

Historical Overview, III: English Puritans, Scottish & American Presbyterians

Let us pray.

You are the object of our worship, Lord. We pray that these truths that are spoken from Your Word would sink deep in our hearts. We pray that the principles that Scripture helps us ascertain would be real and would help us love our congregants better. Amen.

We are continuing our historical overview of worship. We are now focusing on English puritans, Scottish Presbyterians, and American Presbyterians. There is a whole lot of biblical and historical material that we are not able to incorporate into this one worship class. Part of the blessing of the rest of the seminary curriculum is having church history classes, Bible classes, exegesis class, and so on. I am trying to lift, with faithfulness to the Scripture, the worship eyes of the Scripture. I am trying to give enough historical context that it makes some sense. We are not dealing with Eastern Orthodoxy virtually at all. We went pretty quickly to the Reformation, and now we are coming up to the present day as we go. In the heritage of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) our system of doctrine that we hold to is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. We are going to be moving toward understanding what those documents teach about worship and how we are to understand them. As a result, we will be able to find our way through a lot of ongoing discussion and disagreements even within Presbyterian circles about worship practice in particular. We will be lingering a little bit in the time frame around when those documents were formed and first written.

In 1553 a number of believers in Scotland and England were being brought back to the church of England. This was happening because of Roman Catholicism. They were under Rome again, so Protestants had to flee. There were displaced English puritans and Scottish Presbyterians who went to other parts more sympathetic to the Reformation at the time. There are three main areas where these displaced people from the British Isles went. One was Frankfurt, another was Zurich, and a third was Geneva. I have gotten the backdrop for this from the doctoral dissertation written by R. J. Gore. He is the academic dean and professor at Erskine Seminary in Due West, South Carolina. Dr. Gore has written a recent book called *Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle of Worship*. His doctoral dissertation at Westminster Seminary is where he focuses in particular on the impact of these displaced people when they were outside the British Isles. And he looks at how that influenced debate and discussion when they came back. We talked about Calvin coming under the influence of Butzer in Strasbourg. Similarly, these future leaders and those who would form how worship would be done came under the influences in these key cities.

In a sense, going to Frankfurt, Zurich, or Geneva would be like asking which seminary you will go to. It will have an impact on the theological and biblical shaping and practice of the Christian faith. There are English speakers in these places, so they form their own English-speaking congregation within them. John Knox pastored the English-speaking congregation in Geneva, Switzerland while he was under the influence of the French-speaking Calvin and others. In Frankfurt, the focus as they came back was more on the German Reformation and Luther's influence of having the right fixed forms. Their determination in coming back to England was to have the Church of England, which was now Protestant again, to get the right forms. If they revised the prayer book, then they would have worship be more faithful to the Bible. Those who went to Zurich came under the influence of those who followed Zwingli. Remember what we have already said about Zwingli. When they came back, by comparison, they basically wanted to eliminate liturgical forms and structure. You can see my biases, but I think I am being historically accurate. These are broad, sweeping statements, and I am relying on Dr. Gore to some degree here.

Those who went to Geneva were under the influence of Calvin. One of these men was John Knox who came back to Scotland. His focus was more of an influence on worship reform with flexibility.

You can see these things reflected in the people who came back. There were people who wanted to work within the Church of England and bring reform to the prayer book. There were Scottish Presbyterians under the influence of Knox and the Scots Confession who wanted to do it a whole lot more like Calvin at Geneva. And there were the English puritans who were working to purify the Church of England with more radical change. One example would be that there were puritan pastors who wanted to preach for an hour and exposit the Scripture with lots of application. But there were certain approved 10-15 minute homilies that were all that the Church of England was allowing. In its top-down mandating, the church was saying they could not preach the way they wanted to. They could only preach the approved pre-written homilies. So the puritans rebelled against that or the use of vestments. Anything that smacked of Rome, the English puritans wanted to come over to the other side and be against it. You will see that is some of the shaping of what we are looking at today. Knox, in his return to Scotland in 1559, immediately went to work writing a confession. It is called *The Scots Confession of 1560*. There were other people who gave input to it, but it is pretty much Knox's document that was approved by the other people at the time. One of the things you see as you read this is a recognition in regard to matters of worship of a variety of applications. Part of that was taking things he learned from Calvin and seeing that the application of those worship principles in Scotland would look a little bit different. It would not feel like it was being unfaithful to biblical and Reformed worship even though it would be a little different from Calvin. He had the sense that there was no one order to be appointed for all ages, times, and places. The central focus was on the elements of the Word, prayer, singing, and the Lord's Supper. If you think back to what we said earlier when I talked about worship in the early church, the content was Christ; the structure was Word and sacrament plus prayer and praise. It is very similar here. Word and sacrament, prayer and praise, in its simplest form, are the basic building blocks of a worship service.

Let us talk about the English puritans and the regulative principle of worship. We will discuss the regulative principle of worship more specifically later, but there are few things we will get into right away. The English puritans associated the use of the Lord's Prayer, the singing of the doxology, the reciting of the Apostles' Creed, and multiple Scripture readings in a worship service with the Episcopacy. This is what the Church of England required all the churches to do in all of their various places. You always have the Apostles' Creed; you always have the Lord's Prayer. You read from the lectionary, in which you have an Old Testament reading, a Gospel reading, an Epistle reading, and maybe a psalm reading. And you always sing the doxology. This is a case where it is a little bit of an overreaction. There were some things wrong with the Church of England that seemed to be around fixed forms. For example, there was the required homily instead of a sermon preached from your own heart, study, and presentation.

That does not necessarily mean that the praying of the Lord's Prayer every week is bad, though. Sometimes there were things that we unnecessarily linked to the way these people did it. You see it even to this day. One of the reasons that at my church there is resistance to the use of the Apostles' Creed is because people grew up in churches where it was said every week, but nobody there believed it, in their opinion. There is an associating of the words of this creed and this form with people who thought it was empty formalism. There was a woman in a church that I pastored one time who objected to the song *O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus*. She went to a Catholic girls' school. Every Friday at the Mass during the school day they sang *O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus*. She became a Christian later in her life, and every time she hears that song she associates it with all the things that she has now come out of and rejected. Whether they taught her this or not, under Catholicism she viewed Christianity as a works righteousness religion. The words of the song do not communicate that at all, though. She told me about her difficulty

with it. She said that when we sing that song she could not sing it because of her association. What do you do about that as a pastor? You try to be sensitive to it. And you focus on associating new proper things with the hymn and these words about the love of Jesus. How can we get you to think about the love of Jesus when we sing this song instead of all the bad things about the Roman Catholic girls' school you went to? She got to the point by the time I was done pastoring there of saying that she was almost all right with it. She did not cringe any more when she saw that that song was in the bulletin, and she was actually able to sing along a little bit.

There were two major views among the English puritans. One group was called the Latitudinarians and the other group was called the Brownists. The Latitudinarians felt that specific forms of worship were not prescribed in the Scripture but left to man to decide. They could vary. Whether or not you used the Lord's Prayer could vary from place to place and in different circumstances. The Brownists were stricter. They rejected all use of service books and liturgies. They were opposed to read prayers, the use of the *Gloria Patri*, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and kneeling for prayer as the pastor entered the pulpit. This was a common practice among the Scottish Presbyterians as well. They were against those things because they were wrapped up too much with mandated forms in their minds.

The Westminster Assembly was a gathering of English puritans with a few Scottish Presbyterians present to give input. It was predominately a document of the English puritans. Chapter 21 of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* is the chapter on worship. Point One says, "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 worshiped 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." When you hear those words you might get an overwhelming sense of negative intone. This is a place in the *Confession* where it is clear that they are speaking against somebody who does some things that they do not think they should do. They have captured some wonderful things: the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself. He is the One who decides how He wants to be worshiped. It is limited by His revealed will. It should be within the boundaries of what He has set. It would be nice if it said something in here about being free to explore and express that within those boundaries. But that is not going to come through at this time and in this place. It says a lot about how God should not be worshiped. But it does not say how He should be worshiped. That is the problem. It is mostly negative. I agree that God should not be worshiped in any way that is not prescribed in the Holy Scripture. The challenge with this statement is knowing what exactly is prescribed in Scripture. How much room is there in the expression of those things? What is prescribed in Holy Scripture are the elements or the building blocks of worship. He has left it to a lot of freedom, as I will try to convince you of if you are not already. I will give you room to not be convinced, too, if that is where you come out from Scripture before the Lord. But I think He does give us some room.

Gore explores the relationship of this statement by the English puritans in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* with Calvin. It is an interesting study. He does a little bit of that in his book on covenantal worship. He does more of that in his Westminster Seminary dissertation. Gore says that Calvin's regulating of worship as practiced by early Presbyterians "provided essential parameters necessary for biblical worship while allowing for expression of freedom in matters not deemed essential." Sometimes we have a fear that how we use our freedom could get carried away and go past the boundaries. Therefore we will hone it in. This relates to a lot of things, not just corporate public worship. It is more of a mindset. On some matters, where my fears are, I am guilty of this as well.

Let us suppose that the four walls of a room represent the boundaries of the regulative principle of worship, what God has prescribed. We are invited into this room, and we are told to stay in this room.

One of two things could happen. We could focus on how big this room is, how much room we have, and accept the boundaries. Or we could be afraid we are going to be looking out the windows to the next room. To keep us from getting too close to going outside of the boundaries, we are going to build a little closet in the middle of this worship room with no windows in it to make sure we never go out through the door. Sometimes we are in danger of spending all our time looking out the window and trying to figure out how we can bump the wall out. That is a dangerous place to be. But it is equally as dangerous to build a more confining room within the room God has given us. We are not to take away from Scripture or add to Scripture. Both are wrong. J. I. Packer, who is an Anglican, said, “the English puritan idea that direct biblical warrant in the form of precept or precedent is required to sanction every item included in the public worship of God was in fact a puritan innovation which crystallized out in the course of the prolonged debates that followed the Elizabethan settlement. When the puritans challenged the principle that each church has liberty to ordain non-biblical ceremonies and worship where these seem conducive to edification and reverence, when they repudiated all set prayers, when they rejected kneeling in public worship, the Christian year, weekly communion, and the practice of confirmation, they were not, in fact, reverting to Calvin but departing from him though it is doubtful whether they realized it.”

By such a statement he does not endear himself to certain Presbyterians. It is a pretty strong statement. It is a good statement, though. It helps us understand some of the historical context and dynamics. They did not say, “We are going to make it this way.” They responded to other dynamics that were going on at the time. It is important to look at the historical context. It baffles me that when we open the Scripture, we ask where we are in the story and what the historical context of this narrative or teaching is. But when we turn to *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, we treat it as though it is ahistorical. We think that it is not rooted anywhere and there is nothing going on in terms of worship conflict at the time of its writing, to be specific to our course. We do more contextualization of the Scripture sometimes than we do of *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. That is problematic in a lot of ways. It prevents us from allowing the Confession and the catechisms to be the blessing they can be for us. It is not that I want to do away with them; I want them to be what they should be for us as the people of God.

Let us talk about the historical context of the Confession. There were fears of the abuse of freedom that produced what Frame and others have called a minimalist approach to worship in the Confession. In the larger context, parliament had called the Westminster Assembly. This was not the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America. It was a gathering of an assembly under the authority of the state. There was a campaign to death, as some have called it, that led to civil war that was going on over the very issues that were being debated biblically and theologically by the Westminster fathers. Charles I, the king of England, was beheaded in the context of all of this. The stakes are pretty high.

The question that some have raised when it comes to matters of worship is if they came up with a bare bones approach. In their zeal to not do more than was commanded in the Bible, did they end up doing less? That is an important question to ask. Does the regulative principle of worship as understood then apply to actually doing all that the Bible does command and not just making sure that we do not do what it does not command? Are they so concerned not to have imposed worship from the church above that they imposed a minimalist uniform form that was necessary to consider being biblical? Essentially how worship worked its way out into the English puritans’ worship services was to have a very long sermon that was surrounded by lined out songs. A lined out song is done by having a musical presenter stand in front of the congregation and sing the first line of the psalm. For example, from Psalm 100 he would sing, “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord.” Then the congregation would sing it back. Then the presenter would sing the next line. It is a good way to learn a song. Except decades later, after the congregation knows it all by heart, they are still lining out the psalms because that it is the right way to sing the songs.

You have turned a method of learning how to sing the songs into the only right way to sing. We have to be careful about valid application of biblical principles that then get carried too far. The biblical principle of lining out songs is that the congregation needs to sing with understanding. They need to be taught. This is a very effective way of doing it. But at some point that application of the biblical principle, once they have learned it, does not need to be done anymore. You do not have to do it the same way to still accomplish something that actually would be better by not doing it that way.

The Westminster Directory of Worship is not something I take a vow of subscription to. As a teaching elder in the PCA I take a vow of subscription to the *Westminster Confession* and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. But they also produced the directory of worship, and they talk about the acts of the assembly in it. Gore points this out in his dissertation, and Frame hints at in *Worship in Spirit and Truth*. The directory says, “We have perfected and transmitted a directory for worship to both houses of parliament which we hope will be to the joy and comfort of all our godly and dear brethren in all his majesties, kingdoms, and dominions. We have not advised any imposition which might make it unlawful to vary from it in anything and albeit we have not expressed in the directory every minute particular which is or might be either laid aside or retained among us as comely and useful in practice.” First, they have a grand vision for the directory. They also give a little bit of freedom. And they say they have not included everything in there that might be useful in worship. Nor are they insisting that what they have included in all of its minute detail has to be followed. Those who wrote the directory of worship have to be coordinated with those who also wrote Chapter 21 of the *Confession* in some way. And those authors gave a sense that worship could breathe a little bit. After all, they had a sense that they were writing some documents for future generations beyond their own. These fathers in the faith had a much more generational view than many of us do in the consumer, instant gratification, short view vision that we often have in North American churches today. To continue it says, “Yet we trust that none will be so tedious of old customs not expressly forbidden or so averse from good examples although new in matters of lesser consequence as to insist upon their liberty of retaining the one or refuse the other because not specified in the directory but be studious to please others rather than themselves.” This is an incredible statement! I was trying to figure out where I was going to land on some things when I was writing my doctoral dissertation on a biblical historical and contemporary look at the regulative principle of worship. This statement that I found by this writer quoting from the acts of the assembly, including the idea of the richness of the past and the freshness of the present, was the one statement that comes out in my dissertation. It captures most of the work that I have done. The idea of preferring others in love, not insisting in my way, and giving liberty to others feels more like a room that we can move about in rather than a closet that we are locked in. They were telling and presenting to parliament what they had done with their directory of worship.

Let us move onto American Presbyterianism. Both Scottish Presbyterians and English puritans came to the United States. My brother-in-law has done some history of my wife’s family. My brother-in-law and I were looking at some of the genealogical records that he had and discovered something interesting. There was a guy born in Plymouth, England who got married in Laden, Holland to a French Huguenot woman, and he died in Plymouth, New England. He was one of the guys who fled first to Holland and then to North America. He left over some of the issues related to this as the Church of England was putting more and more pressure on the puritans and beginning to persecute them along the way. Apparently this is where the pilgrims went. They were the separatists. They were even more radical in some ways than some of the puritans at the time of *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. They came in the second boat of pilgrims that came to Plymouth colony in the United States. There were also Scottish Presbyterians of various kinds coming over. Some were connected with the Church of Scotland. Some were even more extreme like the Scottish Covenanters. We continue to have the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. Geneva College, where I worked for seven years, is controlled by that

denomination. Today you have the Free Presbyterians in Scotland. The unity of the church has been something lacking in many ways.

In coming to the United States, American Presbyterianism reflected a larger tension in Protestantism between pietistic Protestantism and traditional Protestantism. This happened particularly as the church landed here; there were the great awakenings and the move toward the frontier. Western Pennsylvania was the frontier at one time. So among pietistic Protestantism is an anti-liturgical movement. It would match what you see in the English puritans many years earlier. Then there are others who want to maintain historic liturgies. The whole question of form and freedom is an ongoing debate. It is there in ecclesiology and church government as well. There is top-down rule by bishops, there is congregational rule with no one over them wider than the local congregation, and there is Presbyterianism. Presbyterianism has elders at a local level and teaching elders at a regional level. There is form beyond the local church, but it is not top-down rule by bishops. There is a parallel between ecclesiastical church government and form and practice of worship. In some way this is reflective of how you answer the questions of form versus freedom. Presbyterians historically, on things like church government and worship practice, have said form and freedom within that form. This is compared to having a form that is implemented everywhere or having total freedom where individual churches decide.

The influence of revivals in North America on corporate public worship was huge. Evangelistic preaching in large, open-air meetings began to influence the preaching from the pulpit in the churches. The closest thing for us today is like a Billy Graham Crusade. There is evangelistic preaching by Billy Graham and there is special pop music. The same sort of thing was happening then. A lot of the traveling evangelists would have traveling musicians with them. There was spontaneous prayer. It was not the more formal preaching expository of the Scripture, traditional hymnody, and prayers that follow a form and structure. Instead there were things that were happening out there as the Gospel went to the frontier with open-air preaching campaigns. It was evangelistic preaching, popular music, and spontaneous prayer. People who were converted under that style wanted their church experience to be like that also. There is the debate about what was most effective. The whole seeker-sensitive church growth topic is not something that happened in the 1980s in North America. It happened in the 1780s, the 1880s, and in between in North America. It impacted Presbyterians in America in that it moved away from the rejection of exclusive psalm singing. All Presbyterians used to have this view coming from Scotland. Instead they began to use the paraphrased, Christ-centered songs of Isaac Watts. To some Scottish Presbyterians he is the worst thing that ever happened to music and worship. To others he is the best thing that ever happened. It brings music and worship into the New Testament. They also began using organs and choirs. This was not done in Presbyterianism historically; there were no organs and no choirs.

I am particularly sensitive to this because I spent seven years at Geneva College, the official college of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America. They sing only the psalms and metrical psalms with no instrumental accompaniment except the first note on a pitch. I learned to appreciate the Psalms so much by having to sing only them. But they are the ones who taught me this progressive biblical unfolding of the covenants. With song and worship they stopped at the Psalter, though. They did not bring song and worship on into this progression that they taught me. My understanding of progressive unfolding covenantal history of redemption I did not learn at Pittsburgh Seminary. I learned it at Geneva College when I had to start teaching in their Bible department. I like to say to them that they are the ones who taught me that song and worship should be singing of the Savior explicitly. After all, that is what we are singing in heaven. We are singing, "Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain." They do not have organs, any instruments, or choirs. That is a battle for some. They desire to have the next generation appreciate psalm singing. As I told you earlier, I am a convinced inclusive psalmist. We need to sing

psalms, but not exclusively. One of the ways we can get the next generation to enjoy singing the Psalms is to not have them tied to metrical tunes that have been around for 200 years. It is not just the singing of psalms; it is the singing of psalms out of the old Psalters that are more like the lined-out psalms. You can bring some of the new Indelible Grace tunes to the Psalms because of the metrical nature of the Psalms. My two older children graduated from Geneva. They invited me back to preach at my son Stephen's baccalaureate service a few years ago. The chaplain was a young man I had discipled when I was the chaplain there. He was very influential in my children's lives. He was a covenanter but had some sympathies beyond strict covenanterism. I told him that I was planning to preach on Psalm 51, and I wondered if I ever had special music at baccalaureate. He responded that usually the Geneva college choir usually sings some psalm specials. I asked if I could have Stephen sing Psalm 51 out of the 1912 Psalter as part of the baccalaureate service. I wanted him to sing it to a different tune, though. It was the Chris Miner tune with the words taken straight out of the 1912 metrical Psalter. The chaplain said that would not be possible. I told him that when I was there the head of the music department was writing some new tunes to the Psalms. The chaplain explained that it was different because he was a covenanter head of the music department. He would not let it go beyond musical boundaries. If it is college students at Belmont University creating new songs, it might be too much for the covenanter context.

It was so sad to me because I long to have my grandchildren appreciate the singing of the Psalms. But for it to happen somebody has to help bridge the value of psalm singing to them in a way that musically has some connectedness. It is the same thing with the hymns today. It is one of the great things about the retuning of hymns. You can arrange them in ways that bring a little syncopation. The psalms that were sung in Geneva, Switzerland had critics, too. Some people said they were too lively and called them "Geneva Jigs." They made people want to dance because they were so lively. So they flattened them out and made them have the same value to every note with no syncopation or holding. A hymn may rise and fall, go somewhere, and accomplish the carrying of a message. But by the time you get to the sixth stanza, it is not as interesting as something that might have a little syncopation to it or different values to different notes along the way. A hundred years from now perhaps Covenant students will love a hymn like "All for Jesus" as the Covenant hymn as much as or more than students do now. This might be because it has been reinvented musically without altering its substance. It could have various alternate tunes. If you look in the old Trinity hymnal, there are five tunes to Psalm 23. The nuances of the psalm are so rich that there can be multiple musical settings to it. Back to the covenanters, my longing is that if we want to sing more psalms, let us do it in a way that will engage the rising generation. Some might say that they do not want to have anything to do with singing psalms. But they could fix that and make it better if they were not so tied to a particular form of doing biblical worship, even within the framework of only psalms without instruments. There is an important principle there.

In the movement of Presbyterianism to the frontier, there was the resistance as time went on of the old school Presbyterians. There was a debate on how much theological training a pastor needed to have in order to be ordained. Some thought it was better to have someone with some training to be ordained to be a pastor in a frontier rather than no pastor. It is almost like what we hear from Desire Street Ministries and Mo Leverett. He wants to find some alternate way to get theological training for indigenous people to be trained and lead their own folks in the pastoring, preaching, and shepherding of the flock. That debate is not new. There was also debate over the level of subscription to the Westminster Standards. There is not much new under the sun. As you look back in history you see some of these things. The old school Presbyterians were against the influence of popular culture into worship practice in the name of biblical faithfulness. There are lines that can be crossed by saying if it is popular let us use it in worship to bring people in. there are lines we should not cross in that. So you have to respect those who see the danger of just adopting the practices of the culture in everything we do in the church. This can apply to evangelistic methodology, preaching, the use of drama, Power Point, or

electric guitars. These Presbyterians brought both doctrinal and aesthetic critiques of populous worship practices. Nineteenth century southern Presbyterianism is, in the minds of many people, the glory years of southern Presbyterianism. Dr. Calhoun, who has written great histories of southern Presbyterian churches, believes that the greatest opposition to the populous movements in American Presbyterianism came in nineteenth-century southern Presbyterianism. That is our roots; that is why we have some of the debates we have today. He also stated that he believes the strictest and most narrow formulation of the regulative principle of worship in America was nineteenth-century southern Presbyterianism. That helped me understand, as a northerner in particular, why I ended up writing a dissertation on worship. It helped me understand things in a northern PCA church that I was pastoring at the time. So it is helpful to understand the context. Now we try to figure out how to understand, affirm, and apply the regulative principle of worship, to the degree that it is rooted in Scripture, in our day and our time. How big is this room of doing worship the way God wants us to do it? Where have we knocked out walls that we need to bring back in a little bit to be faithful to the Scripture? Where have we built walls within where God allows us to be that we need to knock down and have some freedom to move around? That is going to be an ongoing discussion for a long time.

The PCA book of church order has a couple of interesting statements in Chapter 47. If you know anything about church polity in the PCA, you know that the directory for worship is not constitutionally binding, except the chapters on the sacraments. It is what we sometimes call pious advice. The pious advice of the directory for worship in 47.1 says, “Since the holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice, the principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible and from no other source.” That is our sole, ultimate authority. In 47.6 it says, “The Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no fixed forms for public worship, but in the interest of life and power in worship has given His church a large measure of liberty in this matter.” I like those. If I were writing a directory for worship I would put some similar things in there. It would probably not be stated nearly as well. This was probably a compilation of many people giving input into how that precise wording should be.

The Book of Church Order is basically the constitution of the PCA. It says our only infallible rule of faith and practice is the Bible. It also says that the amended *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the Larger and Shorter Catechism are the system of doctrine taught in the Scripture. The amendments of the *Confession* relate to church-state issues and acknowledging that the pope is not the antichrist. The Book of Church Order goes through things like how to form new churches and vows that ordained elders and deacons have to take. It says how to go about planning a church or ordaining a pastor. It also addresses the rules of discipline, how to deal with unrepentant sin or heresy in an orderly fashion. The third part is a directory of worship. So it consists of a form of government, rules of discipline, and a directory of worship. The quotes I have given are from within the directory of worship. The directory of worship altogether has been considered the general instruction to the church regarding worship. You have the *Westminster Confession*, the Larger Catechism, and the Shorter Catechism. They came up with a form of government as well and a directory for worship. The doctrinal statements, the form of government, and the rules of discipline are binding. The directory of worship is not binding, though.

Some controversies came up about how to fence the table at the Lord’s Supper. There is a phrase in the Book of Church Order in Chapter 54, which says to invite all those who are members in good standing of an evangelical church to the table. There were some people who felt like that was more restrictive than the Scripture. They said to tie church membership as we now know it in Presbyterian circles was too restrictive. In a lot of churches you are considered a member even though you go through no formal process of submitting to the elders, deacons, or whoever has authority in the church. I was part of an examining committee of a pastor who came for ordination who said that he did not agree with that restriction. He said ordinarily that should be the case, but he could imagine some exceptions to that. He

was going to be a church planter in the inner city. He said he may lead somebody to Christ on a Thursday. And if they gave testimony to him of their faith in Christ, he wanted to have the freedom to permit them to be admitted to the Lord's Table on Sunday morning. Our presbytery approved this man, but someone appealed our decision and brought it to the General Assembly. It was reversed by the General Assembly. Part of what came out of those debates was to give constitutionally binding authority to the chapters on the sacraments. They said every church everywhere must use this language to fence the table and invite people to come to the Lord's Table. That is why those chapters are singled out. I agree with the principle behind those words.

I would say ordinarily those who are invited to the Lord's Table should have three things. They should be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they should have made public profession of their faith, and they should not have discipline against them from a Bible-believing church. They do not have to be members of our church or members in the same way that we formulate membership. Spiritual accountability is important, though. You cannot just say that you are worthy to come to the table because you think you are. The church, and its authority in our lives, is important in the right administration of the sacraments. I think they made it too binding by using those particular words. A lot of us still do not use exactly those words. We say things that we have not gotten in trouble for. I often say that this table belongs to Jesus Christ. He invites to His table all those who are savingly united to Him by grace through faith. We believe in the right ordering and administering of the sacrament and that such people should make public profession of their faith and be baptized if they have not already. It does not have to be in this church. They should affirm that it is important to be under the spiritual oversight of godly leaders in the church. If that is who you are and you are coming today, trusting in Christ, turning away from all known sin, and desiring to walk in greater Christ-likeness, then we invite you to come to the table. So the guy who came to Christ on Thursday would need to wait until he is baptized to take communion. Baptism is the sacrament of entrance; communion is the ongoing covenant renewal of the sacraments in the church.

Part of what we have done is host new member classes. Sometimes they stretch out for a year, six months, or nine weeks. They are very important, and it is important to get to know people before you let them become members of the church. I think that being converted on Thursday and taking the Lord's Supper on Sunday ought to be more ordinary than it is, perhaps. I have more of a problem of whether or not the person is baptized than I do with whether or not the person is a member in good standing of a church in the way we have formulated that in our Book of Church Order. I think people can be baptized and admitted to the Lord's Table in most places. In the book of Acts, that is what made someone a member of the church. The person was baptized and then came to the Lord's Table. That is what happened in Acts 2 if the breaking of bread actually means the Lord's Supper. They were baptized at Pentecost. They did not go through a nine-week church membership class before they were considered members. They did not keep a membership role. We have brought some things for the sake of order and organization that are helpful. But it has elevated that definition of membership into something that goes beyond the substance of repent, believe, and be baptized. You are part of the Body, you are sitting at the apostle's feet, you are praying, you are declaring God's praise in the courts of the temple daily, and you are breaking bread in the Lord's Supper with His people. That seems to be ordinary in Acts 2 or as the Gospel would go to places.

There is a provision in the Book of Church Order that is controversially interpreted. It says that we can invite to the Lord's Table those who are members in good standing or we can invite those who have been approved by the session. That means you may have a visitor who is not a member of your church, but you make some arrangement whereby he or she meets with the elders before the service. People who traveled around used to take a letter with them. The pastor may say that this person is a member in good

standing of wherever his church is, and he is commended as a brother in Christ who is seeking to grow in godliness and serve the Lord with his life. If you come to a new place and come to me as a pastor, I may contact your previous pastor. How I consider you is partly based on the recommendation of a fellow elder in another place. There is something we have lost in terms of accountability. If people do not like what we do, often times they go to the church down the street. Often people are not asked why they left their previous church. Spiritual accountability is important, but it does not always have to take the form of the specific way we have defined membership. I am less strict about that, personally. I am trying to work within where the PCA is on that topic, and I am trying not to push back unduly.

We will talk more about these things later. In my opinion, a young child who makes personal, genuine profession of faith and is able to articulate that in a childlike way to the session should be admitted to the Lord's Table. Later when he or she is 11 or 12, there should be a PCA doctrine class. The child will have more of a capacity to understand systematically some of the things that relate to what has already happened to him and what he is already experiencing in the Lord's Table. That does not have to wait until you have the adult cognitive level. There has to be some cognitive understanding: God is holy, I am not, Jesus came to die for my sins, and I am trusting in Him. The Lord's Supper is not just getting a little grape juice and wine in the worship service. It means something about who Christ is and what He has done for me. There has to be some cognitive understanding, but not an adult level. It makes sense at different age-appropriate levels to teach more doctrinal, biblical understanding of things. I would say the same thing of a new believer off the street who came to Christ. I would tell her to be in the next round of the pastor's class and the new members' class. But she should be baptized and admitted to the Lord's Table long before the next cycle of that. You can do that based on the General Assembly. The General Assembly does not mandate a pastor's class or a new members' class. I could have her meet with the elders, be admitted into membership, and be baptized. You can have a quick membership process, but the elders need to approve the person for membership, or the person needs to be a member of another evangelical church.