

## 18. The church & the communion of saints

### WCF chapters 25-26 *Modern Language version – 1993 – OPC*

25.1. The catholic (that is, universal) church, which is invisible, consists of all the elect who have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ its head. This church is his bride, his body, and the fullness of him who fills all in all.

2. The visible church, which is also catholic (that is, universal) under the gospel (that is, not confined to one nation, as it was before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion, together with their children. It is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

3. To this universal, visible church Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the age. For this purpose he makes these means effectual by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise.

4. This universal church has been sometimes more and sometimes less visible. Particular churches, which are members of this universal church, are more or less pure to the extent to which the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, the ordinances are administered, and public worship is performed more or less purely in them.

5. The purest churches on earth are subject to both mixture and error, and some have so degenerated that they have become no churches of Christ at all, but rather synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall always be a church on earth to worship God according to his will.

6. There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome be its head in any sense [<sup>1646 original</sup> but is, that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the church, against Christ and against all that is called God].

#### **An "invisible" church**

##### Ephesians 1:22-23

We cannot see the whole church around the world and down the ages

Christ the head... the spouse...

The church = Christ's "fulness"!!!

#### **The "visible" church**

e.g. in "Corinth"... who "call upon the name of our Lord" – 1 Cor. 1:2

"their children": the children of Christians are Gods before they are ours – Acts 2:39, 1 Cor. 7:14

"salvation": Christians are in churches...

#### **Christ's gifts to the church**

Her work, word and sacraments: from Christ... empowered by Him... to build us up... until the End – Ephesians 4:11-16, Matthew 28:19-20

#### **Mixed churches and error**

Sometimes seems hard to see the church surviving – e.g. 1 Kings 19, Revelation 12:6,14

And "particular" churches are more/less pure@ word, worship, discipline – e.g. 1 Cor. 5:6-7, Revelation 2-3

Always "mixed": true believers... and non-believers – Matthew 13:24-30

But always there: Matt. 16:18, 28:19-20

The guarantee = Christ the head – Col 1:18

(And the Pope's *not* the head!)

26.1. All saints—who are united to Jesus Christ their head by his Spirit and by faith—have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory. And, being united to one another in love, they participate in each other's gifts and graces and are obligated to perform those public and private duties which lead to their mutual good, both inwardly and outwardly.

2. It is the duty of professing saints to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God and in performing such other spiritual services as help them to edify one another. It is their duty also to come to the aid of one another in material things according to their various abilities and necessities. As God affords opportunity, this communion is to be extended to all those in every place who call on the name of the Lord Jesus.

3. The communion which the saints have with Christ does not make them in any way partakers of the substance of his Godhead, or in any respect equal with Christ. To affirm either is irreverent and blasphemous. Nor does their fellowship with one another as saints take away or infringe upon any person's title to, or right to, his own goods and possessions.

#### **Union with Christ...**

"in Christ" – e.g. Eph. 1:3ff, Philippians 3:10

#### **... and therefore communion with one another**

Joined and held together in Him – Eph. 4:15-16

Spiritual good (e.g. 1 Thess. 5:11-14), material good (e.g. 1 John 3:16-18)

#### **Our duties to each other**

In the worship of God – e.g. Acts 2:42-46, Heb. 10:25

In aiding one another – e.g. Acts 2:44, 1 Jn 3:17, 2 Cor 8-9

#### **The limits of union / communion**

We don't become mini-gods

We don't "own" each others' possessions

**Personal response: for what should we give thanks... confess... pray?**

**Next week: The sacraments**