominations in missionary activity. The following is a breakdown of the small part Christ the King Presbyterian Church plays in this mission:

- A. **Mission to North America.** As a congregation of the PCA, we have a vital part in the extension of the kingdom of God. This is partly so because we started as a mission ourselves, but also in the fact that, as we continue to grow, we will help to begin other mission churches in Pinellas County.
- B. **Mission to the World.** Even now we are dedicating a generous percentage of our total operating budget toward missions giving. Our focus and that of our missions committee specifically, is to support efforts to plant churches, for we believe these churches are the primary means by which God calls and develops His elect.
- C. **Reformed University Ministry.** We also support this ministry which operates on college campuses around the U.S. The Jeff Lees at University of South Florida in Tampa, FL minister to young people at this important time in their lives.

Our overall plan for supporting missions works in North America and around the world takes into consideration the call of Christ in the Great Commission to begin in Jerusalem, Samaria and to the farthest reaches of the world. Thus, we will begin our efforts at home here in Pinellas County and work out from there to the state, North American and world-wide theaters of ministry.

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRIST THE KING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PART 4: LOVING ONE ANOTHER - *RELATIONSHIPS*

We are a relational lot. Throughout the centuries history bears out this singular truth - no man is an island. Though there is no basis in humanistic thought for an explanation, sociologists have nevertheless been very busy trying to unravel the mysteries of societies. Evolutionary theories on origins can only point out the similarities between behaviors of the animal kingdom and humanity. This is a grievous task given to the sons of men! Of course, Christians have known for ages the basis for our need for fellowship and relationships. It is a need that can only be explained biblically.

I. DEVELOPING HEALTHY CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS - A BIBLICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

A. The Imago Dei

Man was created in the image of God. There are several things that stand out about this truth. The first has to do with the nature of God; the second with the nature of man. The Biblical account of our creation reveals a great deal to us about the nature of God. The wording in the Hebrew text alludes to the complex nature of the one true God. “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image ... *Our* likeness ...” is not just an editorial plural. In the very beginning of the record of God’s Word we find the truth that though God is one God, nevertheless this one God exists in a fellowship of divine Persons. The testimony of the Scriptures bears witness to this mysterious truth consistently throughout its sacred pages - both in the Old Testament and especially in the New, where a more fully developed doctrine of the Trinity of God becomes clear.

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

The truth is that God - our Creator - is a highly relational Being. This theology also has important ramifications for anthropology. That we are created in the image of God means that there are certain similarities between God and man - what theologians refer to as “communicable attributes”. One of these attributes has to do with the fact that humans are highly relational. In fact, we are so relational that God said it was not good for the man to live alone. The most fundamental need man has is for significant relationships. This is why any anthropology which fails to take into account that man is created in God’s image is doomed as a theory. The primary relational need man has is not horizontal, but vertical. Apart from being properly related to God, man is relegated to the animal-like existence of trying to live within the confines of seeking ultimate satisfaction through the self-interested pursuits of horizontal

relationships. Apart from a Biblical anthropology man's best hope is for a fellowship of the *Cheers* variety. This explains the prevalence of short term promiscuous relationships. Though hard-wired by God for life long unions with a partner created by God to be the perfect compliment, without a personal relationship with the Creator, man seeks to fill that void in interpersonal relationships - a tragic mistake fraught with deep disappointments, heartache and untold consequences for society.

B. Turning the Heart Toward Home

Immediately after creating Adam and having placed him in his garden/home/sanctuary, God did something quite interesting - He had Adam classify all the vast varieties of species and phylum of the animal and plant kingdoms. We believe there were several reasons for this. First, God had created man with the incredible capacity for order and organization, and this exercise gave Adam the ability to use this gift. Second, Adam became aware of his responsibility as lord over the created order as he exercised his God-given dominion over the earth. Third, and perhaps most important, God showed Adam the essentially incomplete nature of his own existence and as a lone human among the pairs of animals he saw all around him.

So Adam gave names to all the cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. Genesis 2:20

Having created Adam in His image and having stated that it was not good for Adam to be alone, God very carefully set Adam up to be completely smitten by His extraordinary provision for his need - Eve. The two became one flesh and the first human family was created as designed by an all wise God. It is an interesting point that when the Bible refers to humanity, it often uses the word man to denote both male and female members together "Thus God created man in His own image . . . male and female He created them."

God has a very clear definition and purpose for the family. Though the world seems bent on redefining the family and the roles of its members, and though the family as an institution is under attack from many quarters, nevertheless, God puts a premium upon His most basic institution in society. For this purpose, Christ the King Presbyterian Church is intentionally seeking to be a place where God's priorities for the family are modeled. In an age when children are increasingly segregated from family life, we desire to create an environment which does not unnecessarily remove children from families in worship and other youth related activities. Our desire is to provide instruction and activities which keep children and their parents together as much as possible. Worship, therefore, is a time for families to remain intact. We have no plans to implement a so called "children's church". Our understanding of the Scriptures leads us to believe that God has historically worked through the context of covenant communities having nuclear families intact. In fact, we believe it is primarily through the witness of covenant families that God unleashes His blessings upon the world in reaching the lost and creating stable societies. Which brings us to the family of God.

C. The Community of Faith

Pastor and theologian Eugene H. Peterson says in his book *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, “No Christian is an only child”. St Cyprian, 1700 years ago, said “No one has God as his Father who does not have the church as his mother”. The point is that God has called the church (those who had the faith of Abraham in the Old Testament and those who exercise that same faith in the New) into being to serve as the ordinary means by which His people experience union and communion with Him through His Son. It is in the context of the church, as a worshiping community, that God has been primarily pleased to bless His people and express His will in a fallen world. And God has always placed a very high premium upon His people formally associating with His church. This is demonstrated in both the life of Israel and in the life of the New Testament Church.

II. WHY MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH?

In our highly individualistic, self-deterministic and antiauthoritarian American way of thinking, (epitomized by the Enlightenment and what has been referred to as the “Age of Reason”), formal membership in organizations which require mutual accountability and submission to authority is generally held in disdain. This mentality may explain why, in recent years, denominational affiliations have become less important to people and the trend becomes increasingly prevalent for people to hop from church to church seeking the latest and greatest programs, music, entertainment (of which preaching either becomes the main act or is downplayed as irrelevant) or opportunities for self-help. All such thinking is diametrically opposed to God’s purposes for the church as a covenant community established for the purpose of Worship, Outreach, Relationships and Discipleship.

A. The Body of Christ and its organization

The church can be seen as both an organism and an organization. It is a living organism because, as the body of Christ, it is the vital fellowship of those for whom Christ died and who are collectively and individually inhabited by the Holy Spirit of God (cf. I Cor. 3:16-17; 12:12-13). The church is a supernatural creation, built upon the life-giving message of the Gospel; in the church the Gospel is embodied, and through the church the Gospel is displayed and proclaimed. But the church is also an organization. It has members, structure, officers, government and authority (cf I Tim. 3:1ff.). The church is more than an organization, but it is not less. The organization exists to incarnate the organism. If the church is seen only as an institution the temptation will be toward seeing the church as an end in itself, with membership providing nothing more than temporal rights and privileges to the privileged few. Which brings us to membership.

B. Visible and Invisible

It is important to see another balance with respect to the church. Who are its members? Great care needs to be taken in making sure that church membership does not necessarily mean membership in the church. In other words, membership in a local church is not absolutely necessary to salvation, nor is it a guarantee of salvation. Our church fathers made the important distinction between the visible church and the invisible church. The basis for this is found in Paul's argument concerning the nature of Israel as both a nation and the church in Romans 9. Paul plainly says that not all the children of Abraham (those born in the flesh into Israel) are necessarily of the faith of Abraham (those who represent the faith of the true Israel).

This is an important distinction. Since the church is the body of Christ, only those who belong to Christ by faith are eligible to receive its signs and seals in membership. Only those who were born into or formally identified with Israel through conversion or slavery were eligible to receive the sign of circumcision. But many received the signs without having converted hearts. So also, no matter how diligent the elders are, there will be some who gain access into the visible church who do not have converted hearts.

The visible church is all who have made a public profession of faith in Christ having, been baptized, including infants and children.⁵ This is the church you see through its membership. Not everyone in the visible church is, in fact, a Christian. On the other hand, within the visible membership of the church exists the true church - the invisible church. Further, there may be the occasional soul who, though not in a formal relationship with the visible church, nevertheless has been converted and is trusting in Christ alone for salvation.

So why is it important to belong to the visible church if it is not absolutely necessary for entrance into the invisible church? The answer lies in God's ordinary means of grace. Perhaps a helpful way of looking at church membership is to compare it to marriage. As the bride of Christ, we enter into a formal covenantal relationship with Him based upon promises and symbols. In much the same way, a bride is united with her husband through the covenant of marriage. Promises are made, symbols are exchanged, and the two become one flesh. This union is to be permanent and based upon the will to persevere in love and care for one another. So, too, the new believer enters into a covenantal relationship with Christ - the Husband. Christ keeps covenant with His bride, and He gives His bride symbols of His love - baptism and Holy Communion. While it is possible to live with a person without the benefit of the marriage covenant, to do so leaves one living a wrong life (it used to be called living in sin). Do Christians really want to run the risk of living in sin by not uniting formally, in a covenantal union, with their one true Husband? Many seem not to care. But failure to enter into a formal

⁵ The Presbyterian church distinguishes between two kinds of memberships. Communicant membership are all who are members of the church and have been admitted to the Lord's Table. The children of believers who have been baptized are considered non-communicant members of the church.

relationship with a local church short circuits a very important part of the Christian life - that of the God-ordained privileges and responsibilities of church membership.

III. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP - PRIVILEGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The church is a community - a family of sorts - established by God and including all who have been adopted by God's grace through faith in Christ. There is a universal - or "catholic" church which includes all who ever have made a public profession of faith in Christ throughout the world and including every age in history. There is also the particular church which is the local expression of the church in any given geographical area at a certain time in history. Ordinarily, to be a member of the universal church, one must also be a member of a particular church. The local church is where we receive the benefits of membership, the preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments, the fellowship of the body, oversight and discipline under God's appointed leadership, etc. It is the local church where we experience the privileges of being in the body of Christ and fulfill our responsibilities as members of the body of Christ.

A. The Benefits and Privileges of Church Membership

To be a member of a church is to make a public promise to live according to biblical teachings and to support the mission and ministry of the church. In the Bible, this is called a *covenant*. Such covenants are the basis for all societies, such as in the case of marriage. There are many benefits given to anyone who attends a vibrant, vital local church. But very important benefits are reserved only to those who enter into a formal relationship with the local church.

1. Members have the benefit of *accountability* to the pastors and elders, the spiritual leaders of the congregation. Hebrews 13:17 teaches us to "obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls". This command presupposes that you are in a covenantal relationship with certain leaders. Those who excuse themselves from membership claiming that they are "accountable only to God" show a contempt for God's revealed will and place themselves in a spiritually vulnerable position.
2. Members have the benefit of church *authority* to shape the ministry of the local church. It is only the members who have the privilege of voting in congregational meetings and election of church officers. Only members will be eligible to hold positions of leadership in the church.
3. Ordinarily, only members may participate in the *sacramental life* of the church. One must be a member to receive the benefit of communion, or to be able to have one's child baptized into the covenant fellowship of the church.

B. The Benefits of Membership and Accountability

Presbyterianism is a form of government which offers two very important levels of relational oversight. One is a *general* oversight and the other is a *judicial* oversight. In Presbyterian churches, each local church and each minister is held accountable to the church as a whole — while preserving local autonomy on things such as style and philosophy of ministry. In the same way each church member has a relationship of accountability to the church.

1. ***Pastoral Oversight.*** As Christians, we are to encourage one another constantly to follow Christ. Not only do members have the responsibility to hold one another accountable in love, but pastors and elders have the authority to inquire into the lives of the members of the church in order to encourage, disciple, and admonish.
2. ***Diaconal Oversight.*** Those who are a part of the local church fall under the oversight of the deacons of the church as well. This means that, should any member of the church fall upon hard times, the deacons will intervene and if necessary, act as the agents of benevolence. This biblical oversight is important, for God has consistently commanded His church (Old Testament as well as New) to make sure that those with legitimate financial and material needs are to be served in love by offering assistance to meet those needs.
3. ***Judicial Oversight.*** While ministers and elders cannot bind the conscience of believers beyond the teachings of Scripture, they do have genuine authority to lead the people according to biblical standards. For example, they cannot say, “You must attend the mid-week Bible Study”, but they can say you must attend worship regularly or admonish a member to break off an adulterous relationship. If necessary they can even begin a process of church discipline which, if unheeded, could escalate to suspension from the Lord’s Table and even removal from the membership of the church (excommunication). Whenever such church discipline is necessary, there are three goals in view: First, God’s glory must be maintained. Second, the purity of the church must be maintained. Third, the offender is sought to be reclaimed and brought back into a right relationship with Christ and His church (cf. I Corinthians 5:1-13; II Corinthians 2:5-11; II Thessalonians 3:6, 14-14; Titus 1:10-14; 3:9-110).

Of course, anyone who attends a local church on a regular basis enters into all kinds of personal relationships with individuals in that church. As was said before, there are many benefits of simply attending a church. And our desire is to promote many healthy, Godly interpersonal relationships within the broad scope of the ministry of Christ the King PCA. For that reason, we are regularly scheduling fellowship events — special times where people within the fellowship and without can spend quality time in enjoying one another. But we also want to encourage our regular attenders to join our church so that they might participate more fully in the ministry and enjoy all the privileges and responsibilities of membership.

Though we encourage all regular attenders to consider formally uniting with the church, we do not want to put undue pressure upon anyone to join. This is a very important decision which must be arrived at carefully and prayerfully. It is not something to rush into. Again, committing to a church through membership involves certain formal promises — a covenant. One must know what to expect before making such a decision. The next section spells out the five expectations for church membership in the Presbyterian Church in America.

IV. MEMBERSHIP COMMITMENTS

According to the *Book of Church Order* of the Presbyterian Church in America, communing members must give their assent to the following five membership vows. The first two questions deal with one's view of oneself and Jesus Christ, the next three deal with one's willingness to be a conscientious witness for Christ as a member of the church.

4. ***Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure and without hope except through His sovereign mercy?***
 - ◆ How we view ourselves will determine how we will see Jesus Christ and His church. Only those who know that they are sinners and without hope will seek the grace of God in Christ.
 - ◆ Not only do we agree that we are sinners, but we also agree that the natural consequence of our sin is eternal separation from a holy God who must exact justice.

5. ***Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the gospel?***
 - ◆ This question presupposes the orthodox, Christian belief in the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Atonement.
 - ◆ A key word is the word *alone*. It is vitally important to understand that our justification by God comes by way of faith in Christ ***plus nothing***. It has been said that the only thing we can contribute to our salvation is the sin from which we need to be saved.
 - ◆ Another key word is *resting*. In this is conveyed the idea that we have completely given up on any pretense that we can do something to add to that which God has already done in His Son. We repent not only of our sin, but of our supposed righteousness — our attempts to earn God's favor through good works. Rather than fret over your standing with God based upon your "performance", you are simply resting in what Jesus Christ has done for you. By affirming this vow, you are publicly confessing that you are trusting only in Jesus Christ — in His sacrificial death on the cross and His glorious resurrection from the dead — for

your acceptance by God the Father.

6. ***Do you resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the follower of Christ?***

- ◆ Here is where we covenant together to live according to the Word of the Covenant. We are confessing that it is our desire to do so and to make progress in doing so. If you are not sure that you are ready to be held accountable to the teaching of Scripture, or if there are certain areas where you know you disagree with Scripture, then it would be wise to wait and think through these issues before taking this vow.
- ◆ The phrase “in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit” implies that you are using the means of grace and practicing basic spiritual disciplines in order to grow spiritually.
- ◆ This does not mean that you are not struggling with sin in your life. We all struggle with sin. It does mean, however, that you are seeking to live in such a way as to demonstrate a sincere desire to glorify and enjoy God.

7. ***Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?***

- ◆ This includes assent to the church’s general vision and philosophy of ministry, including our commitment to the priority and centrality of worship, prayer, the ministry of the Word, and the fellowship of the body.
- ◆ This promise also includes the understanding that CKPCA is a presbyterian church and that, while you may not hold to particular presbyterian views yourself, you are knowingly joining a church which does hold to particular views which are distinctly presbyterian and reformed.
- ◆ And you are promising to be responsible to support the church with your time and money, being a good steward of that with which God has entrusted to you. You will be called upon to use your gifts in ministry, and agree to make the corporate worship of God an important priority in your life and that of your family.

8. ***Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church, promising to promote its purity and peace?***

- ◆ In this vow, you are agreeing to submit to the church elders in the Lord, and to the regional and national governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church in America.
- ◆ *It is vitally important that you understand the ramifications of this promise.* In the event that you disagree with the elders of the church, you are responsible to come to the elders with your disagreement in order to discuss it sensibly and biblically. Every member has freedom to appeal to the elders for the purpose of clarifying the teachings of the church. Also, should you ever come under the formal discipline of the church, *in making this vow, you are promising that you will not take the*

church into a civil court for satisfaction. Every member has recourse to spiritual oversight by appealing: first, the local session; second, the regional court of the presbytery; and finally, the General Assembly on a national level.

- ◆ Finally, you are committing yourself to a balanced pursuit of purity and peace, of truth and love. This means that you will always seek to deal with conflict in biblical ways — in honest, loving confrontation — and that unresolved problems will be brought to the elders of the church. You are promising to avoid gossip, slander, and every word and action which is not motivated by love to your Heavenly Father and your neighbor.

One final thought before we go on to the next section: Maintaining the purity and the peace of the church must take into account the need to be gracious and benevolent toward our brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as non-believers. The Scriptures are our only infallible rule of faith, practice and life. Therefore, we need to be very careful not to go beyond what the Scriptures require of us in our desire to establish normative criteria for orthodoxy and faithful living. Great harm has been done to the witness of the church by those who seem more interested in focusing upon how a person dresses or what he eats and drinks than whether a person is truly growing in grace and the knowledge of God. God has given certain parameters for our lives which are revealed in the Scriptures. It is difficult enough for mature believers, not to mention new converts, to live up to these without adding other requirements not specified by God's Word. Many non-Christians are put off by the legalistic mentality of the church. Jesus was not a legalist and pronounced woes upon the legalists of His day. On the other hand, sinners were drawn to Him and He often ate and drank with the worst of them. We need to resist the temptation to set up standards, no matter how well intentioned and socially sanctioned they might be, which are not to be found in Scripture.

Again, we want to reiterate the point that we intend to put no undue pressure upon anyone to join CKPCA. Just as it is important to know well a the person before taking wedding vows, so also one must consider very carefully what the church stands for, teaches and believes before taking vows of membership. The purpose of this course of instruction is to enable you to make an informed decision with respect to church membership. So far we have covered the basic areas of ministry related to *worship, outreach* and *relationships*. Now we move on to another very important area of ministry within the church - *discipleship*. For many, the theology of the church will be the most determinative factor in making a decision about membership. Let it be understood that membership in Christ the King PCA does not require full subscription to every doctrine and teaching of the church. This will be dealt with thoroughly in the next section, to which we now turn our attention.

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRIST THE KING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PART 5: LOVING BIBLICAL TRUTH - DISCIPLESHIP

I. THE BIBLE - OUR ONLY INFALLIBLE RULE OF FAITH AND PRACTICE

One thing should be abundantly clear to you by now if you have been worshipping with us for any time - we are a people of the Book. We simply love the Bible! In order to understand anything about Christ the King Presbyterian Church you must understand what we believe concerning the Word of God. In this section we are going to take a journey through Biblical theology as it is presented in our historic creed - the Westminster Confession of Faith. This will be only an elementary survey. This creed, or confession as it is called, was born of the teachings of the Protestant Reformation of 1517 from such men as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, and many other and godly scholars and pastors.

With respect to all theology (the study of God) we have to begin with what can be known about God from the sources in which He has revealed Himself. Therefore, the Confession opens:

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable, yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary to salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord... to reveal Himself, and to declare His will to the church . . . and, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which makes the Holy Scripture to be most necessary. -WCF I,1

There is a simple logic to beginning the Confession with a section on the Scriptures. We simply cannot know God apart from His self-revelation. He has revealed Himself in two books. The first is the book of nature. God has left His signature upon every molecule in the universe. Not only do the heavens declare the glory of God, but every single subatomic element in it does so too. But alas, since we are fallen creatures, dramatically hampered by our rebellion and sin, we cannot read this book correctly, and naturally choose to worship the creation rather than the God who created it (cf Romans 1:18ff). Therefore, in order to reveal His Person and His will to those whom He wills to save, He gave His church another book: His revelation through salvation history, which history we have accurately and perfectly recorded in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. This Bible, accompanied by the divine illumination of the Holy Spirit, is the alone means for us to know God savingly.

Because the Bible is God's inspired and infallible Word, it is alone our source of knowledge concerning who God is, who we are, and what God requires of us. It is

our only infallible rule of faith and practice. It is our final authority in all questions relating to our lives, the church, science, the arts and humanities, and our ability to evaluate good from evil and holy from profane. Having established our source for the knowledge of God, we quite naturally move on to God and what He has revealed to us about Himself.

But before we do, here are two final thoughts (hermeneutical principles) on the Bible from the WCF: First, everything we need to know concerning all things necessary for God's own glory, man's salvation, faith and life is contained in the whole counsel of God - the Bible, being either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence able to be deduced from Scripture. Second, our only infallible rule of interpreting Scripture - in cases where one passage may not seem clear - is to allow the Scripture to interpret itself in other passages which are more clear. Scripture is its own infallible interpreter.

II. GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF THE HOLY TRINITY

There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable 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 them that diligently seek Him; and withal most just, and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. - WCF II, 1.

We'll leave you to work through most of that on your own, only commenting that every one of these attributes have been drawn directly from Scripture and reveal a Being who is simply greater than our ability to comprehend. Section II of this chapter speaks of God's self-existence and self-love. This means that, as the creator, He is completely independent of the creation - not needing it nor finding any expression of self-fulfillment through it. Section III of this chapter speaks of God as a Trinity of Persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is one God who eternally exists in three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance and equal in power and glory. Though there are many passages which reveal God as a Trinity, perhaps the best way to get at it is through reflection on the nature and the outworking of salvation (cf. II Cor. 13:14). The love of the Father is the eternal wellspring of our salvation, the grace of the Son in His self-giving accomplishes our salvation, and this salvation is applied to the elect through the communing agency of the Holy Spirit in regeneration (new birth) and calling (the outward and inward irresistible call of the Gospel).

III. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established - WCF III,1

Those churches which identify themselves within the Reformed community (meaning they still believe and practice the historic doctrinal standards of the Reformation), such as Presbyterian and continental Reformed churches, have always had one thing in common - the belief that everything begins and ends with God. The word most commonly used for describing God, the most fundamental attribute given in Scripture, is **sovereignty**. Simply put, this means that every single thing in all of God's creation happens either by God's direct or indirect involvement in the process. As R. C. Sproul says, there are no random molecules in the universe. God has sovereignly ordained every event of history to accomplish His holy will. He has not done so by foreseeing the event and then establishing it. He has ordained it to happen.

This doctrine has important ramifications for us with respect to our salvation. Many Christians are willing to acknowledge God's sovereignty. However, there is one area of life in which the vast majority of Christians refuse to allow God to be sovereign - salvation. This exception is justified by those who hold to it on the basis of man's supposed free will. How do we reconcile God's sovereignty with man's ability to choose? Let's examine the historical debate.

A. Pelagius

Pelagius was a British or Irish monk who lived in the late 300's to early 400's and found his way to North Africa. His teaching concerning the nature of the fall of Adam and its relationship to humanity caused quite a stir in the early church. Essentially, Pelagius taught that Adam's sin was for Adam alone. Every subsequent human born was born in original righteousness and only fell into sin as the result of the behavior of others and circumstances around him. God's grace was extended to allow man to overcome his own sin through an enlightenment of reason. His teaching was condemned in 412 by the Synod of Carthage.

B. Augustine

Augustine was the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa in the early 400's. He is by all accounts the most influential Christian theologian that ever lived, called by many a Reformer who lived a thousand years before the Protestant Reformation. His teaching heavily influenced Martin Luther and John Calvin. Augustine taught that Adam, as the federal head for all humanity, in his sin, caused the fall of the human race. The doctrine of original sin, that all of Adam's children inherit a fallen nature, teaches that we are not able to do good, improve our

condition in order to please God or save ourselves. We are not sinners because we have sinned, we sin because we are, by nature, sinners. According to Augustine, God's grace is extended to those who are the elect of God. This grace changes the heart of man and enables the sinner to trust in Christ for salvation.

C. Catholicism

Though Catholicism condemned Pelagius' teaching, they did not fully embrace Augustine's. Rather, they synthesized the two to form what has come to be known as semi-Pelagianism, a faith plus good works system of belief. Man was seen as a fallen creature, having inherited from Adam a moral defect. But this defect did not go so far as to rule out the possibility for man to improve himself through discipline and the sacraments of the church. The grace of God is seen as assistance to enable one to pull himself up by his own bootstraps. Man ultimately has the ability to freely choose Christ or to reject him. He did not lose, in the fall of Adam, the ability to conjure up some original righteousness, enabling him to choose to do good. As is the case for all compromises, this did violence to the teaching of Scripture.

D. The Reformation

Never in Martin Luther's wildest imagination did he ever think that he would go toe to toe with Rome. But God had plans to free the church from the idolatry and error of the church of Rome. Having been convicted of his sin as a teaching monk of Rome, Luther was at the brink of insanity. How can sinful men ever be justified in the sight of a holy, pure and altogether righteous God? It is impossible! Not through even the most stringent asceticism of the monastic movement could anyone do a single thing to atone for his sin, to please God enough to undo what Adam's and one's own sin had done to the soul. While teaching at the University of Wittenburg somewhere between 1513 and 1518, Luther was struck by the simple, biblical concept of justification by faith in Christ. As he turned from a rather allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures to a more literal one, he became aware of the heretical nature of the theology of Rome. In an attempt to reform his beloved church, in 1517 he challenged her on 95 thesis - points of debate. In the end, he was tried and excommunicated by Rome, but in the process he launched the Protestant Reformation.

John Calvin took the reigns of the new movement with a passion and intellect unmatched by any before or since. At the age of twenty-two he began to write what would be known as his magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. To this day it is still required reading in most Reformed seminaries, and ought to be at the top of the list for study by every serious Christian. Calvin applied his passion for God's truth and enormous intellect and energy toward hammering out a world view which was informed by the whole counsel of God. It was through Calvin's teaching that the biblical doctrines of grace concerning salvation and God's sovereign power and authority became most clearly articulated. His most devoted disciple, John Knox, is known as the father of Presbyterianism. Knox brought the Reformation to Scotland, where he was opposed by the catholic monarch, Mary Tudor (aka - Bloody Mary). After a brief

exile in England, Knox returned to face a new monarchy, still hostile to Knox's Gospel, under Mary Stuart (Mary, Queen of Scots). Before Mary Stuart could solidify her throne, the parliament approved the First Scottish Confession and established the Church of Scotland in 1560.

E. The Remonstrance

As a reaction to the Calvinistic theology embraced by the church in Holland, Jacobus Arminius began to question what he believed were the basic assumptions of Reformed theology. In Arminius a new Semi-Pelagianism was born. A year after his death, his followers addressed a remonstrance to the states-general of Holland. In it, five points were stressed: Man had moral ability to choose or reject Christ and salvation; God's election was predicated upon His foreknowledge of one's faith; the atonement was universal; the Holy Spirit could be resisted in His attempt to convert the sinner; man could lose his salvation. The Synod of Dort set the record straight in 1618 and set forth five doctrines of grace, known as the five points of Calvinism.

F. Holland's Tulip

In a thorough examination of the Scriptures, the Synod of Dort responded to Arminianism with what we now refer to as the Tulip, an acrostic for five basic doctrines of grace (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints). It is to these doctrines of grace that we now turn our attention in some detail.

1. Total Depravity

Also known as Moral Inability, total depravity refers to the biblical teaching that the natural man is dead in sin and is, therefore, incapable of doing any spiritual good. It does not mean that every man is as outwardly wicked as can be imagined. It simply means that man's heart - in bondage to sin, and his will - in rebellion against God, are not able to perform any work pleasing to God. He cannot improve his spiritual condition, prepare himself in any way to receive Christ, or do anything that would incline God to have mercy upon Him. He is by nature a child of wrath, and left to his own devices, would invite God's judgment upon himself. (cf. Gen. 2:16, 17, 6:5, 8:21; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 1:18ff, 3:9-12, 5:12, 6:20, 8:7; Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 2:13)

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so, as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself for conversion.

Westminster Confession of Faith, IX, 3

In his classic work, *The Bondage of the Human Will*, Martin Luther challenged semi-Pelagianism and took no prisoners in the debate concerning the nature of man's will. He forcefully defended the biblical teaching concerning total depravity. Because the will in is bondage to sin and death, it is not free to not sin. Perhaps the diagram below will illustrate.

Adam and Eve before the fall - <i>able to sin, able not to sin</i>
Adam and Eve after the fall - <i>not able not to sin</i>
Adam's descendants by natural generation - <i>not able not to sin</i>
Adam's descendants regenerated (new birth) - <i>able to sin, able not to sin</i>
Adam's descendants glorified - <i>not able to sin</i>

There are two ways to look at the idea of free will. The first is to take the position that man has free will and can choose to do anything - good or evil - freely. This is contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture (cf Eph. 2:1ff). The second way of seeing free will is to recognize the biblical view of man's heart and will. The scriptures teach that man is dead in sin, that there are none that seek God, and that the heart is desperately wicked and cannot be trusted. Every choice man makes, he makes according to the disposition of his heart - that seat of the intellect, will and emotions. The following is a good definition of free will:

Free will means the ability to choose according to the strongest inclination of the heart.

Simply put, we all choose freely, without any coercion by God or anyone else, according our strongest desire, between options. Whether one is a Christian or a satanist, he will always, every single time without exception, choose what he wants to choose. The unregenerate chooses according to the dictates of his fallen heart - a heart in bondage to sin. The Christian chooses according to dictates of his heart - a heart regenerated by the Spirit of God. Of the two, only the Christian has the ability to choose to do good, because his heart has been set free from bondage to sin and death.

This may seem like much ado about nothing, but it is vitally important to a correct understanding of the Gospel. If man is in bondage to sin so that he cannot choose good or choose to trust in Christ, then salvation is not something he can do or help to achieve. If the doctrine of total depravity is true, then no one could be saved apart from the intervention of God. And thankfully, God has been pleased to intervene.

2. Unconditional Election

Every doctrine of grace is dependent upon biblical teaching concerning the nature of the human heart. If the human heart is truly dead to God, then in order for anyone to be reconciled to God, God must take the initiative. In recent years the doctrine of election and predestination has become a full-blown controversy in the Christian Church. But every true church believes in a doctrine of election because the Bible is full of passages which speak of God's election of individuals whom He divinely sets apart from the rest. However, not every church means the same thing in speaking of election. The way many explain election is to neuter it of its force. They say they believe in election and then proceed to explain it away by adding the caveat that God's election is based upon His foreknowledge. In this view, God looks down the corridors of time to see exactly who it is who will exercise free will and choose Christ. And upon that basis, having seen those who will choose Christ, God elects them! This is the classic semi-Pelagian or Arminian doctrine of election.

This kind of fuzzy thinking is what makes the word "unconditional" so necessary when speaking of God's election. Unconditional simply refers to the fact that there is nothing - no conditions - in the sinner which makes him worthy of election. There are no conditions outside of God's free and sovereign grace which cause God to elect anyone. As the Westminster Confession of Faith states in III, 5:

Those of mankind that are predestinated to life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, has chosen, in Christ, for 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 conditions, or causes moving Him toward that end: and all to the praise of His glorious grace.

You see, if man is truly dead (the wages of sin is death, in the day you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in that day you shall surely die) in sin - spiritually dead - then in order for him to be saved, God had to choose to save him. That is all that is meant by unconditional election. God has taken the divine initiative to graciously choose to save, from the mass of humanity that was freely willing its way to destruction, those upon whom He has set His affection from before the foundation of the world. (Deut. 10:14, 15; Matt. 24:22, 24, 31; John 6:37-39, 65; 17:9; Rom. 8:28-33, 11:5; Eph. 1:4, 5, 11; I Thess. 1:4, 5, 5:9; II Thess. 2:13; I Peter 1:1, 2; 2:8, 9)

To those who hold on to the view that election is based upon God's foreknowledge (Romans 8:29) I offer the following: the case has been made that the word "know", in both original Hebrew and Greek languages, can have a technical sense about it. When God's Word says that Adam *knew* Eve his wife, there was a lot more going on there than ideas. There

was a physical expression of intimacy. When God says to Israel “you only have I *known* among the nations” He is speaking about a covenantal, selecting love that flows freely from His eternal counsel and sovereign will. And, it needs to be stressed, it does not originate in Israel’s deserving (Deut. 7:7). God says of Jeremiah “Before I formed you in the womb I *knew* you” (Jer. 1:5). The full implication of this is that God had not only known about Jeremiah, but that He had set His covenantal love upon him before He created him. It is amazing how many uses of the word “know” in the Bible could be replaced with the word “love”.

So far, we have seen that man is totally unable to save himself because of his sinful nature which is in bondage to sin. We have seen that, because man has no ability to save himself, in order for him to be saved something has to be done to him from outside of himself. God sovereignly chooses to save those whom He chooses. This, in turn, quite naturally leads us to the next doctrine of grace, which concerns itself with this question: “For whom, then, did Christ die on the cross?”

3. Limited Atonement

When we speak of a limited atonement, we are not saying that Christ’s death on the cross was not sufficient to save every single fallen human soul that ever lived or that ever shall. Rather, we are stating that the atonement was not intended to save every single soul. In other words, it is not efficient to save everyone. For this reason, perhaps a better way to name this doctrine of grace is with the title “Particular Atonement”. But then “tulip” turns into “tupip”. This would upset the Netherlands. In truth, there are really only three ways of looking at the cross of Christ:

- a. Christ’s death on the cross only made our salvation possible. This view supposedly preserves man’s ability to choose Christ freely. All Christ did on the cross was to create a door to heaven. It is up to us to unlock it, turn the knob and walk through.
Theological foundation: Justification is by faith and works together
Critique: Dead men don’t walk.
- b. Christ’s death on the cross not only makes salvation possible, it makes salvation necessary for everyone, everywhere. This position is called “universalism” and is believed by many in the church and nearly everyone outside the church.
Theological foundation: Justification is by death alone
Critique: “The way is broad that leads to destruction and many are they who travel upon it.”
- c. Christ’s death on the cross does not merely make salvation possible, it makes salvation necessary - but only to the elect. This is the historical protestant view arising from the Scriptures as understood by the

Reformation.

Theological foundation: Justification is by grace through faith alone

Critique: That's not fair!

Answer to critique: That's right! Fairness (justice) demands that all souls die and go to hell.

Of course, there are many Scriptures where this is clearly inferred. In John 17:9, in Jesus' great High Priestly Prayer for His disciples (present and future), He prays particularly for the given of God, not for the world in general. But the clearest teaching on the particular nature of Christ's death on the cross is to be found in Romans chapter nine. Having established the principle of election in verses 6-13, Paul continues by illustrating the particular nature of God's gracious dealing with a certain segment of Israel to the exclusion of the rest. Using the metaphor of clay, God clearly teaches us that He, as God, has the unchallenged right to glorify one lump of clay and destroy the other lump of clay - that clay being essentially identical and from the same whole. The clay destined to glory serves to glorify God's grace. The clay destined to dishonor serves to glorify God's justice.

The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, has fully satisfied the justice of the Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father had given Him.

- WCF VIII, 5

The cross of Christ does not simply make salvation possible, but actually accomplishes a certain redemption for a certain people - people who are by nature dead in sin and in rebellion against God, but who have been quickened by the Holy Spirit in order to believe. Which leads us quite naturally to the next doctrine of grace - namely, Irresistible Grace.

4. Irresistible Grace

The doctrine of Irresistible Grace has to do with the activity of the Holy Spirit who, having regenerated the human heart, now does the secret work of wooing the new heart through the ministry of the Word of God. In what is sometimes referred to as the "golden chain of salvation" in Romans 8:29-30, we find these words:

"For whom He foreknew (foreloved!), He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son . . . Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

Notice the order: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, glorification. It is not accidental, but rather theological. Those whom God “foreloves” He predestines, calls, justifies and glorifies (cf Eph. 1:4-5, which some translate “in love He predestined us to adoption”). Of particular interest to our present discussion is the term “called”. Sometimes the doctrine of Irresistible Grace is referred to as “Effectual Calling”. This simply means that God works all things together for those who are “the called” to effectually and irresistibly bring them to Christ by means of the Gospel. Upon having their hearts changed, their eyes opened and their ears unstopped, they can now see Christ and His gracious work, hear His voice in the Gospel and are moved to desire Him above all else. Or, as the Westminster Confession of Faith succinctly states:

All those whom God has predestined unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His word and Spirit, out of that 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, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace. This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive (in the process), until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.

- WCF X, 1&2

(Rom. 8:30; 11:7; Eph. 1:10-11; II Thess. 2:13-14; II Cor. 3:3, 6; Rom. 8:2; Eph. 2:1-5; Acts 26:18; I Cor. 2:10, 12; Eph. 1:17-18; Ezek. 36:26-27; 11:19; Phil. 2:13, Deut. 30:6; Eph. 1:19; John 6:44-45; 6:37; Rom. 6:16-18; II Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:4-5; Eph. 2:4-5, 8-9; I Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:5)

Irresistible Grace is an important element of the doctrines of grace because it is necessary, in order for man to be saved by what Christ accomplished on the cross, to have the accomplishments of Christ *applied* to those who are ignorant and blind and deaf to the things of God. Lost man, in rebellion and sin, does not seek God. As Romans 3:10-12, quoting Psalm 14, says, “There is none who seeks after God”. As lost sheep, unaware of the danger of their situation, continue to wander deeper and deeper into trouble until the shepherd goes after them and brings them into safety, so we are dependant upon a Good Shepherd to seek us out and call us home. God is the One who seeks. And once we are found, we rest secure in His care, which brings us to the last doctrine of grace - Perseverance of the Saints.

5. Perseverance of the Saints

They, whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved. — WCF XVII, 1

There are very few Christians in this day and age who do not believe, or want to believe, this doctrine. And for very good reason: no one wants to believe that God is an “Indian giver”! And no one wants to consider the possibility that there is something that can happen, or something that one can do, to put one’s eternal life in jeopardy. Nope, fudge on limited atonement and possibly unconditional election all you want, but don’t you dare take away my eternal security! It is a funny thing that those who seem so bent on preserving an unlimited concept of free will with respect to the ability to choose Christ suddenly become mute when speaking of that free will authoring its own demise. With the rare exception of Free Will Baptist (give them credit for being consistent!) most evangelicals who deny God’s prerogative in election insist upon God’s prerogative in eternally binding them to Christ regardless of how they exercise their freedom of will.

What this doctrine essentially teaches is this: All those totally depraved souls who are elected by God unto salvation, for whom Christ died on the cross, who have been effectually called by His Holy Spirit unto life through the Gospel - all of these and these alone - will persevere in their lives by God’s grace unto the very end, and at the end will be united to Christ forever in glory. Some have said that the Perseverance of the Saints really ought to be called the Preservation of God. It is true. Saints only persevere because God preserves. Notice again the language of the Westminster Confession of Faith:

They, whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither *totally* nor *finally* fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which arises also the certainty and infallibility of this perseverance.

Nevertheless, *they may*, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalence of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, *fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein:* whereby they incur God’s displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.

WCF XII, 1-3

(Phil. 1:6; II Pet. 1:10; I John 3:9; II Tim. 2:18-19; Jer. 31:3; Heb. 10:10, 14, 13:20-21, 9:12-15; Rom. 8:33-39; John 17:11, 24; Luke 22:32; John 14:16-17; I John 2:27, 3:9; Jer. 32:40; John 10:28; II Thess. 3:3; I John 2:19; Matt. 26:70, 72, 74; Ps. 51 (the title); Isa. 64:5, 7, 9; Eph. 4:30; Ps. 51:8)

The Westminster Divines made two very important points in developing their argument for perseverance. First, they rightly attribute perseverance to the power of God and His eternal purposes in saving the elect. Second, in doing so they also recognized the power and occasional prevalence of temptations through the world, the flesh and the devil. They rightly avoided the false doctrine of perfectionism - that the regenerate soul no longer has the capacity to succumb to temptation and sin against God. On the contrary, the reformed position states clearly that it is possible - quite possible in fact, for a Christian to sin in such a way as to do violence to himself, his loved ones, the church - with lasting consequences. This sinful neglect may last some time. The good news, however, is that if the person is one of God's elect, like the prodigal he or she will return, repent and be restored. It is the work of the Holy Spirit which enables the wayward Christian to repent.

The Scriptures do, however, give a word of caution. Hebrews chapter 6 describes a person who, by all accounts, seems to be a believer - even to the point of describing such a person as one who has become a "partaker of the Holy Spirit", having "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come". This one, if he falls away, is without any hope of forgiveness or eternal life. This seems to contradict the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, but in reality serves as a warning for all not to assume that church membership, the exercise of gifts, or any other apparent manifestation of godliness, automatically means that one is truly regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God (cf Jesus words "not everyone who says to Me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven - Matt. 7:21-23). Thus Peter warns us all to "make our calling and election sure" (II Peter 1:10). Only the elect will persevere in good works to the end.

These five doctrines of grace are essentially manifestations of God's sovereign grace. Each one arises naturally from a plain reading of the Scriptures and together they form the basis for our hope for eternal life. Apart from these five points, our hope is diminished substantially, for if it is not God's prerogative to graciously choose to save sinful creatures then that prerogative belongs to sinners. In that case no one would - or could - be saved. It is high time the church of Jesus Christ recaptured the spirit of the apostles and the reformation by humbly acknowledging that God is God and we are not.

Having said that, however, we need to add that there are many theologians, pastors, teachers and church members who do not hold to many, or even all, of these particular reformed distinctives. In fact, the majority do not. We do not want to leave the impression that you have to agree with us on these particular doctrines in order to be a Christian, or even a member in good standing in Christ the King PCA. Remember, we are simply letting you know up front what it is that we believe and teach.

So much more could be said concerning the doctrines of grace, but we must now turn our attention to another cardinal doctrine of the reformation - that of the Covenants of God. We will compare a popular view concerning the nature of God's dealing with man with the view best known as "Covenant Theology".

IV. THE DIVINE COVENANTS

In this section we will be dealing with the nature of God's plan to redeem to Himself a people. Reformed theologians throughout the years have believed that the Bible shows us a simple motif or mode of operation with respect to how God relates to His chosen ones. But before we get into the reformed position, it is necessary to explore a very popular teaching which has, more recently, come into vogue, and has all but eclipsed the orthodox position of the church. This teaching is known by the popular name of "dispensationalism". The following will serve as a very brief history and overview of dispensationalism.

A. Historical Dispensationalism

It is believed that the father of dispensationalism is John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). It has roots in Plymouth Brethren circles in the 1800s in England and Ireland and moved to America in the 1830s. It evolved and percolated for half a century before becoming popularized by Dr. G. I. Scofield in his Scofield Reference Bible. A Scofield Bible Correspondence Course was published by Moody Bible Institute, and many dispensationalist revival leaders dotted the landscape. All of these movements turned the teachings of Scofield into one of the most popular systems of biblical interpretation in the world. Its popularity still abounds in seminaries such as Dallas Theological Seminary, and is testified to by the Left Behind novel series now made into a feature movie. So what does dispensationalism actually teach? It is not easy to nail down specifically, for it has mutated over the years. The following represents an overall evaluation.

Classical Dispensationalism seeks to find the best interpretation of the Bible by taking its cue from II Timothy 2:15 "Study to show yourself approved by God, a workman that need not be ashamed, *rightly dividing the word of truth*" (italics ours). The fault in dispensationalism is not in identifying various administrations, or dispensations, recorded in Scripture. In truth there are various portions of the word which can be identified as marking out various stages showing progression of the revelation of God's plan of salvation. The problem centers on the nature of the relationship which exists between these dispensations.

For the classic dispensationalist, there are seven (some see as many as 10, others as few as 3) dispensations, or epochal sections of history, to be found in the Bible. Each one represents a fairly self-contained unit, having a prominent human agent (e.g., Adam, Noah, etc.) and a particular agreement, or covenant between God and man by which man was to live in a right relationship with God. For the purposes of this discussion, we will be addressing the dispensationalism of Dr. C. I. Scofield, made popular in the Scofield Reference Bible.

According to Scofield, each dispensation represents an attempt by God to have a relationship with man. In the basic scheme, God institutes a covenant with certain stipulations and promises which, if man is able to live up to, would result in certain eternal blessings. As man fails to live up to the covenant, God casts off that particular covenant and begins anew with another, involving entirely new stipulations and promises. We will not take time to review every one of Scofield's dispensations. Rather, we will simply mention two as a sort of springboard to Covenantal Theology.

Scofield's Seven Dispensations

Dispensation of Innocence - Genesis 1:28

Dispensation of Conscience - Genesis 3:23

Dispensation of Human Government - Genesis 8:30 - 11:9

Dispensation of Promise - Genesis 12:1

Dispensation of Law - Exodus 19:8

Dispensation of Grace - John 1:17

Dispensation of the Kingdom - Ephesians 1:10

Under the *dispensation of law* man's obligation was to attain righteousness by means of his obedience to the moral law of God. According to this view, God gave the Law as a means by which man could be justified before God through obedience. It is true that the religious leaders of Jesus' day had adopted a view that they could be justified by painstakingly keeping the Law, but it was never God's intent. The whole point of Paul in Romans and Galatians, with respect to the Law of God, is that it was never intended to be a means for anyone to become righteous. Rather, the Law was given as a means to show the exceeding sinfulness of sin. God's purpose in giving the law was to drive sinners to grace that they might exercise the faith and trust that Abraham demonstrated and by which he was saved.

With respect to the *dispensation of grace* God has supposedly so changed the terms of the covenant as to make the Law of no value at all. Just as in the dispensation of Law there was no room for grace, so in the dispensation of Grace there is no room for Law. The Law of God serves no useful purpose, salvation being of grace. This has led to the current "Lordship" debate between some modern dispensationalists and reformed-covenantal scholars. This debate is precipitated by the logical conclusion of the dispensationalist that there is now no place for the Law, since grace has replaced the law as the main stipulation of the covenant. Since

grace is of such a nature as to enable persons to have Jesus as Savior apart from Law, there is no real need to submit to any external authority. Therefore one can have Jesus as Savior without the necessity of having Him as Lord (classical antinomianism). In fact, the argument goes, the very idea that one must submit oneself to the law of God so flies in the face of grace that it is, itself, sinful.

There are other conclusions that classical dispensationalism draws which fly in the face of Scripture. According to this scheme, the rejection of Christ by the Jews constituted a fundamental break with God's original plan, which was that the Jews would receive the person of Christ as the Davidic King spoken of in the prophets. Since this did not happen as planned, the Jews having rejected Christ (by and large), God initiated the "church age" - a temporary parenthetical measure that would allow the Jews time to recuperate and eventually regain their rightful position as the chosen seed of God. In this view the church is merely an "accidental" blip on the screen of salvation history, rather than the great means and end of God's plan to save for Himself a people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. It should be noted that the thousand year reign of which dispensationalists make much ado was supposed to happen immediately following the preaching of John the Baptist and Christ's inauguration. Since the Jews rejected Christ, in the dispensational scheme, this millennial reign will happen after the "church age" — either before or after the great tribulation, at which point the Jewish nation will arise from the ashes of its own rejection of its messiah, the church will be done away with, and Jesus Christ will take His throne as the Davidic King over a new Israel. Some even believe that the temple rituals and sacrifices will accompany this new order! So much for the book of Hebrews.

B. Covenant Theology

Before there was ever a dispensational theology, there was the covenantal theology which virtually every son of the Reformation embraced. The greatest damage which was done by the nearly wholesale embracing of Scofield's system was the violence done to biblical ecclesiology, the theology of the church as revealed in both the Old and New Testaments. Scofield et al failed to see the essential continuity between God's Old Covenant people and His New Covenant people. The saints in the Old Testament church served a preparatory role as the believing vehicle through which God's decrees would be realized, culminating in the incarnation, birth, life, death and resurrection of God's Son. As such, they looked forward to the promises of salvation which would be realized in the Person and Work of Christ. They were the church, saved by faith through Christ who was to come. In a nutshell, covenant theology defines from the Scriptures only two main dispensations - or covenants. They are as follows:

1. The Covenant of Creation

The Covenant of Creation is often referred to as the Covenant of Works. It represents that period of time when God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden and gave them all the privileges of dominion over all things and union and communion with Him on a daily basis in the Garden sanctuary. A probation was offered as an

occasion for them to either continue in obedience and their happy estate or become covenant breakers by eating of the forbidden fruit. The Covenant Stipulations were: Obey Me and live, disobey Me and die. You know the rest of the story.

2. The Covenant of Redemption

The Covenant of Redemption is sometimes referred to as the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace involves that time from the fall of Adam and Eve to the Second Coming of Christ. The Covenant of Grace is so called because from moment Adam and Eve fell in their sin, they deserved God's judgment. Though sin and death began to reign in their lives and in the lives of their progeny, in the eternal decrees of God He did, of His own good pleasure, enter into an inter-Trinitarian covenant whereby God the Father would elect unto life a people for Himself to live as a testimony to His sovereign grace. This people was secured to God not on the basis of their own righteousness, but on the basis of the righteousness of the eternal Son of God, Who pledged Himself in the Covenant to redeem God's elect by fulfilling the Covenant of Grace through His perfect work as the second Adam. There are some very important similarities between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace:

- a) The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace both involved God entering into a covenant with one individual. In the Covenant of Works God entered into a covenant with Adam - the First Man. In the Covenant of Grace God entered into a covenant with His own Son - the Son of Man - whom we know as the Lord Jesus Christ. He is often referred to as the "Second Adam".
- b) In the Covenant of Works Adam acted on behalf of himself and all his progeny. He was chosen by God to be the perfect representative, or the federal head, of an entire race. In the Covenant of Grace God chose His Son, who was born of a woman - yet without the inherited sinful nature - to be the perfect representative, or federal head, of a "holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people for God's own possession".
- c) Adam was bound by the Covenant of Works to complete and unequivocal obedience to God's commandment. His failure brought forth death to himself and all of his children by natural descent. The Second Adam bound Himself, in the Covenant of Grace, to perfect obedience to the commandment of God. He came "to do the will of Him who sent Me" - which He did perfectly. In so doing, He secured eternal life for all those whom He represented - those chosen of the Father.
- d) In reality, both Covenants are covenants of works, since both required perfect obedience to the Father on the part of the federal head of each. The Covenant of Grace is so called simply because it is all of grace that God the Father and God the

Son entered into a covenant for the purpose of saving from a lost race those whom God willed to save. From our perspective, it is of God's grace alone.

- e) And, in reality, both Covenants are covenants of grace. Even the Covenant of Works involves tremendous grace on God's part. It was gracious for God to have created Adam and Eve; to have created a garden paradise; to give them work to do; to walk with them in the cool of the day; to crown them with dignity and majesty as the pinnacle of creation, made in His image. And, of course, it was gracious of God not to consign the first couple and the entire race to a Godless eternity as is evidenced by the Gospel promise of Genesis 3:15, which inaugurates the Covenant of Grace.

Covenant Theology views the entire scope of the revelation of the history of God's saving activities, recorded in the Scriptures, as one grand design being very carefully and sovereignly fulfilled. This is seen in the lives of every significant individual in the Bible.

1. Adam and Eve - broke Covenant of Works - God promises Seed who would defeat the seed of the serpent.
2. Cain and Abel - seed of the promise and seed of the serpent represented in human flesh. Seth becomes seed of promise.
3. Noah - chosen by God to be the instrument by which the seed of the promise would be saved - ark representative of Christ. Seed of serpent judged in flood.
4. Shem, Japheth show themselves seed of promise, Ham proves to be seed of serpent.
5. Abraham - chosen by God to be the father of many - given the promise of Genesis 3:15 in greater detail and sealed to him through the sign of the covenant - circumcision. His seed - those who have his faith and the One Seed to come (Christ) - will be a blessing to the nations.
6. Isaac - seed of the promise; Ishmael - seed of the flesh.
7. Jacob/Israel - seed of the promise - father of 12 tribes; Esau - seed of serpent
8. Moses - chosen to be leader of the seed of the promise, given further covenant revelation - 10 commandments, ceremonial laws, etc. - shadows of Christ; Pharaoh and Egypt represent seed of the serpent
9. David - seed of the promise, chosen to establish and typify a royal and everlasting dynasty, will be fulfilled in Christ and His kingdom. Good kings represent seed of promise and wicked kings the seed of the serpent - remnant (seed of promise) saved during times prophets and God's judgment until the advent of Christ.

As God unfolds His redemptive plan, it can be easily shown how there is a continuity and essential unity to the sweeping events, places and people He uses to accomplish

His purposes. The Dispensationalist sees Abraham and his descendants as God's people - Israel according to the flesh - relating to God on the basis of their ethnic identity and obedience to the requirements of the stipulations of the Dispensation of Promise. In this view, only those who are the natural descendants of Abraham, and who live according to the Abrahamic Covenant, are the true children of Abraham. Only the true children of Abraham according to the flesh, culminating in the nation of Israel and its civil and ceremonial laws, are God's chosen ones. Covenant theologians see Abraham as chosen by God to be the instrument by which the former promise of God (Gen. 3:15) would be given more comprehensive representation. Rather than Abraham representing only Israel as the people of God according to the flesh, he is the father of all who believe and according to Paul serves as the paradigm for New Testament justification by faith orthodoxy. Abraham believed in God's promise - the same promise given in Genesis 3:15 - and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. In other words, Abraham was justified by faith in the same manner and by the same faith in the same Christ as we now are.

Galatians 3:7 "Therefore know that only those who are of the faith of Abraham are sons of Abraham." ***Physical descent alone avails nothing.***

Romans 4:11 "And he (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though uncircumcised . . ." ***Abraham was justified by faith before circumcision and is the spiritual father to all who believe.***

Romans 2:28-29 "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God." ***Circumcision (and baptism) is a sign of the inward, spiritual circumcision (and baptism) of the heart which is accompanied by faith.***

This means that the true Israel and the true church are one. According to Paul in Romans 9:6 " . . . they are not all Israel who are of Israel". Paul clearly makes a distinction between Israel according to the flesh and Israel according to the promise. Just as not everyone who received circumcision had the inner circumcision of the heart, and not everyone who is a child of Abraham is of the faith of Abraham, so not everyone who is an Israelite according to the flesh is a member of believing Israel. It is the contention of Covenant Theology that there is, in the Old Testament, a national Israel and a spiritual Israel - and that only the spiritual Israel are those who have faith in the promise, and therefore, the blessing, of God. The same can just as easily be said of the New Testament people of God. Not everyone who has joined the church by profession of faith and has received the sign of baptism is necessarily converted. Only God knows who the true church is. Just as God had his believing remnant among the nation Israel in the Old Testament, so too He has His believing remnant in the New

Testament church. We'd like to think that this remnant represents the vast majority of those who attend churches on a Sunday's, but we would probably be surprised by the fact that the percentages have not changed much since the time of the Old Testament church. The main point of all this is:

Since membership into the true Israel depended upon faith in the promised Messiah - a faith that produced a transformed life; and since membership into the true church depends upon faith in the Messiah who has come - a faith that produces a transformed life, there is continuity and similarity between the two entities. In fact, they may only be distinguished by the time they existed in reference to the coming of Christ, and the incidental ordinances God provided for His people as He developed them as the means of accomplishing His will in each stage of salvation history. This, we believe, constitutes a basis for seeing the church of Jesus Christ as representing two dispensations - that of the old covenant and that of the new covenant. Therefore, God has always had His church on the earth, and His purpose has always been to work on behalf of and through the means of His One True Church.

There is one other doctrine that Dispensationalists and Covenantalists disagree upon, and that is the doctrine of Eschatology - or last things. As was mentioned before, dispensational thought has led to an understanding of the church and its place in eternity which, in our opinion, leaves much to be desired. If the church is only a parenthetical accommodation to Israel's rejection of its Messiah, then there will come a time at the end of the "church age" when Israel, as a national/spiritual entity, will reclaim its rightful place as the apple of God's eye and the Messiah will rule as its King. This view has led to some fairly creative "end times" schemes. Some of these are to be found in Scofield's Reference Bible, and others have been elaborated by men like Hal Lindsey (The Late Great Planet Earth) and characterized by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins in their Left Behind series. In the following section we will offer a brief critique of dispensational premillennialism and conclude with a view of several basic reformed and covenantal views on eschatology.

V. ESCHATOLOGY - The Doctrine of Last Things⁶

In the former section we compared and contrasted Covenant Theology with a generic form of Dispensationalism which has evolved from Scofield, et. al. In this section we will be looking at the doctrine of last things, formally known as the study of eschatology - from the Greek word *eschatos*, last. In what follows we will look at the second coming of Christ, which most agree is associated with the end of the world and the establishment of the final age,

⁶ The following outline is adapted from Systematic Theology ; Louis Berkhof, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

various views concerning the so-called millennium, and the state of the church with respect to theories concerning the tribulation.

A. The Second Coming of Christ

Virtually everyone who believes in the first advent of the Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ believes that He is going to come again in the same manner in which He departed. And though there are some differences of thought as to exactly how and when this will take place, there are surely some similarities which can be agreed upon. I will save the dissimilarities for our discussion on millennial views. For now, suffice it to say that there are five things which, according to Scripture, will precede the Second Coming, or Parousia as it is called, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The Calling of the Gentiles

The promise God made to Abraham was that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. In the New Testament the command was given that the Gospel be preached to all the nations (cf. Matt. 24:14, Mark 13:10, Rom. 11:25). Also, passages such as Matt. 8:11, Luke 2:32; Acts 15:14 and Rom 9:24-26 make it clear that there is an expectation that Gentiles will be enfolded into the kingdom of God in numbers which far exceed anything previously occurring.

2. The Conversion of Israel

Both the Old and New Testaments speak of a future conversion of Israel (cf. Zech. 12:10; 13:1; II Cor. 3:15-16; Rom. 11:25-29). Depending upon one's view of Israel, as already discussed above, this either means that Israel according to the flesh is going to undergo a radical conversion to Christ, or that a remnant of Israel according to the faith - those who are Israelites after the manner of believing Abraham, whether Jew or Gentile, will be converted and become the church, or some form of a combination of the two.

3. The Great Apostasy and Tribulation

According to Christ (Matt. 24:9-12, 21-24; Mark 13:9-22; Luke 21:22-24) there will come a time when there will be a falling away from the church those who professed faith but were not truly converted, accompanied by a time of unusually intense persecution of the church. This is often tied to the seventy weeks of Daniel and the "Man of Lawlessness" (see below). If one is a dispensational premillennialist, the church age believers will be "raptured" before this coming persecution. Only those who remain will undergo this persecution - either leading them to faith or finally sealing their doom. If one is a reformed covenantalist, this period is concurrent with the time between the first and second

advent of Christ, ending with an intensification of persecution just prior to the second coming. See also I Tim 4:1,2; II Tim. 3:1-5; II Thess. 2:3.

4. The Revelation of Antichrist

Though the term antichrist is only to be found in John's epistles, the concept of the antichrist goes back to Genesis. Depending upon one's viewpoint, the antichrist is either associated with some historical figure who has or will come, such as Nero, the evil Roman ruler who lit up the way to his palace by igniting crucified Christians and letting them burn on their crosses; or the papacy of Rome, or it refers to every sphere of life, political, social and religious, which opposed Christ. There is much debate upon whether or not the final expression of antichrist will be a historical figure who will be recognizable just prior to the coming of Christ. Jesus spoke of false prophets and false christs who would try to even scandalize believers (Matt. 7:15; 24:5, 24 etc.).

5. Signs and Wonders

The Scriptures mention several signs which will serve as precursors to the end of the age: Wars and rumors of wars; famines and earthquakes; the coming of false prophets; false christs who may be given to signs and wonders ministries; fearful heavenly disturbances involving the planets, sun, moon and stars (Matt. 24:29, 30; Mark 13:24, 25). Many have thought they were in the last days based upon some of these things occurring in history, but alas they weren't. At the least, these occurrences will probably be all happening at the same time and with unusual intensity if the end is portended by their appearance.

All of the above represent the biblical data related to the event leading up to the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. How these truths fit together, and one's particular approach to Biblical interpretation – i.e., dispensational or covenantal - will determine the details and their relationship to one another. However, in some fashion, most agree to these five basic harbingers. Before we move on to a discussion on millennial views, it would be well to look at just what the Bible says concerning the nature of Christ's return.

B. The Nature of Christ's Second Coming

There are three things one needs to understand concerning the nature of Christ's return. They are as follows:

1. The Time of Christ's Return

The exact time of Christ's return is unknown and unknowable (cf Matt. 24:36). The only thing that can be said with certainty is that He will come at the end of the world, and that there will be certain warning signs which will give a general sense of impending judgment by God. All those last times "experts" which have claimed to know when Christ will return have egg on their faces. So, too, will all who seek to predict it in the future. We simply are not given to know specifics.

2. The Manner of Christ's Return

Here we will need to look at five points:

- a) Christ will come personally. Acts 1:11 says "This Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you beheld Him going into heaven."
- b) Christ will come physically. Again, see Acts 1:11; 3:20, 21; Rev. 1:7. In the same physical body He took with Him to heaven, He will return to earth.
- c) Christ will come visibly. Because He comes physically, it will be visible (cf. Matt. 24:30; Acts 1:11; Col. 3:4; Titus 2:13)
- d) Christ will come suddenly. Even though there will be signs giving a general sense of Christ return, still it will come as a thief in the night and, especially to those who do not look for Him, suddenly (Matt. 24:37-44; 25:1-12; I Thess. 5:2, 3)
- e) Christ will come gloriously and triumphantly. Whereas His first advent was marked by humility and understatement, His second will be with great fanfare and glorious celebration. He will be in royal apparel. Matt. 24:30 says the clouds will be His chariot, the angels His entourage, along with the saints and heavenly hosts (II Thess. 1:7, 10; 4:16; I Thess 3:13).

3. The Purpose of Christ's Return

Christ will return to usher in the eternal age, bring to close the present age, collect from the earth all His faithful ones who remain alive, raise from the dead the bodies of saints now in heaven, raise the bodies of the wicked for judgment, judge the wicked from among men, angels and Satan himself, forever secure the everlasting doom of the wicked in hell, and forever secure the everlasting glory of the elect in heaven. We believe the most plain and obvious reading of Scriptures has all these events occurring at the same time - that is, at the precise time Christ returns. (cf. Matt. 13:49-50; 16:27; 24:3; 25:14-46; Luke 9:26; 19:15, 26, 27;

John 5:25-29; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:3-16; I Cor. 4:5; 15:23; II Cor. 5:10; Phil. 3:20, 21; I Thess. 4:13-17; II Thess. 1:7-10; 2:7, 8; II Tim. 4:1, 8; II Pet. 3:10-13; Jude 14-15; Rev. 20:11-15; 22:12)

C. Millennialism - The 1,000 Years of Revelation 20:1-6

There has been much debate over the so-called millennium. I refer to it as so-called because there is really only one place in the bible where the idea of a 1,000 period is mentioned, and that is in a highly symbolical book which seeks to communicate eternal principles with very broad and artistic strokes of the seer's brush. Revelation falls into the literary genre known as "apocalyptic literature", which, by nature, is rather difficult to pin down interpretively. Be that as it may, the millennium issue comes from that source and falls into three different views: premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism.

1. Premillennialism

Premillennialism is found in the early history of the church - though not referred to by that name - in the writings of Irenaeus. He thought the world would endure six thousand years, corresponding to the six days of creation. The seventh thousand, also corresponding to the seventh day of creation - the day of rest - would be a period of joy and celebration, brought about by the second coming of Christ. Jerusalem will be rebuilt and the earth will produce in abundance. At the end of this period, God will judge the earth and usher in the eternal state. For centuries, until the nineteenth century, this view remained basically the same, with some deviations and accommodations made along the way. With the rise of dispensationalism, premillennialism found new life and morphed into a new, comprehensive interpretation of the Bible. To this day dispensational premillennialism represents the most popular interpretation of the Scriptures.

Modern premillennialism understands the nature of last things in the context of Jesus' ministry taking two directions. Both John the Baptist and Jesus originally envisioned the kingdom message taking root in the heart of Israel. When it became apparent that Israel, by and large, was not interested in this message, Jesus put His Messianic ministry on hold, ceased to preach the kingdom of God, and began to preach the Gospel of God's grace to the Gentiles. The remainder of His earthly ministry sees Him concentrating upon those whom He could bring with Him to heaven through repentance and faith. Thus, the parenthetical nature of the church we spoke of earlier. All during the time between Christ's first and second coming, the Gentiles are becoming Christians while the Jews, by and large, are not coming to Christ. When Jesus returns, however, things will change dramatically. Christ will take the church (through what is known as the rapture) away from the earth, where they will meet Christ in the air. Those left behind (where have you heard that recently?) will go through a period of intense persecution. Some will be driven to believe, others will be hardened in their sin. This is

what is referred to as the “seven years”. During this period, the message of the kingdom, originally meant for the Jews in the first half of Christ’s ministry, will be preached with great success. The persecution will continue to intensify until Christ returns again to establish His millennial reign - thus the “pre” in premillennial. Christ returns before - pre - His millennial reign. During Christ’s millennial reign, Satan will be bound, and there will be an establishment of a real, visible, terrestrial and material kingdom of the Jews, the restoration of the theocracy with Jesus sitting on the throne of David, and the temple again being the center of the religious life of God’s Israel.

2. Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism, as its name suggests, is the opposite of premillennialism. This system sees Christ returning after the thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6. This school of thought is most closely associated with Reformed Theology as one of its leading positions. Roughly speaking, those who hold this view see the thousand year reign of Christ as concurrent with the age of the church. Some see it as a reference to the teaching that the gates of hell will not prevail against the witness of the church. It tends to be a very optimistic - some even would say an unrealistic - view of the role of the church in the world. In this way of thinking, the church is able to so profoundly affect the world in which it lives that the world is becoming more and more transformed by the witness of the church. In fact, the Gospel is so successful, that the missionary activity of the church actually prompts Christ’s return, as the nations and the world embrace Christ and are transformed into an expression of heaven on earth. Christ simply comes to bring in and complete what His church has been doing at his bidding in heaven.

It should be noted that the popularity of this position was greatest before the first and second world wars. Before the wars, there was an age of enthusiastic growth and social peace and harmony which fostered the belief that the church was having a dramatic impact upon the world. After the war, many of these dreams were dashed to the ground, as the ravages of war took their toll upon humanity, and the evil of ungodly despots and governments raged furiously and cruelly on. There are still a few optimistic souls who hold to this position within the Reformed camp. The next position represents the view held by most who consider themselves Reformed Covenantalists.

3. Amillennialism

As the name implies, amillennialism does not believe that the reference to a thousand year period in Revelation 20:1-6 refers to a literal one thousand year long period, either before or after the second coming of Christ. Rather, amillennialists believe the reference is a symbolic description of a long, but definite period of time. This time is believed to be the time between the first and the second coming of Christ. In it is a depiction of two events: First, the reference to the binding of Satan shows that during the ministry of the church Satan will not be able to thwart or derail the church from its

mission (cf the great commission). This binding permits the successful proclamation of the Gospel to every nation and people and tribe and tongue. Second, the church will be actively involved during a period of active persecution, as noted by the expression of the martyrs who remained faithful, and the dominion given to the church - those who have not capitulated to the anti-Christian world view of the seed of the woman. Note also the reference to the first resurrection - which is believed to represent the new birth from spiritual death.

In fact, the entire book of Revelation is seen as representing that period of time between the first and second coming of Christ. There is a very careful, yet highly symbolic picture of the events which occur in the life of the church. First, John sees the vision of the Son of Man while suffering tribulation on the Isle of Patmos for the testimony of Jesus. Jesus shows John the church, symbolically in seven manifestations. The Church is warned to avoid the sins of these churches. Then a scroll, which represents the history of the church - from the first to the second coming of Christ - is seen, with the Lamb being the only one able to open its seven seals. After the seals are opened and the history of the church has been revealed, it is looked at from a different angle, represented by the seven trumpets. Following the seven trumpets, another view is given represented by seven bowls. Each of these visions shows different viewpoints of the same period of time. Each begins with the advent of Christ and ends with the final judgment. The Revelation closes with a magnificent symbolic representation of Christ's victory, the triumph of His bride, the judgment of the seed of the serpent, the New Temple, New Jerusalem and New Heavens and Earth - all references to the eternal state ushered in by the parousia - the second coming of Christ.

Again, it needs to be stressed that even in Reformed circles, there is no unanimity of thought concerning millennial views. Most Reformed scholars fall into the amillennial camp, many others the post-millennial camp, and even a few consider themselves to be "historical premillennialists". None, however, embrace the dispensational premillennial position. Covenantal and dispensational views tend to be mutually exclusive.

Enough of this! It is time to move on to one more covenantal/reformed distinctive - one which grows quite naturally from an understanding of the Scriptures which sees the basic continuity between the Old and the New Testaments, between the Israel of God before Christ and the Israel of God since His ministry. We are, of course, speaking of the application of the sign of the Covenant to the people who have received the promise of the Covenant in Christ.

VI. THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH - MEANS OF GRACE

All protestant churches agree that there are two sacraments, and that the definition of a sacrament is that it is, in some way, a sign and seal of an inward spiritual reality. There is also agreement that the two sacraments of the church, baptism and communion, derive their force from having been commanded by Christ Himself. All other so-called sacraments have

no such authorization from our Lord. In what follows we will look at both sacraments and give some information about their history and purpose in the church. It is hoped that, having been given the opportunity to see the biblical mandates for each, an understanding as to why Christ the King PCA follows certain procedures and practices will be reached.

It is generally held within the church at large that baptism, however it is understood and administered, like the Old Testament counterpart of circumcision, is initiatory in nature, while communion, like its Old Testament counterpart in Passover, is commemorative in nature. Simply put, baptism is the rite by which one is initiated into the church, and communion is the rite by which believers in the church are to remember their union with Christ in His life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension.

A. Baptism

Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church; but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life. Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His church until the end of the world.

Not only do those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized.

— Westminster Confession of Faith - XXVIII; 1, 4

It is very clear that baptism is a sacrament of the church which was commanded by our risen Lord Himself. The Great Commission in Matthew 28 leaves no room for doubt. It is clear that circumcision was no longer to be the sacrament of the church, see Acts 15:1,2; 21:21; Gal. 2:3-5; 5:2-6 et al. And, it is equally clear from Colossians 2:11, 12 that Paul understood baptism to be the rightful replacement for circumcision in the new covenant. What is not so clear from the plain teaching of Scripture is the exact mode of application, and the proper recipients. This has caused much division in the church, and represents an ongoing debate among brothers. Our desire in what follows is to present a clear, simple rationale for why the Presbyterian Church in America believes it is right to include the infants of believers in the administration of baptism in the church.

The most fundamental difference between those who practice exclusive believer's baptism and those who include the children of believers in baptism is one's view of

the relationship between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Those who practice believer's baptism tend to see a greater than lesser dissimilarity between the two covenants. What was part and parcel for Israel in the Old Testament has little to do with what is part and parcel for the church in the New Testament. Israel was Israel and the church is the church. But one of the main points of understanding within Reformed circles is the close relationship which exists between God's people of the old covenant and those of the new. This understanding has implications for how one sees the signs of the covenant - both those of the old and those of the new - relating to one another. Reformed Christians tend to see strong similarities between the two entities and their attending sacraments.

Notice the following parallels between the two Covenant signs and their recipients:

<p>Promise made to Abraham and his children – Genesis 12, 17 Promise made to believers and to their children - Acts 2:39</p> <p>Sign of the Covenant to Abraham is Circumcision - Genesis 17 Sign of the Covenant to Church is Baptism - Matthew 28, Colossians 2:11, 12</p> <p>Abraham, as believer, was to receive the sign of the covenant - circumcision Those of the faith of Abraham are to receive the sign of the covenant - baptism</p> <p>Children of faithful Abraham also received the sign of the covenant, thus including them as members in the covenant community Children of believers quite naturally are to receive the sign of the covenant, thus including them as members in the covenant community</p> <p>Some who received the sign of circumcision did not accompany it with faith Some who receive the sign of baptism do not accompany it with faith</p> <p>Many who receive the sign of circumcision did profess the faith of Abraham Many who receive the sign of baptism do also profess the faith of Abraham</p> <p>God nearly took Moses' life for not being faithful in applying the covenant sign of circumcision to his children - Exodus 4:24-26 ?????????????!</p>

Those who fail to see the close relationship between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant quite rightly look exclusively to the New Testament for their marching orders in seeking to be obedient to God's commands. And since the New Testament is quite silent about the notion of children being baptized, it is understandable when Baptists refuse to apply the New Testament initiatory rite to anyone other than those who profess faith in Christ. They are simply being consistent with their hermeneutic, or system of biblical interpretation.

However, reformed covenantalists are also seeking to be obedient in applying the sign of the covenant to their children. Their hermeneutic demands that their orders do not come exclusively from the New Testament teaching, but include the Old Testament's teaching as well. In what follows we will look at this interpretation, the historical practice of the church, and close with a call for an evaluation of the reformed covenantal position on baptism.

Because those in the Reformed camp see such a close relationship between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church, it is quite natural for them also to see a close connection between the signs and seals of the Israel and the signs and seals of the church. It does not involve a leap of faith for reformed believers to apply the sign of baptism to the children of believers, since this was what was required of believers in the Old Testament. God commanded that the sign of salvation, or the sign of the covenant, was to be applied to everyone who identified with believing Abraham, and their children, for an everlasting covenant. We believe the question begs to be asked - in what sense would the sign of the covenant be representative of an everlasting covenant if it was suddenly removed from the corporate life of God's covenant people without comment or commandment? Reformed Christians don't believe it has been removed from the life of the church, rather, we believe it was modified to fit the new nature of the people of God in the New Testament. Circumcision became baptism. The Old Testament sign of the eternal covenant (circumcision) was modified into the New Testament sign of the eternal covenant (baptism).

Perhaps the strongest argument used by the believer's baptist camp against infant baptism is the silence of the Scriptures concerning the baptism of children. It is thought that because there is no specific mention of infants and children being baptized that this proves the point. There is, though, a strong case that can be made from the Scriptures that those who professed faith in Christ should be baptized. This thinking fails to take into account the historical context in which the actions of the early church are recorded. Most of the early converts coming to Christ and being baptized were Jewish converts. They had already experienced the sign of the Covenant in their flesh, having been circumcised. Now that they have made public profession of faith in Christ, they must submit also to baptism. The only baptisms recorded for us in the early church are either those of Jewish converts to Christ, who must be baptized, or Gentile converts of Christ, who must be baptized. Both of these groups had to be baptized because they had not had the opportunity to be baptized as infants

However, there are hints in Scripture which leave open the door that the early church practiced a baptism reminiscent of what it replaced - circumcision. There are three instances in the New Testament which, though not specifically commanding the baptism of infants and children, seem to suggest that it was a natural thing for Paul to do to the early converts.

- Acts 16:14-15. Paul had preached the gospel to a group of women who had been praying by the riverside. Lydia, a business woman - seller of purple, a very expensive color to produce for clothing - had her heart opened by the Lord and she believed in Christ. Very casually, very naturally does Luke record that Paul

baptized her and her household (oikos). This broad term denotes all who are under the authority of the head of house, including children, servants and even the children of servants. Though children are not specifically mentioned, it doesn't require a leap to know that a business woman might have an extensive household. Did they all believe? We do not know. But we do know that they were all baptized.

- Acts 16:25-34. Paul and Silas have been severely beaten and are in jail for preaching the gospel. As they pray and sing hymns an earthquake opens the doors, making possible a jailbreak. As the jailer contemplates his future he decides to end his life, believing all are escaped. Paul assures him that all are present and accounted for and commands him to believe in Christ telling him both he and his household will be saved (apostolic prediction?) Then, after having washed Paul and Silas, he and his family are baptized. (Where did the water come from? Was it from the same source as that with which he dressed Paul's and Silas' wounds? How much was there? Enough to be immersed?) The main point is, was it possible that there were infants and children in the family? Maybe.
- I Corinthians 1:16. Paul is refuting the sectarianism of the church at Corinth, some of whom are glorying in the fact that they have been baptized by the more famous ministers. As Paul contemplates the problem he tries to recall those whom he baptized, thankful that his was not a ministry marked out by mass baptisms. He does, however, recall having baptized the "household of Stephanas". Again, the idea of a household being baptized . . .

Of course, none of this proves that any infants were baptized. It merely opens up the possibility; some would say the probability, that among all these households, which by definition include family infants and infants of the family's servants, there were a number of infants included.

There is, along with the above references to households, an interesting passage in the Old Testament book of Joshua. Joshua 24 records Joshua's charge to Israel shortly before his death, wherein he tells the people that they will have a difficult time staying true to God - human fallen ness being what it is. So he calls them to a point of commitment - who will they serve? His response is as follows: You decide whether it is right to serve the LORD or not for yourselves. But as for me and my *house*, we will serve the LORD. Here we have recorded a statement of fact that either supposes that everyone in Joshua's house is capable and willing to serve the LORD, or that, as the head of house and representative before God; Joshua simply states that *his* is going to be a house characterized by, under his covenantal authority, faithfulness to God. The question begs to be asked, does this, and other references to the corporate nature of family life such as I Corinthians 7:12-16, cause us to see the term "household", with the believing head of house being the family "priest", in a covenantal light similar to the Old Testament concept of corporate tribal and familial solidarity? If so, we can expect God to bless the corporate nature of the family by means of precious promises. The alternative is a radical

departure for God's established norm. Individualism didn't become popular until the Renaissance. Covenant theologians have historically seen the family as a corporate entity, blessed by God through His chosen representative - the head of house - as the recipient of all of the covenant promises and assurances recorded in God's Word.

Another biblical argument in favor of the baptism of the infants of believers comes on the flip side of the exclusive believers baptist's argument that the Bible seems to be silent on the matter. It is thought that because the Bible is rather silent on the issue, certainly not commanding that infants be baptized, the case against this practice is closed. Let us offer another perspective on the relative silence of the Scriptures, for this silence speaks volumes. For thousands of years prior to the advent of Christ Old Testament believers were steeped in a covenant theology that was remarkable in its stipulations. Every Jewish parent knew the importance of circumcising their infant sons because God purposely stipulated that the sons of believing Israelites be included in the covenant community (with all of its blessings and privileges). The early church was comprised largely of Jewish converts, and those who were in positions of leadership were from Jewish backgrounds. Therefore, when a head of house became a believer and was baptized and admitted into the fellowship of the covenant community - the church - what would he (or she) have most likely done with his infants and children? For over two thousand years God included infants in the covenant community through the application of the sign and seal of circumcision. There is no indication in Scripture that this was all supposed to change. Yes the sign was changed and baby girls were now included, but no flashing neon signs in Scripture explaining that now babies are to be removed from the covenant community and the sign of the covenant refused! Not a hint of instruction or debate over this radical departure from what was the God appointed and time honored norm. For many, it is simply too much to believe.

The last argument in favor of infant baptism is, by its nature, the weakest. Nevertheless, it is credible and substantial. It is an argument from history - the practice of the early, post apostolic church as recorded in the earliest known sources. Rather than catalogue these references, we will simply give a reference to a scholarly look at the issue by Samuel Miller in his book entitled *Infant Baptism: Scriptural and Reasonable*. His contention is that history shows a very early practice of infant baptism, in fact, within the second century of the apostolic age. And though there may have been individuals in church history who questioned the practice, the first movement which formally opposed infant baptism and embraced adult believers baptism was the Anabaptist movement of 1522. This does not prove that the paedobaptist are correct, but only that if they were incorrect, the practice had been in place for a rather extended period of time. Which begs the question, from where did the early church receive the practice on infant baptism?

One other minor point is that most churches have a place for the recognition of infants in the service. Even churches which do not practice infant baptism seem compelled to offer infants to God in a dedication of sorts. In the Old Testament every male was to be circumcised on the eighth day, but the firstborn male was to be presented to the temple and redeemed with a sacrifice, for the law stipulated that every firstborn male belonged to the Lord. Some see the practice of baby dedications deriving from this - others see it as a means to

accomplish what baptism stands for, without all the water and trappings. It is worth noting, however, that baby dedications, as practiced by churches, find little support in either the language or context of Scripture.

So what is it that those who baptize infants believe is actually being accomplished through the sacrament? What benefit is there to the baby, who does not know what is going on and will not remember? The answer is as follows:

1. We believe that baptism is a means of grace in the life of the covenant child. The grace of God represented in baptism is communicated to the child indirectly, through the promises which are made by the parents to do everything in their ability to insure that the child will be brought up in the context of a believing home and church. God enters into covenant with parents who take these covenant promises seriously. We also believe that the corporate nature of the church enables those baptized infants to participate in the life of the church, not as outsiders waiting to come in, but as insiders experiencing the full blessings of every right and privilege of church membership.
2. We believe that baptism is a means of grace in the life of the covenant family. The grace of God communicated and symbolically represented in baptism allows for parents to hold onto the precious promises God extends to believers and their children. Covenants in the Old Testament were often stipulated upon obedience. Parents who do what they believe God has called them to do in baptizing their infants are assured that God always blesses obedience. We believe the Bible teaches that this blessing trickles down to the next generation, giving them a general assurance that the faithful actions of the parents will bear fruit in the lives of their children. This does not mean that the child is automatically saved. Each child must either affirm or reject the faith of their parents before God.
3. We believe that baptism is a means of grace in the life of the covenant community. Every time a child is baptized in the church, the covenant community participates and serves witness to the event. It serves as a gentle reminder to children that they are responsible to fulfill what their baptism symbolized - union with Christ and obedience to His will. It reminds adults to look to the grace of God in their own baptisms. And it gives force to the responsibility that every member of the church bears in the rearing and discipling of every child within the covenant community. It doesn't take a village to raise a child, it takes a covenant community. The entire church covenants with God by promising to do whatever possible to set before the child of the covenant a godly example - offering whatever assistance and oversight is necessary to the parents and child as is needed.
4. When a child is baptized in a church service, the pastor calls the parents before the church and asks them questions of covenant. The covenant is actually between

God and the parents, on behalf of the child. God promises to bless the obedience of the parents as they live under His covenant stipulations. The parents promise to obey God in the rearing of the child. Even the church promises to do their part in the process - a recognition of the corporate nature of covenant life before God.

If you are interest in finding out more about the blessings of the practice of infant baptism, the pastor can provide you with an excellent book on the subject: *Children of Promise - the Biblical Case for Infant Baptism* by Robert R. Booth.

B. Holy Communion

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the night wherein He was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in His Church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death; the sealing all benefits thereof unto believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto Him; and, to be a bond and pledge of the communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body.

— Westminster Confession of Faith XXIX, 1

As was mentioned before, baptism involves initiation into the covenant community, whereas communion involves commemoration - the remembrance of Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension - the basis of our salvation. Within the church at large, there are several views which have shaped the understanding of what is actually involved in the sacrament among various Christian communities. What follows will be a brief outline of the basic views.

A. The Miracle of the Mass

According to Roman Catholic dogma, the sacraments are ever so closely tied to that which they represent as to become one and the same. Baptism actually removes original sin, leaving the infant neutral. The celebration of the Eucharist involves a grace which actually infuses the recipient with true virtue. This is seen in the way the elements actually become the body and the blood of Christ. Each time the priest presents the bread and the wine, through what is known as the miracle of the mass, the elements are actually and miraculously converted into the actual body and blood of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, by partaking of the true and sinless body and blood of Christ, *ex opera operata* (by the working of the work) that which is the true property of Christ is infused into the sinner, resulting in supernatural grace. This view has come to be known as *transubstantiation* (the substance is transformed into another

substance). It is a very literal interpretation of Christ's words, "This *is* My body . . . this *is* My blood".

B. One Step Removed

The Protestant Reformation launched by Martin Luther in 1517 never was intended by Luther to be a break with Rome - not originally. His desire was to purify what he considered to be the spurious and unbiblical practices which had corrupted the church and its hierarchy. As a result, he was excommunicated and the Reformation began. With respect to the sacraments, Luther saw the danger of Rome's view. Salvation was to be all of grace through faith, not by means of what priests and popes did. So, along with many other articles of faith, Luther changed the practice of Communion. In doing so, however, he was repeatedly reminded of Christ's words, "et hoc corpus meum - this is my body". Desiring to steer clear of the miracle of the mass, he nevertheless refused to compromise on Christ's words. He would not let them stand figuratively. So he developed a compromise understanding which came to be known as *consubstantiation* (con - with - the substance). Somehow, mysteriously, the real body and blood were present *with* the elements of the bread and wine.

C. A Nuda Signa

The aftermath of Luther's break with Rome saw many theologians working out the particulars of theology from Scripture. One such theologian was Ulrich Zwingli, a contemporary of Luther and Calvin. Zwingli developed a view of communion which radically broke not only with Rome but also with Luther. His view was that the sacrament was a nuda signa - a naked sign, only serving to remind believers of the spiritual truth symbolized by the sign. There is no real presence of Christ in the sacrament - whether real or spiritual. God simply calls upon believers to remember Christ through the picture He paints.

D. A Real Presence

The view of John Calvin is probably the most prevalent view among most protestant and reformed churches. Calvin developed a view that preserved the sacrament as a genuine means of grace while rejecting both the pope's and Luther's view, as well as Zwingli's. The real presence of Christ is present in the sacrament - not corporally, but spiritually. Christians truly feed upon Christ - but by faith. As believers receive the physical elements into their bodies, by faith they do also receive, spiritually, the real presence of Christ, who nourishes them spiritually.

This latter view represents the practice of Christ the King Presbyterian and every Presbyterian Church in America congregation. In the administration of this sacrament, the PCA requires only this upon its recipients: First, that the recipient be born again. Second, that they have made a public profession of faith before a recognized Christian body representing a church which is faithful to the Gospel and practices Biblical discipline, having been received into that fellowship as members in good standing. Third, that each communicant

has spiritually prepared for participation. Fourth, that there is no lingering, unconfessed sin which has caused alienation with God or man.

It is the practice of this church, and most Reformed Churches, to encourage parents to disciple their children, leading them to affirm the covenant promises represented in baptism by committing their lives to Christ. Once a child has made a credible profession of faith, parents should teach him the basics of meaningful participation in the life of the church as servants willing to offer their spiritual gifts in service to Christ. Parents should be careful to teach their children what is meant by Holy Communion, so that at least an elementary understanding is evident. At some point, the parents are encouraged to seek an appointment with the Elders in order to present the child for examination as to his Christian experience. The purpose of this examination is to determine if it might be time to admit the child to the fellowship of the Lord's table. At this point, the child, who has been a non-communing member in the church, becomes a communing member.

The pastor is always willing to meet with parents who believe their child might be ready to be presented to the Elders to be admitted to the Lord's Table. If parents need help teaching the child concerning participation in the Holy Communion they are welcome to ask the pastor for assistance. There is no set age for when it is appropriate for a child to be presented to the Elders. Each couple knows best the emotional and spiritual maturity of their own child. However, there should be such a level of spiritual, emotional and intellectual maturity for the child to be able to fulfill the biblical requirement of self-examination set forth by Paul in I Corinthians 11:28. For more information, please see the pastor.

The sacraments of the church are certainly instituted by Christ to be a means of grace for His church. But they are not the only means of grace. Scripture identifies several others. These include:

Worship Fellowship Prayer Bible Study Sacraments

In the next section, we will look at the government of the church, examining the three basic models of church government which different churches have embraced over the years. Can you guess what form of government Christ the King *Presbyterian* Church embraces? Can you say "elder" in Greek?

VII. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH

The church of Jesus Christ is a living organism made up of many different organs and parts. Paul likens the church to a body (I Corinthians 12:12-31), to a temple (Ephesians 2:21), and Peter carries the motif further by saying that we are living stones being fitted together to form a spiritual house, God's holy habitation (I Peter 2:5). What these passages also have in common is a reference to structure, citing that some parts are particularly gifted in certain areas for oversight, teaching, administration, etc. (cf Ephesians 4:11ff)

This latter passage is especially informative, since it shows Jesus Christ to be the King and Head of the Church, and the one who actually gifts His people for service. This gifting is organizational in nature - it gives the organism organization. Thus, the government of the church is a divine blessing given by God for the good of His church. But what kind of government did Jesus leave us? Are we to figure it out for ourselves or does the Scripture give us details? A survey of the church shows three operational models of church government: Hierarchical, Congregational and Presbyterian.

A. Hierarchical

The Hierarchical system of government may actually have its roots in ancient Israel. It began with a desire on the part of Israel to have a king like the other nations - a notion that God only accommodated in order to give Israel what they deserved! - He was their king and they were a theocracy. Under the theocracy of God, Israel was to be a kingdom of priests - a witness to the nations. But with the introduction of an earthly king, the shift was made to an authority vested in humans.

Perhaps the most powerful influence upon the government of the church came when Constantine made Christianity favorable within the Roman Empire and Eusebius of Caesarea developed a theology which would eventually assure that Christianity would become the state religion of Rome. The emperor would become the virtual leader in all matters both secular and ecclesiastical. It is this confluence between the secular power of the Roman Empire and the early church that was the beginning of the Roman Catholic church. And, of course, the Roman Catholic church, and later the Greek Orthodox Church, and the much later Anglican Church all have inherited hierarchical forms of church government.

A hierarchical government simply means that there is a hierarchy in the flow of power. Authority comes from the top down. The Pope represents the top, and his claim to be the successor to the throne of Peter, and to be the vicar of Christ, means that he possesses sole authority over the church. This is best demonstrated by the doctrine of infallibility - the idea that when the Pope speaks "ex cathedra" His words are the very words of Christ. The result of this kind of government upon the church has been devastating. History is replete with examples of abuses of power, corruptions and every imaginable form of departure from Biblical orthodoxy.

B. Congregational

Congregational churches are the polar opposites from hierarchical churches. They are typically independent, and are ruled by the simple majority of the voting congregation. This is a pure democracy in action. The strength of the congregational system is that of local authority. It is very grass roots, with very little political overhead. Ironically, this very autonomy and popular rule also creates its greatest weakness. There is no system of accountability to hold a congregation responsible and faithful to Biblical orthodoxy. And the simple majority rule has left in its wake a trail of church splits, where the disenfranchised minority simply leaves and starts elsewhere. But perhaps the greatest irony is the current phenomenon of congregational church becoming, for all practical purposes, local expressions of hierarchical churches. This happens when, due to a lack of in house leadership and denominational accountability, the pastor - usually a charismatic and powerful personality, creates a church after his own image, and lords it over the congregation, who, in turn, are wowed into submission by his personae.

C. Presbyterian

Presbyterianism derives its name from the Greek word for elder - presbuteros. A body of elders is known as a presbuterion - a presbytery. It is the conviction of Presbyterians (of course) that presbyterianism, as a form of church government, is the most thoroughly biblical government known to man. And not, it might be added, without good reason. Whereas hierarchicalism derives its origins from the government of the Roman Empire, and congregationalism is rooted in the humanistic individualism of the Enlightenment, Presbyterianism has its origin in the Scriptures!

Rule by elders is not limited to the New Testament. There are hundreds of references to elders as rulers over Israel. But it is in the New Testament that the office of elder finds its clearest definition. The obvious passages are I Timothy 3 and Titus 1:5-2:5. In these passages there are two technical terms used; elder and overseer (from which the term "bishop" comes). These terms seem to be used interchangeably, but overseer may be a term more closely aligned with minister, an elder who oversees. It is for this reason that the Presbyterian Church in America distinguishes between those elders who are called to rule and govern, and those who are called upon and gifted to minister the Word and sacraments.

In Presbyterian churches, the spiritual oversight of the church is given to the elders. They have the responsibility to shepherd the flock, oversee the preaching ministry, determine the right use of funds, oversee the teaching ministry and administer discipline. The body of elders is called a Session. Each session is comprised of those who have demonstrated the qualifications found in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1, and have been duly nominated and elected by the congregation. This representative form of government

is, in fact, the very biblical model of government that our forefathers created in the constitutional republic of the United States of America. In the session, the pastor acts as the moderator of the meetings and sets the agenda - with input from the elders. In fact, the pastor does not have a vote in the session, except in the case of breaking a tie. The ruling elders hold the pastor, or teaching elder, accountable for his personal conduct and ministry. The congregation gives all due honor and submission to the session, whom they have prayerfully and carefully given the privileges and responsibilities of oversight.

The pastor, or teaching elder, is not a member of the local church. His membership, and primary source of oversight, is with the local presbytery. A presbytery is a local voluntary affiliation of churches within the geographical bounds of a particular area. Presbyteries typically meet quarterly, and each church in the presbytery is represented by a teaching and ruling elder. The beauty of churches affiliating together is seen in the pooling of spiritual and material resources in accomplishing ministry. Mission churches, both home and foreign, are often established and funded through the collaborative efforts of churches in presbyteries. It also falls to presbyteries to maintain biblical faithfulness and discipline the pastors of local churches. In this system, no church within the denomination may call a pastor until he has been thoroughly examined by the presbytery in areas of theological integrity, church government, knowledge of the Bible (including the use of original languages), church history and personal piety. It is this collective oversight and accountability which helps insure that PCA churches maintain high standards in ministry.

Not only do churches have representation at the local level through participation in presbyteries, but each church is also represented denominationally at the annual General Assembly. At the General Assembly meetings, each agency of the denomination gives its report to the churches. The four major agencies, or committees of the PCA are: **Committee on Administration** - sort of an informational clearinghouse; **Committee on Christian Education** - a resource for teaching aids; **Committee on Mission to North America** - assists churches and presbyteries in the planting of new churches; and **Committee on Mission to the World** - oversees the over six hundred career missionaries and their works, and coordinates short term mission projects. These agencies have no other authority than that which has been granted by the churches and presbyteries. In this way, presbyterianism is both grass roots and representative. Every decision has to be approved by the presbyteries, who in turn are representative of the local churches. In addition, the G/A oversees the two denominational schools, *Covenant College* and *Covenant Seminary*, and *Ridgehaven*, our retreat and conference center in the North Carolina mountains.

To see an overall view of the denomination and its various committees and agencies, see the chart on the following page.

Presbyterian Church in America Ecclesiastical Model



"True to the Scriptures, the Reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ"

D. A Word Concerning the Other Officers of the Church

Elders are not the only ordained officers in the church. According to Acts chapter 6, the main duty of the elders was spiritual oversight – the ministry of the word and sacraments. Because they were becoming distracted by serving those who had needs, the office of Deacon was established. These deacons were good and godly men who were set apart to address the physical/material needs of those in the church. At Christ the King PCA, our deacons are charged with the responsibility to take care of the members first, then to seek to minister to those in the community who have needs which can be met by the grace and mercy of Christ through the church.

VIII. THE DISCIPLINE IN DISCIPLESHIP

We hope this overview has been helpful to you in assisting you concerning your desire to participate in this ministry. Again, let it be emphasized that one needn't be completely in accord with our Reformed theological convictions, nor our view of baptism, nor our view of eschatology, nor our view of church government, to be a member in good standing. What is necessary is a credible testimony that Jesus Christ is, in fact one's Lord and Savior, and a willingness to support this ministry to the best of one's ability and submit to the government and discipline of Christ the King Presbyterian church. This we take very seriously. The pastor and the elders are always at your disposal to hear your comments, criticisms and questions. But please do not join the church if your differences with us are so substantial as to make it impossible to support this ministry. And please don't join in the hopes of beginning a movement to "throw the bums out".

Most importantly, know that in joining this church you are pledging yourself to act responsibly and biblically. You must understand that any member who fails to live up to the questions of covenant listed on pages 27 through 29 will likely face a process of discipline following the pattern of Matthew 18:15-20 and I Corinthians 5: personal exhortation, a visit from the elders, possible suspension from the Lord's Table and, if necessary, even removal from the church roles - excommunication. Again, the purpose of every step of church discipline has the following in mind: The honor of the name of Jesus Christ, the purity of His church, and the restoration, through repentance, of the offender.

If, after all of this, you desire to join Christ the King Presbyterian Church, call the pastor and set up an appointment for an interview with the session. Also, please take some time and fill out the Ministry Survey Form on the following pages. We would like to know what you would like to do to serve Christ and His people as a member of this church. It is our prayer that you will find your spiritual home at Christ the King PCA. If there is ever anything the pastor or anyone at the church can do for you, please do not hesitate to call the church office. May God bless you and yours as you seek His will in living a life to the glory of God.