

Chapter 26 of the 1689 Confession of Faith: “Of The Church”,
Session # 5, “The Purest Churches”, Presented by Pastor
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on December 24th, 2017.

The 1689 Confession, Chapter 26: “Of the Church”

Paragraphs 3 will be our focus today –

1. The catholic or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

(a) Hebrews 12: 22 and 23; Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:10, 22-23; 5:23, 27, and 30-32

2. All persons throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ according unto it, not destroying their own profession by any errors everting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, are and may be called visible saints; and of such ought all particular congregations to be constituted.

a) 1st Corinthians 1: 2 b) Acts 11:26 c) Romans 1: 7; Ephesians 1: 20-22

3. The purest churches under heaven are subject to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan; nevertheless Christ always hath had, and ever shall have a kingdom in this world, to the end thereof, of such as believe in him, and make profession of his name.

(d) 1st Corinthians 5; Revelation 2-3; (e) Revelation 18: 2; 2nd Thessalonians 2: 11-12; (f) Matthew 16: 18;

Psalm 72: 17; 102: 28; Revelation 12: 17

4. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, in whom, by the appointment of the Father, g) all power for the calling, institution, order or government of the church, is invested in a supreme and sovereign manner; neither can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof, but is h) that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God; whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

(g) Colossians 1: 18; Matthew 28: 18-20; Ephesians 4:11-12; (h) 2nd Thessalonians 2: 2-9

In considering Paragraph 3, we ought to remember that our own 1689 London Baptist Confession was, at many places taken directly from the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1646. In the Westminster Confession, there are two Paragraphs which were not included in either the Savoy Confession of Faith or our Confession. (Paragraphs 3 and 4) And the Paragraph that we are studying today was partially added to the Savoy’s Declaration of Faith, by the Puritan Baptists of that day, to make up what we are studying now. The Savoy Confession, which was drawn up in 1658 by such good and godly men as John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, and Philip Nye, added 19 more chapters to the Westminster Confession; that is how important they thought this Chapter on the Church was. They wrote 30 Paragraphs on this subject of the Church. Our own Baptist forefathers, not believing in Presbyterianism or in Church courts and synods, studied for greater brevity and to build off of the simplicity of the Westminster Confession, and they wrote 15 Paragraphs, many of them building off of the Savoy Confession’s statements. The Westminster itself has only 6 paragraphs on the Church. So the doctrine of the Church, in the minds of godly men in that day, was something that was under development in their thinking as they looked into it, and thought upon it, in relation to the truth of the Scriptures. It appears that you and I, and indeed the whole visible church in the world today, have much to learn about this subject.

Paragraph 3 begins by saying that the purest churches under heaven are subject to mixture and error. In other words, our Confession is acknowledging that even the best of churches, with the finest and most godly of people, still may not come to understand or clearly discern their full responsibilities before God and in relation to men. And if they can discern them, they are not always consistent and thorough in carrying them out. So there will, as long as the world stands, be enough sin, and weakness, and remaining corruption even in godly men, that there may be some error and some mixture of maturity and immaturity in their midst. Why is this? It is because there is so much to learn from the Bible, so much truth to grow up into, and so much laziness and lack of diligence in studying the word and applying to ourselves what we know so that we practically live it out in a life of godliness; this is the reason for this statement. We need to pray for more of the Spirit in this regard, and to believe that in the Latter Day Glory of the Church, in the Millennium, that the Church will receive greater measures of the Spirit's power and working. I will speak more of this in a later message

But now, let's look first at some of reasons why churches in our day are not as pure as could be, if they were more consistent in godliness. To be pure as a church means purity in relation to the doctrines which the church holds to, and whether the church as an assembly has righteous moral practice of keeping the commandments of God, taking place in their midst, and in relation to people outside of the church as well.

I want to begin with Hebrews Chapter 12, verses 22-29, to open this truth up. – “For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: “AND IF SO MUCH AS A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT SHALL BE STONED OR SHOT WITH AN ARROW.” And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I AM EXCEEDINGLY AFRAID AND TREMBLING.”) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, “YET ONCE MORE I SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO HEAVEN.” Now this, “YET ONCE MORE,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.”

One of the reasons that churches in our day, as well as in past centuries since the early church, have not been more pure is because they do not understand what kind of a kingdom that they have come to. They do not have a very good understanding of the difference between the law and the gospel, and since they are afraid of being seen as legalists, they say things like – “We are not under law, we are under grace. And therefore we really do not have to keep all of the commandments of God. We simply have to have a general love for all Christians and it is not really important, nor is it required, that we come to church, or commit to a local church. But in 1st Corinthians chapter 7, and verse 19, Paul says – “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God.” If you do not keep the commandments of God, in other words, how can you call yourself a Christian. You are going to have a hard time proving it to anyone. One of the commandments of God which Paul gave to these Hebrews that he was writing to, is found in Hebrews 10: 23 – “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” (That is the Day of national reckoning where Jerusalem would be destroyed) They were to keep going to church, keep learning the Scriptures, keep serving God in this holy way of following Christ in accordance with the truth of His word, and love the brethren.