

Chapter 26 of the 1689 Confession of Faith: “Of The Church”,
Session # 1, “The Universal Church Defined”, Presented by Pastor
Paul Rendall in the Adult Sunday School, on, 2017.

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

Paragraph 1 – The Universal Church Defined

A. The whole number of God’s Elect by Regeneration, the Work of the Spirit –

We are here given a good definition of the Universal Church as being the whole number of God’s elect people in all generations. That God does have a people at all, it says here, is due to the internal and invisible work of the Spirit of God, and the truth and reality of His grace in their hearts. When a sinner is born again by the Spirit of God in regeneration, it is completely God’s work, and that person both sees and enters in to the kingdom of God spiritually. This is their being saved by being made a New Creature. The Kingdom of God is the realm of the Triune God’s saving activity and rule. Christ’s Universal Church is all those persons savingly brought into the Kingdom of God. It is God’s work to open the door to their entering (their becoming a part of) the Universal Church and coming under Christ’s righteous rule. He transfers them from the Kingdom of Satan to the Kingdom of God, and He literally, spiritually places them in this body of believers in Christ. This transfer is brought about not only by the regeneration of the heart of the elect sinner, but by their believing in the gospel of Christ in close connection with the New Birth.

John 3: 3-8 – “Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Mark 12: 28-34 - “Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?” Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘HEAR, O ISRAEL, THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE. AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” So the scribe said to Him, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the

whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him."

Joseph Benson says: When Jesus saw that he answered discreetly — "And thereby showed that he had just views of true religion; he said, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God — He applauded the piety and wisdom of the scribe's reflection, by declaring, that he was not far from embracing the gospel, and becoming a true member of Christ's Church, possessed of all the blessings belonging to his disciples. Reader, art thou not far from the kingdom of God? Then go on: be a real Christian; else it had been better for thee to have been afar off."

Luke 17: 20, 21 — "Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!'" "For indeed, the kingdom of God is within You."

Jesus is giving the Pharisees a principle of truth which they had not understood before and even at that time they did not grasp it; that the kingdom of God (God's realm of saving activity and rule) was something that could only be understood internally, and not by way of outward observation.

Colossians 1: 13 — "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

B. The Church Universal is One Body Gathered under Christ her Head —

Colossians 1:18 — "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

The body of Christ is all of the persons chosen by God unto salvation, and gathered through the preaching of the gospel, and placed into His spiritual mystical body; invisible to men, but clearly known and visible to God.

1st Corinthians 12: 12, 13 — "For as the body is one and has many members but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ." "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."

Ephesians 1: 10 — "That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him."

This glorious body of people are His spouse and they are being gathered in their generations, according to the will and purpose of God, and they shall all eventually be gathered into one glorious body at the time of Christ's return at the end of the world, and the resurrection of all of the righteous dead. Christ is the Head of His body, the Church, and He is the Sovereign Ruler and King over His everlasting Kingdom. He, by virtue of the glory of His Person and His Mediatorial work of obedience to God's law, and His sufferings and death on behalf of all of the elect, has been appointed by God the Father as the Ruler of the Nations, and the Judge of the living and dead. The putting forth of the blessed influences of His Spirit in this particular work of saving the elect, and thus gathering them to be a part of His Universal Church is invisible

from the standpoint of our perceiving how that work is brought done in regeneration or brought to complete fruition in the gathering, both individually and corporately, as one body or spiritual building. Nevertheless, the work is most definitely accomplished by God's might and power, and not by the power of men, and thus all glory will belong to God for its being done and completed according to His eternal plan.