

## 42) Chapter 26 – The Local Church

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- 2 weeks ago covered paragraphs 1-4 on the “universal” Church; this week paragraphs 5-15 on the “local church”

### I. Its Origin – para.5

- The Lord Jesus, as Head of the church (paragraph 4), calls a people out of the world given to Him by the Father (Jn6:37; 17:2; 10:16) He does so through the ministry of the Word by His Spirit
- This calling is not only for salvation, but for instruction in Christ’s commands in discipleship Mat 28:20
- The ordinary context of this discipleship are local congregations or assemblies of believers with duly appointed teacher/leadership
- The two-fold purpose of the local church is to offer God worship (as the house or temple of God) and to receive instruction of how to live for God’s glory
- Act 14:21-23 they were not content with individual salvation, nor assembly, but properly appointed elder/teachers
  - This is the apostolic pattern and understanding of the fulfilling of the Great Commission

### II. Its Membership – para.6

#### A. Evangelical

- Those who have believed the Gospel and live in evident repentance

#### B. Volitional

- They willingly consent to walk together according to Christ’s instructions

#### C. Covenantal

- They give themselves to the Lord and one another in a mutual commitment to obedience
- This is expressed in baptism as a covenantal oath of obedience
- This is distinctive from views of the church which include those who have not evidenced faith and repentance, such as Paedo-Baptist churches (explain)

### III. Its Authority – para.7

- The confession declares that each church is, as gathered together according to the commands of God’s Word, is independent in the sense that there is no higher church structure or order
- They are ruled by the Word of God which is the inspired directives given by universal apostles and prophets
- As a local body, they are given the power and authority required to worship and discipline as appointed by Christ
- This is in contrast to the structures of the Roman Catholic Church, denominational hierarchies (Presbyterian, Methodist, Church of England)

### IV. Its Government – para.8-13

- Para.8 In a church there is essential a two fold-division; the members of the church (including all), and its officers
  - The continuing New Testament offices in the local church are only two: elders (pastors/teachers/overseers) and deacons
- Para.9 These offices are recognized by congregational suffrage according to the qualifications of 1Tim3 and Tit1
  - Those recognized are then appointed (or ordained) by the existing (or overseeing) eldership
- Para.10 The focus of the responsibilities of the eldership is the shepherding of God’s flock by the public and private ministry of the Word of God and prayer; they do this with the recognition of one day giving an account to God
  - The primary responsibility of the diaconate is the ministry of the physical needs of the members
  - The confession states the legitimacy of the financial support of those who labor in the Word (1Timothy 5), “so that they may have a comfortable income without being entangled in secular affairs, and may also be able to exercise hospitality towards others.
- Para.11 the confession states that it is not, however, only the right of pastors to teach or preach, but also others who are approved and called by the church
- Para.12 the statement is made that all believers are obligated to join themselves to local churches (unless providentially hindered) so that they can gain the privileges of the church as well as be under the discipline of the church by way of correction and government
- Para.13 the issue is addressed as to what someone should do if there is an offense within the church that is not resolved to their liking
  - They may not may disturb church order in any way
  - Nor should they absent themselves from the meetings of the church or the administration of the ordinances
  - But they should wait upon Christ and the further actions of the church.

### V. Its Association – para.14-15

- Para.14 Every church should see itself as a part of a larger work in the body of Christ, expressed in the prayers for all of Christ’s churches everywhere (pastoral prayer)
- There should be a particular sharing in the life of other churches of like-faith including help with providing for other ministers of the Gospel, benevolence, and sharing of concerns (for particular prayer: prayer letters)
- Para.15, the issue of problems arising within a local church which then seeks other like-minded churches for counsel

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- this includes representatives (elders) from other churches to consider and give counsel, and then communicate their findings among the churches in fellowship with one another
  - It makes clear that this is merely advisory, but not authoritative (no hierarchy)
- the NT church structure is simple, but clear