

## Class #9: Wrap-up, Ordination, and Sabbath Views

Uptown Church Sunday School: Hot Topics in the PCA

June 26, 2011

*“Test everything; hold fast what is good.”  
“Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words,  
which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.”*

### Introduction

- Today we will wrap up our long, adventurous study of hot topics and debates in the PCA
- **Prayer**
- **Plan for today's class**
  - Review each of the 6 issues we've covered to reiterate the key points and tie it all together with a view towards our goals from the beginning of the class
  - Discuss what ordination within the PCA looks like – how it works, what are the steps, and what are some of the key doctrinal issues that come up
  - Do a deep dive on one last topic that is often an important one at the ordination level: Sabbath views

### A. Recap of Six Hot Topics

- **Introduction to the class: key principles**
  - Diversity (to a degree) built into the fabric of the PCA: unity along *numerous* key areas – namely, the Westminster Standards and BCO – but there is still healthy diversity of views
    - *Q: What is the constitution of the PCA?*
  - Each church / presbytery seeks to balance various tendencies, but for many there leanings and tendencies: churches emphasize various things
    - Doctrinalist / traditionalist
    - Pietist / experientialist
    - Culturalist / progressivist
  - Key: there is a difference between a debatable view and an invalid view
- **Issue #1: Creation views**
  - *Q: What were the three views we covered regarding the Gen 1-2 creation account?*
  - Day-age view: Creation took place over six consecutive but overlapping ages of indefinite length
    - *Q: When did this view arise?*
  - Framework view: Gen 1-2 is a poetic scheme in which several “pictures” of creation are set within a six-part framework topically, not chronologically
    - *Q: What are the two “halves” of the Framework View?*
    - *Q: When did the Framework View arise?*
    - Genre of Genesis 1-11: poetry / “mythological” with some history
  - Calendar Day view: God created all things in six 24-hr periods

- *Q: What were the key arguments for this view?*
  - Genre of Genesis 1-11: historical narrative
  - “Yom” (Hebrew day)
  - Toledot structure (“these are the generations”)
  - “Vav consecutive”
  - “Sign of the direct object”
  - Lack of poetic features (parallelism and imagery)
  - NT and OT consider creation / Adam / etc. to be factual and the days to be real
- *Q: What is the acceptable position within the broader PCA? Where do Uptown and the CCP fall?*
  - All views are technically acceptable (with caveats); up to presbytery to determine if you must take an official exception over any given view
- **Issue #2: Female deacons / deaconesses**
  - View 1: In favor of the office of deaconess
    - Most in this camp support “commissioning” but not “ordaining” deaconesses as equal (or almost equal) office-bearers as male deacons
    - *Q: What were the common arguments?*
    - Sampling of the arguments: Phoebe (Rom 16:1), use of *diakonos*, deacon is not an office of authority but service
  - View 2: Against the office of deaconess
    - *Q: What were the common arguments on this side?*
    - Sampling of arguments: 1 Tim 3:11 referring to “wives” not “deaconesses”; Phoebe not a “deacon” but a “servant”; lack of OT or NT precedent for women office bearers
  - Outcome of multiple years of PCA debate (2010): “These assistants to the deacons are not officers of the church (BCO 7-2), and, as such, are not subjects for ordination (BCO 17).”
- **Issue #3: The Insider Movement in Missions**
  - Question of what is an acceptable level of contextualization in missions, especially in the Muslim context
    - Note: this is not the same thing as the underground church (C6)
  - *Q: Who can outline what this issue is? What are the main aspects?*
  - Key aspects
    - Removal of “Son of God” and “Father” (and other familial language regarding the Godhead, like “begotten” or “adoption”) due to the perceived offense of Muslims
    - Retention of religious identity as a Muslim
      - Both community and self-identification – still consider yourself a Muslim
      - Do not participate in the visible church but stay in the mosque and continue most or all Muslim religious rituals / prayers / etc.
    - Doctrinal affirmations: e.g., Mohammad was a legitimate prophet; Qu'ran is inspired just like the Bible; trinity?
    - Evangelism techniques: Camel Methodology, etc.

- We covered numerous areas of critique – see online notes
- Outcome of 2011 GA overture 9: translations removing “Son” / “Father” / etc. were pronounced unfaithful; study commission will be formed to study further
- **Issue #4: Inerrancy of Scripture**
  - *Q: What were the two opposing views we covered?*
  - View 1: Infallible but not inerrant (McGowan)
    - Defn: we have no basis for knowing if there are errors or not; either way, it does not matter because God can use an errant Bible to achieve his will
    - Critique: Bible's own view of itself; logical impossibility of infallibility without inerrancy
  - View 2: Incarnational Analogy (Enns)
    - Defn: just as Christ took on all the trappings of flesh, so did the Bible: it fully takes on the erroneous (e.g., creation myths) worldview of the ANE in order to communicate to them; we should expect errors and be okay with it
    - Critique: no biblical support; role of the Spirit in “filtering” wrong views in the authors; nature of inspiration itself; implications on Christology
  - Reformed view: God's Word is inspired, inerrant, and infallible
    - Inspiration: organic, verbal, plenary
    - Inerrant: no errors in the *autographs*; but we also have confidence in the Spirit's superintendence of the copying such that we know most scribal errors and can trust the text we have today
    - Infallible: incapable of erring (though we are)
- **Issue #5: New Perspective on Paul (and Federal Vision)**
  - *Q: Who can summarize the NPP?*
  - Comprehensive reinterpretation of Second Temple Judaism and Paul's theology
  - Covenant nomism: elected into covenant by grace, stay in by works
  - Paul did not break with Judaism; was mainly interested in Gentile inclusion
  - Justification is recognition that you are in the covenant; not an issue of legal standing before God
    - “Righteousness” is not imputed but is a statement that you are in the covenant
    - Present and future aspects of justification
  - You're either on the road to Geneva or to Rome
- **Issue #6: Theology of Sonship**
  - *Q: Who can recall the key points of Sonship?*
    - Emphasis on adoption, living as sons, living by grace / faith; “Daddy”; spiritual orphanism; sanctification by faith
  - *Q: What were some of the main critiques?*
    - Right answer to the wrong problem? Issues with *ordo salutis* / “sanctification by faith.” Lack of balance between faith and obedience of faith. Ability to have assurance. Downplaying third use of the law in sanctification.

- Summary: Sonship has great things to offer, but as with all things it can be improved. Must be self-critical with all sorts of “programs” and such man-made takes on Christianity.

## **B. Ordination Process Overview**

- Question in light of all these “hot topics” - how does the denomination safeguard the flock from teaching elders with errant views? What makes us different than, say, independent Baptist churches that do not have formal oversight?
  - Answer: a rigorous and controlled ordination process
- **General overview of PCA ordination**
  - Only men who have obtained proper licensure from the presbytery may preach in a PCA church
  - Licensure includes
    - statement of inward calling and Christian experience
    - oral / written exam conducted by Presbytery on (i) basic knowledge of biblical doctrine and Westminster Standards, (ii) practical knowledge of Bible content, (iii) basic knowledge of BCO and PCA history
    - oral interview before Presbytery regarding the above
    - provide written sermon on an assigned passage and present orally before Presbytery or a committee of Presbytery
  - Prior to ordination, you must come under care of Presbytery and complete at least a one year internship at Presbytery (which is different than the church internship)
    - BCO: “The Holy Scriptures require that some trial be previously made of those who are to be ordained to the ministry of the Word, both concerning their gifts and concerning their ability to rule as teaching elders, in order that this sacred office may not be degraded by being committed to weak or unworthy men, and that the Church may have an opportunity to form a better judgment respecting the gifts of those to whom this sacred office is to be committed.”
  - If the internship is approved, the candidate still cannot be ordained until he has received a specific calling by a local body (or presbytery or GA).
    - In the meantime, candidates can serve as assistants to ministers, etc. as called by local Sessions
  - The Pastor is elected by the congregation and called to their church
    - Session calls a congregational meeting to elect a pulpit committee
    - Upon identification of candidate, a congregational vote results in a formal written call; this call is then taken to Presbytery
  - Upon acceptance of the call, the candidate is then examined for ordination
  - Ordination process
    - Bachelors + Masters from an approved seminary is required (in most cases)
    - If candidate has previously received licensure or been ordained in a different presbytery, he is required to make note of any change in views he has experienced
    - Examination procedures

- c. Trials for ordination shall consist of:
  - (1) A careful examination as to:
    - (a) his acquaintance with experiential religion, especially his personal character and family management (based on the qualifications set out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:6-9),
    - (b) his knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages,
    - (c) Bible content,
    - (d) theology,
    - (e) the Sacraments,
    - (f) Church history,
    - (g) the history of the Presbyterian Church in America, and
    - (h) the principles and rules of the government and discipline of the church.

A Presbytery may accept a seminary degree which includes study in the original languages in lieu of an oral examination in the original languages.
  - (2) He shall prepare a thesis on some theological topic assigned by Presbytery.
  - (3) The candidate shall prepare an exegesis on an assigned portion of Scripture, requiring the use of the original language or languages.
  - (4) He shall further be required to preach a sermon before the Presbytery or committee thereof, upon three-fourths (3/4) vote.

- Presbytery also examines candidates regarding any exceptions he may take with regard to the fundamentals of the denomination's doctrinal standards
  - “Therefore, in examining a candidate for ordination, the Presbytery shall inquire not only into the candidate’s knowledge and views in the areas specified above, but also shall require the candidate to state the specific instances in which he may differ with the Confession of Faith and Catechisms in any of their statements and/or propositions. The court may grant an exception to any difference of doctrine only if in the court’s judgment the candidate’s declared difference is not out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine because the difference is neither hostile to the system nor strikes at the vitals of religion.”
  - Upon approval, the candidate undergoes a public ordination in the presence of the calling congregation (see details in BCO 21-5).
  - See BCO chapters 19-21

- **Issues that are commonly asked of a candidate:**
  - Sabbath view (below)
  - Position on creation, deaconesses, NPP, etc.
  - Cessation or continuation of extraordinary gifts of the Spirit
  - Paedocommunion
  - Difficult theological issues like “does God ordain evil?”

### **C. Sabbath Views**

- One topic that often comes up in ordination is the view of the Sabbath. Is it still a binding ordinance on the Christian, or has the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment ceased to be normative? If it is still normative, what does it mean to keep the Sabbath?
  - WCF is pretty clear and broadly speaking this is not technically a PCA issue
  - However, within the Reformed world this is constantly debated

- What we will not be doing: answering the question “Can I do \_\_\_\_\_ on the Sabbath?”
  - That's not necessarily the point.
- We will approach this topic from two angles:
  - Binding vs. non-binding ← main focus
  - If Binding, then what are the areas of question regarding how to keep the Sabbath
- **Binding vs. Non-Binding**

<b>View 1: Sabbath no longer binding (“Anti-Sabbatarian”)</b>	
<b>Definition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observance of the Lord's Day / Sabbath is no longer a binding, normative obligation on the Christian</li> <li>• The Christian Sabbath is a good thing for Christian fellowship and worship, but there are no restrictions or requirements on Sabbath observance</li> <li>• Rather, keeping Sabbath is a “matter indifferent” → that is, subject to the liberty of Christian conscience</li> </ul>
<b>Arguments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sabbath was only binding on Israel</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Fourth Commandment was part of the “distinctives” that set apart Israel, just like circumcision and food laws</li> <li>◦ Those distinctives are no longer relevant in the church age, since the ethnic markers have been removed in the union of the Jews and Gentiles under the lordship of Christ</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Mosaic Law is abrogated in light of the cross of Christ</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Law of Moses belonged to the “old age” that has passed away               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Paul often speaks negatively of the law</li> <li>▪ Law of Moses has been fully terminated in Christ – civil, ceremonial, and moral</li> </ul> </li> <li>◦ The new law that binds Christians is the “Law of Christ”               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1 Cor 9:21 - “To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Observance of the Sabbath is a matter of Christian conscience</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Col 2:16-17 (read): “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.”</li> <li>◦ Rom 14:4-6 (read): “Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Critique</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specifically regarding Col 2 and Rom 14 passages: what Paul has</li> </ul>

	<p>in view is not <i>the Sabbath</i> but ceremonial days that made up the Jewish calendar; other days besides the weekly Sabbath were called “Sabbaths,” and those are the indifferent matters in view here</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most proponents of this view still uphold the other 9 commandments: thus, you have 9 commandments and 1 suggestion? That does not seem to be the intent of the Decalogue.</li> <li>• Other critiques handled below</li> </ul>
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<b>View 2: Sabbath continues to be binding on the Christian (“Sabbatarian”)</b>	
<b>Definition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Sabbath command, along with all the Ten Commandments, continues to be binding on the Christian</li> <li>• The Christian Sabbath is no longer the last day but the first day of the week, in keeping with NT practice and the Lord's resurrection</li> </ul>
<b>Arguments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Sabbath is a creation ordinance (Gen 2:1-3)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Preceded the fall and pre-dated the nation of Israel and Mosaic Law</li> <li>◦ The Sabbath is rooted in the divine 6-1 pattern</li> <li>◦ Israel was instructed to avoid picking up manna on the Sabbath before the law was given at Sinai</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>The Ten Commandments are normative for all generations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Written in stone by the very hand of God (not by Moses)</li> <li>◦ Principal law – very general, of which all the other laws for Israel were applied case laws</li> <li>◦ Jesus and Paul both support and uphold the moral law as perpetually binding (Sermon on the Mount, Rom 13:8-10)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>The Sabbath has a rich, theocentric focus for believers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <i>Q: What are some of the reasons given for the Sabbath?</i></li> <li>◦ Commemorating God's creative work (Ex 20:11)</li> <li>◦ Provision for rest and recuperation (Ex 23:12 - “ that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and your servants may be refreshed”</li> <li>◦ Sign of God's covenant with his people, which has not passed away but has come to fruition in the new covenant (Ex 31:16 - “observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever”)</li> <li>◦ Reminder of salvation and redemption (Deut 5:12-15 - 4<sup>th</sup> commandment mentions God's deliverance from Egypt)</li> <li>◦ Given as a holy convocation for God's people (Lev 23:2-3 - “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation”)</li> <li>◦ Foretaste of the final rest in heaven (Heb 4:9-10)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Jesus showed himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath</b></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mt 12:1-14: Jesus attacked the Pharisees' legalism regarding the Sabbath (e.g., cannot walk but so far, cannot rescue someone, cannot pick grain if you are hungry), not the Sabbath itself</li> <li>• <b>Jesus gave purpose to the Sabbath</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mk 2:27)</li> <li>○ Sabbath is not a day of inactivity, but a day of worship, rest, and works of necessity / piety / mercy</li> <li>○ Warfield: “the Sabbath is an oasis in the desert of earthly cares”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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- In sum:
  - The Sabbath command is the most debated law of the OT
  - We suffer from an inadequate view of the Sabbath: we worry about what we cannot do and see it as a burden, when God actually created it to be a blessing
    - How many people never study the Word b/c we don't have time?
    - How many people don't visit the sick b/c we don't have time?
    - How many of us wake up on Monday exhausted?
- **Approach to the Sabbath: exceptions to the Westminster Standards**
  - Most PCA ordination candidates will fall in the Sabbatarian camp, so the question mainly revolves around some of the language of the Confession and Larger Catechism:
    - WCF XXI.8: “This Sabbath is to be kept holy unto the Lord when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and *recreations*, but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.
    - WSC 60: How is the sabbath to be sanctified? The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, *even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days*; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.
  - The question typically revolves around the “recreation clause” - does that apply to jogging? Throwing ball with kids in the yard? Going to a Panthers' Game?

## **Conclusion**

- Recalling the main purpose of the class:
  - Gain an understanding of the issues of doctrine and practice that have recently or are currently been a source of debate in our denomination
  - More importantly, learn how to disagree on such matters in a Christian way
- *Q: What are some of the most important things you've learned along the way?*
  - Balance

- Innovation is often a path towards heterodoxy!
- Nuance: some views are outside the pale (e.g., NPP) and are to be addressed with vigor; others are within the bounds but worthy of debating to ensure we are in accord with God's word (e.g., creation views); others are gray areas about which we should be charitable and balanced (e.g., sonship)