

Someone Find Me A Berean!

If a police officer pulls you over and asks you to take a breath test, do you ask to see his warrant card first?

The one time this has happened to me, I didn't. Perhaps I should have. But you don't expect to be pulled over by someone posing as a police officer.

We need to be much more careful when it comes to the things we believe. Just because we read it in a Christian book or hear it at church doesn't necessarily mean it is true. The people at Berea listened to Paul and studied the scriptures to make sure what he was teaching was right, [Acts 17:10-12](#).

It has been a habit of mine to take notes on the sermons I hear, but when I get home most Sundays, my notebook and bible go back on the shelf while I deal with something else, usually lunch.

But wouldn't we all be better off if we reviewed what we heard at church? Historically, Presbyterians have taught that whatever time on Sunday that isn't spent at church should be spent thinking and talking about what we have learned, see the [Directory for Family-Worship .8](#) and the [Westminster Confession of Faith 1.8](#).

Two clauses later the Westminster Confession says: "Controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture," [WCF 1.10](#). So I was surprised when the General Assembly of Australia (GAA) issued a statement to be read in all congregations of the Presbyterian Church of Australia condemning a number of teachings as unbiblical which had no scripture references.

There were a couple of points I hadn't considered, like whether an evil spirit can control a Christian. So I barred myself up in my office with my Bible, the Westminster Confession and one or two other good books, and physically rolled up my sleeves to find out whether what I was being told was true.

I started by looking up passages I knew dealt with the individual statements, then browsed the Westminster Confession and a systematic theology, following up Bible references on the way. I then did word searches for more related passages. Taking notes as I went, it took me several hours to be satisfied with my answers.

This is what I came up with:

a. "acceptance of feelings as extra-biblical revelation which provide detailed guidance in matters of life, and/of ascribing authority to such revelation rather than allowing freedom in matters which are not dictated in scripture"

[Hebrews 1:1-2](#) tells us that the former ways of God revealing His word finished with the coming of His Son, also [WCF 1.1](#), though the Holy Spirit still speaks through the word, [Hebrews 3:7](#), [10:15-17](#).

The Bible tells us all that we need to know for living this passing life and for eternal salvation, [2 Timothy 3:15-17](#), [WCF 1.6](#), and is the highest and final authority to which the Church and any person may appeal, [WCF 1.8 & 10](#).

b. "that contact with those outside The Fellowship leads to defilement"

We should guard our hearts and be careful what we take in, [Proverbs 4:23](#), but Jesus ate with sinners but was not defiled, [Matthew 9:9-13](#), and He clearly taught that it is not external things that defile us. We are defiled by what is inside us, [Matthew 15:17-20](#). The Church is a mixed bag including both the saved and the condemned, as Jesus taught in [Matthew 13:24-30](#), [47-50](#), also [WCF 25.4 & 5](#), and we should not be surprised to see this also in the Presbyterian Church of Australia or the broader Church. We cannot completely cut ourselves off from sinners; losing contact with sinners is unhealthy for the Church and makes evangelism almost impossible.

Also, to restrict membership of the invisible Church to members of a visible group is presumptuous, as it is the Lord who looks on the heart, not us, [1 Samuel 16:7](#).

Regardless of the sin or heresy of any group or person, mere contact with them cannot jeopardise our salvation.

c. "that The Fellowship can claim a higher loyalty than a person's family"

Jesus told His disciples that no one should lord it over others in the Church, [Matthew 20:25-28](#). Peter echoes this and tells the leaders to rather be "examples to the flock." [1 Peter 5:1-3](#).

The implications of following Jesus will sometimes separate people, even family members, [Mark 10:34-39](#). However, those who are part of Jesus' body cannot be turned against each other by faith in Jesus, but are rather united. Our enemies are Jesus' enemies, not other Christians. Following Jesus is not a cause for division between people and their believing families.

d. "that a person who has faith in Christ may yet be subject to the enduring and controlling influence of generational curses or evil spirits"

[Exodus 20:5-6](#) shows that God's punishment is on subsequent generations who disobey Him, but His blessing is not exhausted even for 1000 generations who serve Him, also [Luke 1:50](#). The onus is on each generation and each person for themselves.

In [Mark 3:22-27](#) Jesus clearly explains that no evil spirit can control someone in who lives the Spirit of God, for no evil spirit can overpower God. Granted, to grow up with a demon controlled parent would be a bad influence, but this need not be controlling.

e. "that forgiveness by God depends on detailed confession of sins to others and close personal fellowship with elders"

The context of [1 John 1:9](#) is clear that God is the person to whom we should confess. James instructs that believers confess to other believers, rather than hide their sins, so that they can pray for each other, [James 5:13-16](#), and it is good and reasonable for a person to ask forgiveness from a persons or group against whom they have sinned, [WCF 15.6](#), but the Psalmist tells us that he confessed his sins to God and was forgiven without confession to a human being as a prerequisite, [Psalm 32:5-6](#).

Ultimately, though a person falls under God's fatherly disapproval they cannot become unsaved again, [Psalm 89:31-33](#), [32:5](#), [1 Corinthians 11:32](#), [John 10:28](#), [Hebrews 10:14](#), and [WCF 11.5](#).

f. "that forgiveness by God depends on ongoing personal holiness"

It is God's will that we be made holy, [1 Thessalonians 4:17](#), [2 Corinthians 7:1](#), and certainly without holiness we will not enter Heaven, [Hebrews 12:14](#), but it is God who makes us holy in His sight and makes us more like Jesus, [1 Thessalonians 3:11-13](#) and [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#).

In Jesus we have put on the new self, which was created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness, [Ephesians 4:24](#), also [WCF 13](#) & [17](#).

The exercise of examining what I was being told has proved not only the truth of the GAA's statement, but also the value of checking out what we hear in God's word.