

September 25, 2005

The Westminster Confession on Worship (cont'd)
The Worship of the Church, § 2.4-2.8

Basic Points:

1. References to the Church's worship are woven throughout the Westminster documents (as already seen in Chapters 1, 2, 7, and 16 of the Confession.) Understanding the Assembly's view of worship is integral to understanding the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.
2. The covenantal perspective is also woven throughout the Westminster documents and is likewise integral to understanding them. This covenantal perspective is developed further in *The Worship of the Church*.

The Worship of the Church Sections 2.4-2.8

- 2.4 God to be worshipped only as He has revealed in His Word (Chapter 21: "Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day.")
- A. God is "to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might....But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture." (21:1)
 - B. Worship to be offered only to the Triune God, through Christ's mediation alone. Prayer to be offered "with reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love and perseverance." (21:2-4)
 - C. The parts of "the ordinary religious worship of God" include the reading, preaching and hearing of the Word of God, the singing of psalms, and the administration of the sacraments. (21:5)

- D. Worship not tied to a particular place. God to be worshipped in families and in private devotions and “more solemnly in the public assemblies which are not carelessly or willfully to be neglected.” (21:6)
- E. The Christian Sabbath the weekly day for the worship of God; the day centered on the worship of God, public and private. (21:7,8)

2.5 A mark of the true Church is the purity of its worship
(Chapter 25: “Of the Church.”)

- A. God gave to the Church “the ministry, oracles and ordinances of God”, which are the public means of grace. (25:1)
- B. God’s presence and Spirit make the means effective. (25:3)
- C. “Particular churches...are more or less pure according as...public worship [is] performed more or less purely in them.” (25:4)
- D. Some churches have degenerated badly, but “there shall always be a church on earth to worship God according to his will.” (25:5)

2.6 Saints are bound together in the Worship of God
(Chapter 26: “Of Communion of Saints.”)

- A. The holy bond that unites Christians is visibly expressed when they assemble for worship: “Saints by profession, are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification” (26:2)

2.7 The Sacraments are Signs and Seals of the Covenant of Grace
(Chapter 27: “Of the Sacraments”, Chapter 28: “Of Baptism”, Chapter 29: “Of the Lord’s Supper”)

In the weekly public assemblies, the saints review God’s covenant with them and renew their part in it. Westminster’s covenantal perspective is seen most clearly in the Confession’s treatment of the sacraments.

- A. The sacraments “are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace.” They “confirm our interest” in Christ, and “put a visible difference between Christians and the world”. They also “solemnly...engage [the partakers] to the service of God in Christ, according to his word.” (27:1)
- B. Baptism is the sacrament for “the solemn admission...into the visible church, but also...a sign and seal of the covenant of grace.” (28:1)
- C. The Lord’s Supper is not a private matter, but “a bond and pledge of [the partakers’] communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body.”

2.8 Summary of the Westminster Assembly’s Doctrine of Worship

Two themes run through the Confession’s teaching about worship:

- A. More obviously, an emphasis on the Church’s obligation to offer worship that is pure, both inwardly and outwardly.
- B. An emphasis on worship that is covenantal. This will be developed further in weeks 7 and 8 of this class.