

Chapter 26 of the 1689 Confession of Faith: “Of The Church”,
Session # 8, “Maturity and Immaturity in the Local Church” Presented by
Pastor Paul Rendall in the Adult Sunday School,
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The 1689 Confession, Chapter 26: “Of the Church”

Paragraph 3 will once again be our focus today –

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

Hebrews Chapter 12, verses 22-29 – “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.”

1st Application - God never intends any Christian to be an independent entity and follow their own subjective leading, exclusively, as it regards whether you will join a church or not.

He expects that you will join a local church. But He wants you to do this freely. And He expects that you will prayerfully come to this righteous conclusion; that you will make your decisions and make your plans by taking counsel with Him in His word, and He will then direct you.

We are receiving a Kingdom, we have been brought into the Universal Church of Jesus Christ, a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, and so – Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear in the context of the local church. Let us understand that

our God is not a God who is timid and overlooks sin. He is not One who will not deal with it any longer, since Christ has come and fulfilled His holy law. No, each of us is still accountable for what we do with the truth of the Bible in terms of obtaining a reward or losing it. And even though God does deal with us mercifully and gently through Christ because of His entire fulfillment of the law of God on our behalf, nevertheless, we are to recognize this great fact – that our God is a consuming fire. He is still the righteous Judge and evaluator of all men, and especially His own people. Our God knows that His Son died in order to make us holy, and part of that holiness, a very great part, is learning how to love and serve Him with other brethren in a local church. This is why it says in Hebrews 13: 1 – “Let the love of the brethren continue.” It means that each Christian should join a local assembly of God’s people, and participate by using your gift and becoming of help and benefit to the whole church which you belong to.

2nd Application – We should understand that since we are receiving a kingdom we should partake of solid spiritual food in the context of a local church.

Look at Hebrews 5: 5-14 – “So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: “YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.” As He also says in another place: “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK”; who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest “ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK,” of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Now, I beg you to remember that the apostle Paul was writing to Hebrew people, but he was writing to them in the context of their local church or churches, for he tells them later in this letter, in chapter 13, verse 17 – “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.” So, these were people who had been sitting under the ministry of the word for some time, but evidently they had not profited by it as they should have, because he says to them that they had become dull of hearing, and that even though by this time they ought to have been teachers, they had come to the place where they needed someone to teach them again the first principles of the oracles of God; they had come to need milk and not solid food. This should show us that it is very important that we listen to receive the word that God has for us; to really think about the Scripture and what God is saying to us through it, and then to remember that God is expecting us to live out what truth that He gives to us.

If you don’t listen in a prayerful way, you will not grow up in terms of being able to partake of the solid food of the word; the meat of the word which will strengthen you greatly. If you can only handle milk, or the simple and basic truths of the word, if you partake only of milk, then you cannot become skilled in the word of righteousness and you will remain babyish. The reason that these people were in this condition was that their senses had not been trained by reason of use to discern both good and evil. They did not consider this important enough to take notice of, and thus they would allow themselves to sort of drift through the Christian life. And this is why they were immature as Christians.

3rd Application – Holding fast to our Confession of Christ is done in the context of a local church.

Hebrews 10: 23-25 – “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.”

I hope that you are able to see here that holding fast the confession of your hope, that Christ has done all things necessary for you in salvation, and that He and the Father have given you the Holy Spirit as the guarantee and the downpayment of your eternal inheritance, this confession is something which you have not only made in your heart, but you have made such a confession in the presence of many witnesses in the local church at the time of your being baptized and joining that local church. I want you to see that the basis of your not wavering in your hope is not simply your own determination to do so, but it is because He who promised is faithful. That is, it is God who will faithfully apply the blood of Christ to your sins, and to the best of your works, so that you will be cleansed and forgiven. And it is God who will faithfully teach you His ways in the midst of all of your trials and in the experience of life, day by day, all the way to your death, and He will bring you all the way to heaven.

He will faithfully supply you with grace, both the imputed grace in which you stand, and the imparted grace which will over time change and transform your heart and life, so that you will indeed be learning to do God’s will at every point in which the word of God instructs you. If you are mature, you will be considering others in the local church in order to stir them up to love and good deeds. And you will not forsake, you will not leave off assembling with the brethren in that local church just because you have come into certain disagreements or conflicts with them. You will pray to learn and grow up into Christ, and grow up into maturity, by praying to learn what God would have you to learn in the midst of your trials, and you will not strive to argue and fight with other believers to try to get our own way in everything. That is maturity.

Instead, you will learn to submit to the Lord and to the other Christians in the local church in the fear of God. If we are mature, we will exhort one another, and so much the more, as we see the Day approaching. This may be the day of our death, or the day of Judgment, or in the case of those to whom Paul was writing to – The day of the destruction of Jerusalem. In our day it might be the day of the destruction of the Antichristian powers, or even our thinking about the Day of Judgment, which is approaching, even if it may approach slowly in relative terms. Surely we shall shortly be there.