

On Being Presbyterian
Chapter 6 - “A Heart Aflame: Presbyterian and Reformed Piety”

“spirituality” vs. “piety”

Piety = our reverence and love for God along with the practices that express and shape these realities

“Reformed piety is nothing less than how Presbyterians believe that the Christian life should be lived... [T]he Westminster Standards provide excellent guidance on what Reformed piety is and what it should look like.” (p. 100)

orthodoxy and orthopraxy

I. The Root of Reformed Piety: Union With Christ

Q. 66. What is that union which the elect have with Christ?

A. The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God’s grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; which is done in their effectual calling.

(Westminster Larger Catechism)

1 Corinthians 6.17

Ephesians 5.23

Q. 69. What is the communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ?

A. The communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is their partaking of the virtue of his mediation, in their justification, adoption, sanctification, and whatever else, in this life, manifests their union with him.

(Westminster Larger Catechism)

Union with Christ → justification, adoption, sanctification

1 Corinthians 1.30

Union with Christ confers both a new status and an intimate communion with God. This is also the basis of our union and communion with other believers.

II. The Practices of Reformed Piety: Means of Grace

“By using the means of grace, we enjoy communion with God and have assurance that we are united to Christ. We are taught that the way in which Christ communicates the benefits of his mediation – which are ours through union with him – ‘are all his ordinances; especially, the word, sacraments, and prayer ‘ (LC 154). That is to say, the means of our spiritual growth, the very engine of Presbyterian piety, is worship.”

(pp. 103-104)

A. Preached Word

Q. 89. How is the word made effectual to salvation?

A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

(Westminster Shorter Catechism)

Nehemiah 8.5-8

Experiencing the preached Word as a means of grace: preparatory prayer → focused listening → discerning evaluation → meditation → practical application

B. Sacraments

1. Baptism

Q. 167. How is our baptism to be improved by us?

A. The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavouring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.

(Westminster Larger Catechism)

“We are born into this world only once, but we celebrate our birthday year after year throughout life; we are baptized only once, but are to remember our baptism and experience its meaning, and work out its implications, year after year throughout life.” (J.G. Vos)

2. The Lord’s Supper

Q. 75. How are you admonished and assured in the Lord’s supper, that you are a partaker of that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross, and of all his benefits?

A. First, as surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup given to me, so surely his body was offered and broken for me and his blood poured out for me on the cross. Second, as surely as I receive from the hand of the one who serves, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, given me as sure signs

of Christ's body and blood, so surely he nourishes and refreshes my soul for eternal life with his crucified body and poured-out blood.
(Heidelberg Catechism)

“And so, in the Lord’s Supper, we gain assurance, confidence, and boldness in our faith, trusting in the promise of grace found in the meal and resting in that gospel grace for our salvation.” (p. 106)

3. Prayer

Prayer = “an offering up of our desires unto God” (WLC 178)

“[I]t is how we pray that provides the means of our transformation through the work of God’s grace. We are called upon to pray with a full apprehension that God is our King and with an intense realization that we are sinners who would be totally and completely lost without the initiative of God’s grace. Further, as we pray, recognizing who it is that we are addressing and who we are as we address him, our prayers are filled with gratitude to the God and King who saved us; we offer them with understanding, with wholehearted belief in and fervent sincerity toward him, with love and determined perseverance. Finally, we offer our desires up to God with a humble submission to his will, recognizing that he is the King who governs all his creatures and all their actions in accordance with his perfect will.” (pp. 106-107)

4. Worship

God is to be worshipped everywhere, in spirit and truth; as, in private families daily, and in secret, each one by himself; so, more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or willfully to be neglected, or forsaken, when God, by His Word or providence, calleth thereunto.
(Westminster Confession of Faith, 21.6)

Pattern: Individual/Family (6 days) → CORPORATE (Lord’s Day)

“[W]hen our churches gather together for corporate worship on the Lord’s Day, they are gathering not simply as disparate individuals, but as worshipping households who have worshipped together all week long as families.” (pp. 107-108)

5. Singing Praises

“[A] major part of our worship in every sphere, and hence a major part of our piety, is the singing of praises to God. Church historian Hughes Oliphant Old observed that ‘any kind of Protestant spirituality is going to be a singing spirituality.’ Thus, singing the Psalms as well as hymns and other spiritual songs is an important means for enjoying communion with God.” (p. 108)

6. Sabbath-Keeping

“[The Lord’s Day] is meant to be a day of rejoicing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the new creation that has been brought about through him. We are called to ‘make it our delight,’ to use the entire day for resting from our weekday work and for feasting in God’s presence.”
(pp. 108-109)

The blessing of Sabbath-keeping:

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken.
(Isaiah 58.13-14)

7. Service

“Presbyterian piety is concerned not only with our communion with God and the saints in corporate worship, but also with the very practical matter of service toward one another. Our communion with each other commits us to ‘such spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification’ (WCF 26.2).” (p. 109)

Deacons model this service for all believers.

Galatians 6.10

III. The Goal of Reformed Piety: Grateful Growth in Grace

Christian life = a journey

“[W]e do not look for perfection in this life.... [T]he goal of our piety is not a perfect or even ‘moment by moment’ sinlessness, but rather long-term growth in grace, progress in communion with God, and a ‘practice of true holiness’ (WCF 13.1). Our great hope for our growth in grace is ‘the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ’ (WCF 13.3). Any progress that we make in the Christian life is due solely to the sovereign work of God’s Spirit, motivated by God’s amazing grace and rooted in God’s glorious gospel.” (p. 110)