

Chapter 26 of the 1689 Confession of Faith: “Of The Church”, Session # 3,
“The Church Militant and Triumphant”, Presented by Pastor
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on December 10th, 2017.

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

Paragraphs 1 and 2 will be our focus today –

But I will also read Paragraph 3 as the last part of it will also pertain to our study 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.

1st Corinthians 1: 2; 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; Rev 12: 17

A. The Metaphor of A City

Hebrews 12: 22 and 23 – “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.”

We have now come to place in our study of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, where the invisible Church has been sufficiently considered. (although we cannot comprehend it very well in our experience yet; someday we shall) But I believe that we should now begin to make a transition to the study of the visible Church. The visible Church is as Paragraph 2 states it – “All those 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 (overthrowing) the foundation, or exhibiting unholiness of conversation”. In the verses that I just read to you from Hebrews chapter 12, we are told that visible saints have “come to this Mt. Zion and unto the City of the Living God.

Now I think we can understand that those saints who have died have come to an innumerable company of the angels in heaven, and to the general assembly above in heaven. But we need to understand further, that the whole Universal Church of Jesus Christ is composed of those in heaven and earth both. Those saints who are already in heaven, having gone there before us, and those who are still

here upon the earth until they receive the upward call of God through their death, to be with the Church gathered above; these should be understood as the whole body of Christ. They are not two bodies, but one body, spiritually in Christ.

And there is a very definite spiritual sense in which the visible saints on earth have “come” to all of the things mentioned in these two verses. For they have come to the same City, Mt. Zion, that is the Universal Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. And yet there is an important distinction to be made between those who have gone before us into heaven and those who remain. There is one Universal Church but it is composed of the Church Militant and Church Triumphant. These distinctions have been used by theologians for some centuries now in order to convey this Biblical truth: The Church militant are those Christians who are still fighting the good fight of faith and holding fast and holding forth the truth of the word of God here upon the earth. And the Church triumphant has overcome and has sat down with Christ upon His throne. Those who are here upon the earth are still promoting Christ’s cause and kingdom here on the earth. The Church triumphant are those Old Testament saints and New Testament saints who have fought the good fight and finished their course, and they have now come to God, the Judge of all, and to the place of the “spirits of just men made perfect”. They now behold the Lord Jesus, not with glorified physical eyes yet, but with spiritual sight and vision of His glory in the heavenly place where they are now; rejoicing forevermore. We who are here upon the earth are one with them in spirit, and we know that we will join them when it is the Lord’s purpose to bring us home to Himself in heaven.

My point is, however, that those saints who are still upon the earth are most definitely joined together spiritually with those who are in heaven. They are one family. The saints now in heaven were once visible upon the earth. And these saints now in heaven are still spiritually joined together with those upon the earth because of the work and presence of the Holy Spirit having placed them into the one body of Christ. This is a true spiritual unity which will last forever, having been established by the will and purpose of the Father, and by the righteous rule and presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who sits at the right hand of the Father. And He is waiting until all things shall be put under His feet. And then we shall all be gathered visibly into one body.

John Gill says on this verse – “And unto the city of the living God; the Gospel church is a city, built on Christ, the foundation; and is full of habitants, true believers, at least it will be, in the latter day; it is pleasantly situated by the river of God's love, and by the still waters of Gospel ordinances; it is governed by wholesome laws, of Christ's enacting, and is under proper officers, of his appointing; and is well guarded by watchmen, which he has set upon the walls of it; and it is endowed with many privileges, as access to God, freedom from the arrests of justice, and from condemnation, adoption, and a right to the heavenly inheritance: and this may be called "the city of God", because it is of his building, and here he dwells, and protects, and defends it; and who is styled "the living God", to distinguish him from the idols of the Gentiles, which are lifeless and inanimate, no other than sticks and stones.”

He further says in His Body of Divinity P. 853 – “The Church is sometimes distinguished into the church “triumphant and militant”, the whole family named of God in heaven and earth. The church triumphant consists of the saints in glory, whom Christ has taken to himself, to be with him where he is; and this is continually increasing. The church militant consists of persons in the present state, which is said to be, “as an army with banners”, Song of Solomon 6:4, this is made up of such who become volunteers in the day of Christ’s power; who put on the whole armour of God, and fight the good fight of faith; and in this state it will continue to the end of the world.”

We can also see this metaphor conveyed to us in Matthew Chapter 5: 13-16.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?” “It is then good for noting but to be thrown out and trampled under-foot by men.” “You are the light of the world.” “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.” “Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it give light to all who are in the house.”

A City set on a hill cannot be hidden. The visible Church, the visible saints have been given this mission. We are the light of the world, one metaphor, and we are also a City which is set on a hill; another metaphor. And the visible saints shine forth the light the lamp of truth in the house of God; truth set on a lampstand. This is the preaching of the word which gives light to all the visible saints in the local church, and all the local churches in the world. The visible saints then shine forth their light, not only to the whole house, but to the whole world.

B. The Metaphor of a House, or a Building, or Temple.

Ephesians 2: 14-21 – “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.” “And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.” “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.”

Because Christ is our peace, because He has fulfilled the law of God, He has in doing so, broken down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles and abolished the enmity between us; they thinking that because they have the law of God are to forever think themselves the privileged ones and thus despise us Gentiles as dogs. Christ’s fulfilling the law of commandments contained in ordinances places us together on the level field of all believers having His righteousness imputed to them and being clothed by it, we have together been made into one new man, the Church, the Israel of God. Thus His going to cross established and made this peace between us in that we are both reconciled to God in His one body, through the cross; making us one spiritual body together. We both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, we Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints in the City of God; we are members of the one household of God, and we together have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, and we are being built together by God into a holy habitation of God in the Spirit. This is the Universal Church, but you will notice that this spiritual household exists in both heaven and earth.

C. The Metaphor of Fullness

Ephesians 3: 14-21 – “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

Now you will notice that verse 15 confirms the truth that I have been trying to give to you here today that the Church is the whole family of those who are in heaven and earth. And Paul prays here that those who are still persevering in their faith here upon the earth would be granted according to the riches of God’s glory to be strengthened, to comprehend what is the width and length and depth and height of what God has called us to, in our worship of Him, and our communion and fellowship with Him. He has called to draw from, and experience, His fullness of blessing on account of what Christ has done for us in His love. In His love for us, He laid down His life for us, and in His love He keeps our souls. He keeps us by His loving care for us as the Good Shepherd. Paul wants us to know that this love of Christ surpasses all

knowledge and so he prays that the Ephesian believers and all to whom he is writing would know the reality of this love as they walk the Christian walk and live the Christian life; that together we might be filled with all the fullness of God. That is, he is praying that we, as believers in Christ will be filled with blessings of all sorts and all kinds; blessings which will justify us, sanctify us; fullness of blessings that will bring us to heaven, and glorify us on the last Day as a part of Christ's Church, His Universal Body.

Ephesians 1: 22 and 23 – “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

John Eadie says – “The church, then, is the πλήρωμα – the glorious receptacle of such spiritual blessings. And as these are bestowed in no scanty or shriveled dimensions-for the church is filled, so loaded and enriched, that it becomes fulness itself-and as that fulness is so vitally connected with its origin, it is lovingly and truly named “the fulness of Christ.” The storehouse, “filled with the finest of the wheat,” is the farmer's fulness. The blessings which constitute this fulness, and warrant such a name to the church-for they fill it to overflowing, “good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over”-are those detailed in the previous verses of the chapter. “All spiritual blessings,” the Divine purpose realizing itself in perfect holiness; filial character and prerogative; redemption rooting itself in the pardon of sin; grace exhibited richly and without reserve; the sealing and earnest of the Spirit till the inheritance be fully enjoyed-the results of the apostle's prayer-Divine illumination; the knowledge and hope of future blessedness, and of the depth and vastness of that Divine power by which the new life is given and sustained, union to Jesus as the Body with the Head, the source of vitality and protection-all these benefactions, conferred upon the church and enjoyed by it, constitute it a filled church, and being so filled by Christ, it is aptly and emphatically called – HIS FULNESS.

John Gill says: “The fulness of him that filleth all in all; besides the personal fulness which Christ has as God, and his fulness of ability and fitness for his work as Mediator, and his dispensatory fulness, which dwells in him for the use of his people, the church is his relative fulness, which fills him, and makes up Christ mystical; and which is filled by him, and is complete in him: and then will the church appear to be Christ's fulness, when all the elect, both Jews and Gentiles, shall be gathered in; and when these are all filled with the grace designed for them; and when they are all grown up to their full proportion, or are arrived to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; which will be a glorious sight to see, and very desirable: and this shows the certainty of the saints' perseverance and salvation: for if anyone member, even the meanest, could be lost, the church would not be the fulness of Christ: and this may be further concluded, from its being His fulness, who **filleth all in all**; which may be understood either more extensively; for He fills both worlds with inhabitants; He fills all places with his omnipresence, and all creatures with proper food and sustenance: or with a limitation to the church and people of God; He fills all his churches and ordinances with his gracious presence; and He fills the various societies of his saints with members and with officers; and these with the gifts and graces of his Spirit, suitable to their place and station; He fills all and every of the saints, all the vessels of mercy, whether greater or lesser, all sorts of them, of larger or meaner capacities; He fills all the powers and faculties of their souls, their hearts with joy, their minds with knowledge, their consciences with peace, their wills with spiritual desires, submission and resignation, and their affections with love to himself and people: in short, He fills them with all grace and goodness, and the fruits of righteousness; and so makes them meet for usefulness here, and for happiness hereafter.”