

**Chapter 26 of the 1689 Confession of Faith: “Of The Church”, Session # 4,
“Visible Saints and Purest Churches”, Presented by Pastor
Paul Rendall in the Adult Sunday School,
on December 17th, 2017.**

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

Paragraphs 2 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)

Ephesians 2: 4-10 – “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us (that is – all believers and all the elect in all ages), even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast.” “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

We have been thinking together about the meaning of all of these terms: The Universal Church, the Visible and Invisible Church, and we come now today to think about visible saints and pure churches. The Universal Church, I have been trying to relate to you, is God’s workmanship based upon His purpose

in predestination and election, and God saves whom He will. He has mercy upon whom He will, and He causes them to be born again to a living hope; to the sure hope of eternal life. He gives them this grace in regeneration and they find that in connection with the preaching of the gospel that they have a heart to believe. And when they believe they are then placed into the spiritual body of Christ which is the Church Universal. It is comprised of all of God's elect people in all generations; both those in heaven and those on the earth. They are one family and one spiritual body linked together by faith with their one spiritual Head – Our Lord Jesus Christ. Those saints that are in heaven are the Church triumphant and those upon the earth are the Church militant. The Universal Church therefore, is composed of visible saints here below, and invisible (to us presently) saints above. And although we might not know all of them yet, in the ages to come we will. Even now, verse 6 tells us that we are seated together with Christ in this mystical spiritual sense which we are talking about, but someday we will literally spiritually with Him there in heaven after we die, and before the resurrection of the body at the last Day when Christ shall return. On that glorious Day we will be able to behold as one gathered assembly, the Universal Church of Christ. Right now, We simply need to remember that if God's work of regeneration has been done in a person, they are a part of that Universal Church, whether we recognize them now at this point, or if we do not.

The question that we should now proceed to is this? What is a visible saint? Well to answer that question I would like you to turn with me over to 1st Corinthians 1, verse 2 and 3.

1st Corinthians 1: 2 and 3 – “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and our: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Here we find the apostle Paul writing to the local church in Corinth, and he addresses them as “those who are sanctified” in Christ Jesus, called to be saints. Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ savingly is sanctified in Christ Jesus. Everyone who believes in Jesus savingly is called to be a saint. A saint is a holy one of God. They are not a special group of believers who are more sanctified and holy than the vast majority of other believers, as the Roman Catholic Church teaches. Every single person who has been born again is sanctified, is set apart to God's purposes in holiness, and is therefore seen by God as one of His holy ones; one of His saints. It is not at all wrong for us to look at each other as God's saints, or to call each other saints. We simply need to realize the theological and practical reality of what we have been called to. We have been called to holiness and as a part of the effectual call of God to us in relation to the preaching of the gospel, we have believed in Christ, and that flowing out of our being born again. A part of this blessed work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is the circumcision of our heart; the taking away of its hardness and giving to us a heart of flesh so that we experience a real death to sin, and having a seed of righteousness planted in our heart, we also begin now, to live to righteousness. In believing in the gospel of Christ, we are justified by faith, and God now looks upon us as perfect and complete in Christ. He sees us “in Him”. He does not look upon us as a wicked person any longer. He looks upon us as one of His saints. We should know, even as He perfectly well knows, that there is a lot of work in progressive sanctification that will have to be done in us, but because of the good of initial or Definitive sanctification, He can call us His holy ones; His saints.

1st Corinthians 1: 30 – “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption – as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.’”

1st Corinthians 6: 9-11 – “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” “do not be deceived.” “Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” “And such were some of you.” “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

2nd Timothy 2: 19 – “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His, and ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.’” “But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.” “Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”

So, here in these verses we are beginning to make a transition to paragraph 3 of Chapter 26 - The purest churches under heaven are subject to mixture and error. That is expressed by Paul in terms of the metaphorical illustration of a great house. Verse 19 says that the solid foundation of God stands – that is, that the Lord knows those who are His. Then comes the solemn responsibility of the visible saint – “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” There are some who will make better progress in progressive sanctification than others, but all will make some real progress. But there are others who are not Christians at all, but have never been born again. And even though they profess Christ, they do not live in a way honoring to God.

Listen to John Gill – “here are not only vessels of gold and of silver; persons who are members of the visible church, who are comparable to gold and silver, for their worth and value, and preciousness in the sight of Christ, who accounts them his jewels, and peculiar treasure; and for their excellency and usefulness in the church, by reason of those differing gifts bestowed upon them; and for their lustre and purity, both of doctrine and of life; and for their solidity and duration: but also of wood, and of earth: there are others in a visible church state, who are like to dry wood, destitute of the grace of God, and are fit matter for Satan to work upon, and by them raise and increase the flames of contention and division, and will be fit fuel for everlasting burnings; and there are others who are sensual, and carnal, and worldly, who mind earth, and earthly things, and have no spirituality, nor spiritual mindedness in them: and some to honour; who are designed for honourable service, and behave honorably, and are worthy of honour in the church; are honourable officers, or members in it; and are to the honour of Christ, and the Gospel; and shall at last enjoy honour, glory, immortality, and eternal life. And some to dishonor; who are to the disreputation of the church, the dishonor of religion, and scandal of the Gospel; by them God is dishonored, his ways evil spoken of, his doctrines blasphemed, and his name reproached; and who are themselves dishonorable among men now, and will be covered with shame and everlasting contempt hereafter.”

Our Confession states that “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.”

2nd Timothy 2: 21 – “Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”

John Gill says again: “2 Timothy 2:21 – “If a man therefore purge himself from these,... That is, if a man clears himself, and keeps himself clear from such men as Hymenaeus and Philetus, who are comparable to wooden and earthen vessels, and are dishonourable ones; if he shuns their defiling company, and polluting principles; if he keeps clear of their heresies, and is not carried away with the errors of these wicked men, and is not drawn aside by them into immoral practices, but stands fast in the faith, and departs from iniquity: he shall be a vessel unto honour; he will be made manifest, and appear to be a vessel chosen to honour; and will be an honourable member of the church here, and will be honoured by Christ hereafter: sanctified: he will appear to be one that is set apart by God the Father, and whose sins are purged away by the blood of Christ, and who is sanctified internally by the Spirit of God; for external holiness springs from internal holiness, and is, an evidence of it: and meet for the master's use: the use and service of Christ, who is the master of the house; either for the ministry of the word, the administration of ordinances, or for some service or another, which he calls him to, and employs him in.”

And prepared unto every good work; which an unregenerate man is not; he is to every good work reprobate; he is not capable of performing good works; he is not prepared for them, nor ready at them; but a true believer, one that is regenerated, and sanctified by the Spirit of God, he is created in Christ Jesus unto good works; and has in the performing of them right principles, aims, and ends, as well as a supply of grace, by which he is enabled to do them.