

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

CHAPTER 26.-*Of the Communion of Saints.*

II. Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification¹; as also, in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities, and necessities. Which Communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those, who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus².

Question 1.—*Are the saints bound by profession, to maintain an holy fellowship, and communion in the worship of God, in performing such other spiritual duties, as tend to their mutual edification?*

Answer.—Yes. Heb. 10:24,25; Acts 2:42,46; Isa. 2:3. Therefore, the Donatists of old, and Separatists now do err, maintaining that hypocrites and wicked men, do pollute and defile the worship of God, not only to themselves, but also to others that worship with them; and that therefore we must separate from communion in the worship of God, because of them. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) Because the church of the Jews in Christ's time was very corrupt, Matt. 15:7; Mark 7:7,8; and, yet both by his practice, and his command, he would not have his hearers to separate from it. For he both observed the feasts, and preached in their synagogues, John 8:1; Luke 4:15; John 10:22. And he commands his hearers to observe what the scribes and Pharisees bade them do, Matt. 23:3. 2.) Because the apostle is so far from commanding separation from the church of Corinth, that he praises their meetings (1 Cor. 5:4; 11:20; 14:23), notwithstanding of the many gross scandals which were among them, 1 Cor. 1:11-13; 5:1,2; and 15:12,13. 3.) Because the apostle calls the Galatians, the church of Christ, brethren and the children of God, who were yet, in some measure, removed from God to another gospel, Gal. 3:1. And yet since it was a constitute true church, it was his judgment, there should be no separation from it, notwithstanding all the foresaid faults, Gal. 6:1-5. 4.) Because the church of Ephesus was a true church, though they made defection from their first love, Rev. 2:4. So was the church of Pergamos, though there were in it, who held the doctrine of Balaam, Rev. 2:14. So was the church of Thyatira, notwithstanding that they suffered Jezebel, that called herself a prophetess, and taught the servants of Christ to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols, Rev. 2:20. 5.) If we must separate from the communion of the church in things lawful, for the fault of others, or for the faults of ministers, and if their sins pollute the worship of God to others, then we must not keep communion with any church, seeing there can hardly be a church where there are not some hidden hypocrites; nay, where there are not some, who are known to be such by the minister. Yet such are not to be excluded, as Christ himself teaches, Matt. 13:24-31,47,48. 6.) If the worship is polluted to some for the faults of others, with whom they worship, then must the word and sacraments have their efficacy and worth from the persons that worship, and from the dispensers of them, which is

¹Heb. 10:24,25; Acts 2:42,46; Isa. 2:3; 1 Cor. 11:20.

²Acts 2:44,45; 1 John 3:17; 2 Cor. 8,9 *chapters*; Acts 11:29,30.

absurd. 7.) Because wicked and evil men, do not pollute the worship to others, but to themselves only, as appears from the man that wanted the wedding garment, Matt. 22:11. And from those who did eat and drink unworthily at the Lord's table. Such do not eat and drink damnation to others, but to themselves, 1 Cor. 11:27,29.

Question 2.—*Are saints by profession bound to relieve each other in outward things, according to their several abilities, and necessities?*

Answer.—Yes. Acts 2:44,45; 1 John 3:17; 2 Cor. 8,9 chapters; Acts 11:29,30. Scripture clearly teaches that those who minister to one another in spiritual things ought likewise to minister to one another in the outward things—with this limitation, “according to their several abilities, and necessities.”

Question 3.—*Should this communion, as God offers opportunity, be extended unto all those, who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus?*

Answer.—Yes. Gal. 6:10; Acts 2:42,46. However, this doctrine has been erroneously applied by the Latitudinarians to mean that we ought to embrace Christians, as such, of every denomination and even no denomination. They who would advocate joining in sacramental communion with those bearing the Christian name, of all professions, however corrupt; as with Papists, Arminians, Anabaptists, and Episcopalians, without requiring any acknowledgment of their errors, is a construction inconsistent with the true meaning of the article, with the well known principles of the Westminster Assembly and with the Scriptural understanding of the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.” The communion treated of in this chapter, takes place, in various degrees, as Providence affords opportunity. There is one degree of it, in the relief that Christians afford one another in outward things; another, in performing spiritual services, tending to their mutual edification; as in ministering privately to the instruction and consolation of each other; a third, in private religious worship; as in families; a fourth, in public ordinances; particularly in the sacraments. We may have communion in the former degrees with many, with whom it would be unwarrantable to have the last degree. The Israelites might have communion with pious strangers, that were not circumcised, in almsgiving and prayer; but not in eating the Passover, Ex. 12:48. That communion in the worship of God we are bound to maintain, is a communion in his instituted ordinances, and in them exclusively of all human devices in the worship of God, or in the government of the Church, Deut. 12:32. Hence, according to that principle we cannot have communion with such who oppose these things—being open and avowed enemies to the true worship of God and government of his Church. Heb. 10:24,25 indicates that the “holy profession” is that of the members of the same church making the same public profession. As for that phrase “call upon the name of the Lord,” it is often used to invocation and prayer, but in 1 Cor. 1:2, and some other places, it is descriptive of the character of the persons, who profess a cordial and firm adherence to the name of Jesus Christ; that is, to the whole display that he has made of himself in his truths and institutions.