

Communion with God

Continuing in God's Covenant

Halifax: July 22, 2007, Nehemiah 8-13

Welcome of New Members

This morning,

- we have the privilege of welcoming Timothy Lindsay and James Shearouse as communicant members of Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church.
 - Tim and James, please come forward so you can be presented to the congregation.

You all already know James Shearouse...

- He has been a member of this congregation since we began, having been baptised as an infant.
 - He has been counted among us on the basis of God's promise to receive the children of believing parents.
 - But now that he has reached that age in which he can meaningfully confess his faith and take vows before the Lord,
 - He has met with the session to be examined as to his belief and commitment to Jesus Christ, and the session has determined that he has a credible profession of faith.
 - Therefore, he has been admitted to the communion table on the basis of his profession.
 - The session received him on April 11, and today we present him to you as a communicant member.

Most of you also know Timothy Lindsay...

- Tim visited with us on a couple of occasions when he was home to see his parents who live in Dartmouth.
 - He grew up in the United Church where he was baptised and confirmed,
 - but it was not until he went to University that he came to know Jesus Christ in a saving way—
 - It was then that he came to believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God,
 - to see truly that he was a sinner without hope but in the mercy of God...
 - to turn to Jesus Christ in living faith for the forgiveness of his sins and to begin to live a new life in fellowship with Him as Lord.
 - It was at that time that Tim made a credible profession of faith in the church he was attending.

- However, for a variety of reasons, including several relocations, Tim was not a member of any particular congregation.
- As God's providence has brought him to Halifax until January,
 - Tim asked the session if it would be possible for him to unite with this congregation when he came to us.
- We met with him on July 7 and examined his profession of faith and his commitment to Jesus Christ,
 - and judging these to be credible, we gladly received him as a member of this congregation.

And now Tim and James,

- In behalf of the Session, it is my privilege to present you to the congregation as communicant members...
 - As an act of worship to God and for the sake of the congregation,
 - the session asks you to reaffirm the vows you took when you met with us.
- Tim and James, I ask each of you, in the presence of God and before these witnesses,
 1. Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His love and mercy?
 2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners, and do you receive Him and trust in Him alone for salvation as He is offered in Gospel?
 3. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the written Word of God, the only perfect rule of faith and practice?
 4. Do you now promise, in humble reliance upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
 5. Do you accept the doctrines and principles of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, so far as you understand them, as agreeable to and founded on the Word of God?
 6. Do you promise, with the Lord's help, to be faithful in the performance of your Christian duties, both in private life and in the work of the Church?
 7. Do you submit yourself in the spirit of love to the government and discipline of the Church, and seek the peace, purity, and prosperity of this congregation so long as you are a member of it?

Tim and James, we welcome you to this congregation.

Introduction:

This morning, I am taking a break from our regular series in Matthew because I want to preach on a topic related to the receiving of new members...

- I have chosen for my text the last six chapters of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8-13).
 - This message was really one that I had intended to preach in our Old Testament Survey that we have been doing on Sunday night,
 - but when I saw how suited it was to what we are doing today, I decided to wait and preach it to you this morning.

Now I want you to think about what was going on in the days of Nehemiah.

- God had brought His people back from 70 years of captivity...
 - In their exile, they had been cut off from the worship of the temple because of their disobedience...
 - But now the Lord had restored them...
 - He had brought them back to Jerusalem and they had rebuilt the temple and the city walls.
 - They were once again a City for God—
 - a city set on hill to be the light of the world,
 - highly visible as the people of God.
- You can be sure that all those who truly loved the Lord were thrilled about this!
 - They were eager to continue as the City of God, showing forth His glory and His mercy in their worship at the temple.
 - They did not want to lose this privilege again.
 - They did not want the City of God to lose its character as the City of God.
 - They did not want to return to captivity.

Now my brothers and sisters,

- we may learn from this that there are times when the people of God lose their character as the City of God...
 - This is what happened when the temple and the walls of Jerusalem were torn down and they were scattered throughout Babylon...
 - There were still many who believed, but they were no longer a City of God, shining as light in the world—
 - They were individuals, and many shined as individual lights, but they were not a city on display.

In our New Testament times, God has not appointed a central city as He did in the Old Testament,

- but He has placed us in congregations all over the world.
 - And these congregations are each little cities of God within the cities in which they are found.
 - But sadly, some them, many of them, have lost their character as a city of God...
 - they have so departed from the word of God, that they no longer shine as a light in the world.

Brothers and sisters of Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church,

- we should be very thankful that God has graciously called us together as a congregation for Him and given us light to shine forth as His city in our community.
 - Just look at all He has done for you!
 - He has delivered you from the dominion of darkness and brought you into the kingdom of His Son.
 - He has opened your eyes to see your need of a Saviour
 - And He has shown you the perfection of Jesus Christ as that Saviour, and has caused you to understand what Jesus did to take away our sins.
 - He has given you a new heart and a new spirit so that you can begin to live for Him, to see how excellent His way is, and to walk in it.
 - He has given you a glorious hope that when Jesus returns, you will be done with all your corruption...
 - all your bitterness and greed and malice will be gone...
 - You will live in God's house with fullness of joy, living in perfect harmony in the delight of God's glorious presence and in the company of all the redeemed!
 - He has done great things for us and we are glad!
- Like the people of Nehemiah's day,
 - You who love the Lord and are true members of this city want to it flourish.
 - You don't want to see it scattered and brought to confusion.
 - You want it to shine in the glory that belongs to it,
 - to be a praise in the earth,
 - to show forth the mercy of God and the grace of God in Jesus Christ.
 - You do not want to ever lose sight of the privilege that is yours to be a part of the city of God,
 - You don't ever want your love to grow cold!

But we must be realistic...

- The members of God's City **do** lose their love and their zeal...

- The New Testament is full of warnings about drifting away,
 - about losing our first love,
 - about growing cold toward God,
 - about becoming barren and unfruitful.

- In revelation, Jesus warns churches that if they do not repent,
 - He may come and remove their lampstand!
 - That is, He may turn them over to darkness—
 - To take away the lampstand is to take away the gospel—the very thing that sets the church apart!

- This is no idle threat!
 - Take a survey of Nova Scotia.
 - You will find that 85% of the citizens here are baptised!
 - But you know as well as I do that the great majority of these do not have the light of the gospel...
 - They do not see their great need of Christ,
 - They do not rejoice in Him as the one who washes away our sins...
 - They do not have a new heart and a new life from the living Spirit of God...
 - They are cold and barren and unfruitful.

- If you know the Lord and love the Lord today, you don't want that to happen to you...
 - You don't want that to happen to this congregation!
 - You want to be preserved in the grace of God!

And I have good news for you...

- Our gracious Lord is also concerned for our preservation...
 - In fact, He promises that He will preserve those who truly know Him so that they will **not** utterly depart from Him.
 - You will say,
 - “But you just pointed out to us that He threatens to take away His lampstand and that this is no idle threat...
 - that there are many churches which have indeed lost the light of the truth and the love of the truth.”
 - It's true that this happens—
 - But you see, there are many in a congregation or that come into a congregation that don't truly love the Lord.

- They have come near and they have made a profession,
 - but they do not truly believe and have never been given a new heart and new spirit.
- And when these multiply in a congregation,
 - the congregation can grow cold and the Lord will eventually take away His lampstand—
 - the light of truth will be taken from them and they will fall into confusion and believe lies.
 - From such congregations, God often calls out those who still love Him and they form new congregations...
 - Really, they are a continuation of the old congregation—continuing in the grace and light upon which the congregation was founded...
 - This is the way that the Lord has worked throughout history...
 - This is what happened among the Jews in the first century who turned to Christ—
 - they were driven out of the synagogues and formed new congregations.
 - This is what happened in the Protestant Reformation...
 - This is how the Lord continues His church...

And I say, it is a privilege to a part of a congregation that has the light of the gospel!

- You know that God has restored you and you are glad...
 - You know that He has brought you back to be His City just as the people in Nehemiah's day knew that God had restored them.
 - And just like them, you want to continue as His City...
 - You don't want to be scattered and to have the light taken away...

In Nehemiah 8-13, we are given three things that a congregation needs if it is to retain its character as the City of God.

- Surely all you who love to be a City for God that shines as a light for God in this world do not want to become darkness...
 - And so this morning I want to present to you these three things that will help you to continue as a City of God, a light for God in Halifax.

I. First of all, you need the faithful exposition of God's Word.

A. See how the people had a desire for the Word in Nehemiah 8...

1. The chapter opens with them gathering together and calling for Ezra the scribe to come and read the word to them in the public assembly...

- a. The scriptures they had at this time were the Law of Moses...
 - The people knew they needed to hear it—they wanted to hear it.
 - They insist upon it!
 - b. We are told in 8:3 that they gave attention to the Word from early in the morning until midday!
 - They were hungry for it.
2. Now I tell you, if a congregation is not eager to receive God’s Word,
- you can be sure that God’s Word will not continue for long in that congregation.
 - Ministers are lazy, and we would much prefer to give little ditties than sermons—something flowery and light...
 - And if there is always pressure to have shorter sermons and lighter sermons,
 - you can be sure that such a congregation will get them!
 - There will be more and more entertainment and less and less preaching!

B. But why is preaching so important? Why is it so essential?

- 1. It is important because this is the way that God’s truth is brought to us!
 - a. Today, many people like to think that the truth comes from within, that we have a light within us that we just need to encourage and improve...
 - but the Bible says something very different about us!
 - It says that we are full of darkness and that our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked.
 - That means that we need to have the truth brought to us,
 - we need to have it presented to us from the outside...
 - If we don’t, we will never come to the truth—
 - we won’t even know the truth!
 - b. And the method that God has appointed for this to happen is preaching...
 - 1) In 1 Peter 1:23, Peter says that we have been “born again through the word of God” which he describes as “the word that was preached.”
 - In 1 Corinthians 1:21, Paul says that it is “through the foolishness of the message preached” that God is pleased to save those who believe.
 - 2) This is why Jesus commanded His disciples to go out into all the world and preach the gospel.

- He knew that the world needed to have the word of the gospel preached to them...
- The nations did not already know the gospel...
 - How could they?
 - How could they know that God had sent His Son from heaven to come and die for guilty sinners?
 - How could they know that God calls them to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins?
 - As Paul says in Romans 10,
 - “How can they hear without a preacher?”

TRANS> So you see that the Bible makes it clear that preaching is the primary means God uses to bring His truth to us...

- But that is not all...
 - Not only do we need to have the truth brought to us at the start...
- 2. We also need the word to be continually brought to us if we are to continue in the truth.
 - a. Paul makes this clear to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4...
 - Just after telling Timothy how useful the scriptures are—
 - how they bring the truth to us,
 - how they convince us of sin,
 - how they correct us,
 - and how they lead us into God’s gracious way,
 - Paul says,
 - “I charge you therefore before God and the LORD Jesus Christ... preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching!”
 - He goes on to warn that without faithful preaching, the people will be turned aside to fables and lies!
 - b. There is a constant drift in all of us and God’s word calls us back...
 - 1) We are always wanting to flatter ourselves,
 - but a continuous diet of sound preaching reminds you that you are sinner in desperate need of forgiveness and grace...
 - The people in Nehemiah wept when they heard of the word of God because they saw how sinful they had been...
 - In chapter 9, they responded with a deep confession of their sin...

- The Bible shows you what you are—it corrects all the lies that come from self-flattery and from the flattery of the world.
 - But if you no longer hear the pure word of God preached—
 - if it is watered down, you will soon forget what you are!
- 2) In the same way, without the word faithfully preached, we will lose sight of God’s glory and of the wonders of His grace...
- We live in a world that is constantly complaining against God.
 - a world that is looking for good reasons not to serve God.
 - the way Israel did when God brought them out of Egypt...
 - “We were better off in Egypt,” they said.
 - “The LORD brought us out in the wilderness to kill us.”
 - How quickly we can forget what God has done, how quickly we lose sight of the deep love of Jesus Christ,
 - how quickly we lose sight of the perfections of God and the beauty of God...
 - We need to hear the gospel again and again, faithfully proclaimed from the pulpit!
 - We need to be continually reminded about the character of God.
- 3) Oh my brothers and sisters...
- I have seen many people who have drifted away from the very heart of the gospel...
 - It is very sad when churches no longer preach the truth.
 - I grew up in a church like that—even the minister did not know the gospel!
 - In such a church, the people are soon turned aside to lies...
 - We all need a continual diet of God’s word if we are to continue in His grace.

C. But note well, it must be the **Word** that is preached...

- that is, the holy Scriptures...
 - that is what Paul told Timothy to preach...
1. This is what Ezra and the thirteen preachers who assisted him preached...
- It was from the scriptures that they read, and it was the scriptures that they expounded...

- As is says in verse 8 of this noble company of preachers,
 - Neh 8:8: “They read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.”
 - They laboured in order that the people would understand the scriptures.
- a. That is what a preacher is supposed to do...
 - The truth is to be brought from the scriptures, not from his own imagination, his own heart, his own studies...
 - He is not to bring worldly psychology, human philosophy, flattery, self-help, and all the other things that people may want to hear today...
 - He is to bring sound doctrine, teaching from fount of the scriptures...
 - He is to open the scriptures by explaining them so the people can understand what God says.
- b. When God’s Word comes to you as it should,
 - You will know that it is from God...
 - It will cut deeply to your heart and expose things that only the Lord is able to expose—things that you would not admit...
 - And it will show you the glory of Christ so that you will be renewed in your appreciation of what He has done.
 - It will impress your duty upon you so that you will see what God wants of you in your marriage, in your church life, in your work!
- 2. We are told that Ezra was a man who had dedicated himself to this work...
 - We are told in Ezra 7:10 that:
 - Ezra 7:10: Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.
 - He and the other men who taught with him were men that studied hard in order that they might preach them faithfully...
 - We need to be careful that we receive the word from those who are duly qualified to preach...
 - those who have been called of the Lord, set apart by the laying on of hands by a Presbytery that is committed to the Word of God—
 - by that, I mean a presbytery that is true to the scriptures itself and so is looking for men who are true to the scriptures and who can expound the scriptures with faithfulness.

TRANS> So the first thing you need as a congregation if you are to continue in the grace of God is sound preaching.

- Now let's look at the second...

II. Secondly, you need to view your relationship with God as a covenant relationship.

A. In Nehemiah, we see that the whole congregation renewed their covenant with the LORD.

1. They did this after they heard His word because they realised how they and their fathers had broken God's Covenant.
 - a. In chapter 9, they confess how they have been unfaithful to God's covenant and how the LORD had been faithful.
 - In verse 37, they confess that their troubles have come upon them because of their unfaithfulness...
 - b. And then in verse 38, they say:
 - Neh 9:38: "because of all this, we make a sure covenant and write it, our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it."
 - And chapter 10 sets forth those who signed the covenant and then tells what the covenant entailed.
 - c. They realised that they and their fathers had broken God's covenant, so they are renewing the covenant.
2. They did this because they were serious about continuing with the LORD.
 - a. He had graciously brought them back, and they are affirming that they were His people—
 - They wanted to solemnly promise that they would walk as His people!
 - b. You will notice in Neh 10:28-29 that there is a summary of their covenant making:
 - Neh 10:28-29: Now the rest of the people—the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding—these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes:
 - c. It is important to see, as it says here, that when you enter a covenant, you take a curse and oath upon yourself..
 - What does that mean?

- It means that you are asking God to curse you—to destroy you—if you do not do what you have promised...
- It is a way of saying,
 - “I really mean this!
 - This covenant is not something I intend to walk away from.
 - I am asking that serious consequences be brought on me if I do!”
- It is a very solemn thing to enter into a covenant!
 - You are binding yourself to a relationship that you cannot violate without penalty!

B. We ask everyone who unites with this congregation to either enter into covenant with God or, if they have already done so, to renew their covenant.

1. This is important because many in the modern church do not understand our relationship with God in terms of a covenant.

a. But it is a covenant relationship.

- The Lord calls upon all those who come to faith to confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus...
- They are to make a formal profession that they belong to Him...
 - And that they will follow Jesus as Lord.
- It is not until such a confession has been made that they are entitled to receive the signs and seals of the covenant...
 - Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

TRANS> Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are not faithfully administered in a congregation unless they are administered to those who have a credible confession of faith.

- That is why the elders examine those who are admitted to communicant membership.

b. Baptism is only to be given once to each person when they first enter into covenant,

- either upon their own confession or, if infants, the confession of their parents...
 - but in either case, it is by a confession of faith...
- And the Lord’s Supper is only to be given to them as they continue in that confession—walking faithfully in covenant with God...

- And if baptised as infants, they are only entitled to come to the Lord's Supper when they are of sufficient age and maturity to make and maintain a credible confession apart from their parents...
 - As infants, their faithfulness is tied to their parents—if their parents reject the covenant, a little child will follow them...
 - but when they become old enough to stand independently of their parents, they then confess their faith and are admitted to the Lord's Supper.
 - That is what James has done.
- c. Whenever a person rejects the covenant by denying Christ or by refusing to repent of his sins,
- that person is no longer eligible to come to the Lord's Supper until he repents and renews his covenant with God,
 - asking for forgiveness and promising new obedience.
 - You can see how important it is to realise that our relationship with God is a covenant relationship that needs to be renewed.
 - We personally renew our covenant with God every time we come to the Lord's Table.
 - Each time we come, we confess Christ afresh as our only hope of salvation, and we renew our promise that we will serve Him, and we look to Him for forgiveness and strength.
 - But when our breach of the covenant has been public and has resulted in our suspension from the Lord's Table,
 - we then need to renew our covenant publicly.
 - Sometimes, this is even done by an entire congregation.
 - That is what the whole congregation at Jerusalem did after they had returned from exile,
 - They realised that the Lord had cut them off from His ordinances because of their disobedience...
 - and so they come to renew the covenant as a whole congregation.
2. There are several reasons it is helpful to recognise your relationship as a covenant.
- a. First, because a covenant clearly defines what the relationship is.
- It has clear terms, stating in a concise way what God has done to make you His people, and what your obligations to Him are as His people.

- It is important for us to know that those who coming into the church understand what it means to be a faithful church member.
 - If a person applies for membership, but does not really understand who Christ is and what He has done...
 - or what his obligations to Christ are,
 - it gives the elders an opportunity to clarify this for him and to lead him to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ—
 - to clarify for him what it really means to be a Christian.

- b. Secondly, it is helpful to recognise your relationship with God as a covenant because it binds you to that relationship...
 - I have already pointed out that you take upon yourself a curse and an oath, asking God to judge you if you don't observe what you have promised...
 - Such a solemn exercise helps you to understand that being a member of the congregation of God's people is not a trivial matter.

 - This is very important in our day, because people like to be casual about their relationships...
 - There is a fear of entering into covenants because they bind us—
 - we don't want to be committed—we want to be free to change the terms...

 - A lot of young men are afraid of the marriage covenant...
 - They don't want to love, but they don't want to be bound to love until "death do us part"...
 - I have heard of some "marriages" in which the parties promise to be faithful "as long as we both shall love" rather than "as long as we both shall live."

 - Take a carpenter—
 - he likes to leave things a little vague so he can say:
 - "Oh, you wanted me to do the dry wall—well, its going to be a little extra for that..."

- c. Third, it is helpful to have a covenant because a covenant is public...
 - 1) You stand up before witnesses to make your vows,
 - and these witnesses keep you accountable if they see you failing to do what you have promised.

 - 2) If you mean business about continuing,

- you want that—you want to be held accountable by the community...
- You want them to come to you when your love for Christ grows cold and you start to stray and hold you to what you have promised.

TRANS> And that leads us to the third thing you need as a congregation needs if you are to continue in the grace of God.

III. The third thing you need is faithful church discipline.

A. In Nehemiah 13,

- We see that God graciously brings Nehemiah back to Jerusalem to turn the people back to their covenant obligations...
- When He returned, He found three gross violations of the covenant...
 1. First, he found that there was a neglect of God's house...
 - a. Nehemiah found that a priest named Eliashib had actually turned one of the storerooms of the temple into a house for Tobiah, an Ammonite who was not even supposed to be admitted to the temple!
 - He converted the store room that was to be used for storing what was given to the Levites from the tithes of the people!
 - The store house was not needed because of another violation...
 - The people had ceased to provide support to the Levites!
 - b. Nehemiah immediately went to work to rectify these abuses...
 - He threw all of the furnishings of Tobiah out of the temple,
 - and he reinstated the tithes for the Levites, placing men to oversee what was brought to them.
 2. Secondly, Nehemiah found that the Sabbath was being desecrated...
 - a. The people were labouring—treading out their wine presses and harvesting their fields...
 - and they were buying and selling!
 - The day that God had appointed for thanksgiving and praise had been turned into a day of ordinary labour and marketing.
 - b. Nehemiah rebuked the nobles for this.
 - They were the ones who were ordering their servants to work and allowing the markets to be opened,
 - and he warned them that this was the very same thing that brought the city of God to ruin in by gone days!

- He ordered the gates of the city to be shut so that buying and selling could not continue, and he saw that the day was sanctified.
3. Thirdly, Nehemiah found that there was unfaithfulness to God's covenant in the family...
 - a. One of the things the people had expressly promised was that they would not give their daughters to those who were not God's people, or take wives for their sons or for themselves from such.
 - b. Nehemiah was so upset about this that he struck some of those who had done this and pulled out their hair...
 - He realised how serious a violation of the covenant this was,
 - And he warned them how that even Solomon had been to worship idols because of marriage to pagan wives.

TRANS> What a blessing it was that Nehemiah came and did this!

- How quickly the people had turned away!

B. If you are serious about continuing in God's grace, you will want active discipline—

- you will want the members and the leaders of the church to come to you when you start to violate God's covenant...
- you will fully support them when they deal with others who have violated God's covenant.

1. Don't you see brothers and sisters,

- a. This is one of the first things that goes when a church starts to depart!
 - Everyone in a congregation does not fall into rebellion all at once,
 - but as we start to become too afraid or too polite or too something to deal with sin in our midst!
- b. Just look at the record of church history!
 - 1) How is it that a church can be considering whether it is appropriate for homosexuals to become ministers?
 - Is it not because somewhere along the line,
 - the church decided to look the other way when a church member was co-habiting outside of wedlock?
 - when it was no longer scandalous to do so in the eyes of the Church?
 - 2) Again, how is it that a whole denomination can have images in their worship that worshippers bow down to?

- Is it not because somewhere, way back when, the church began to look the other way when congregations first began to worship in ways that God had not instituted?
 - Somebody didn't want to hurt someone's feelings—they didn't want to cause a rift—they didn't want to be thought unloving...
 - But the truth is, they had lost their love to the Lord...
 - If you are serious about seeing the church continue as the church, you will be serious about church discipline.
2. The church loses its identity, its distinctiveness, as the city of God when it ceases to uphold Christ's standards...
- a. Is this not true with any society?
 - If you are a board certified surgeon, it means something only as long as the certifying board upholds the standards of what it requires for certification.
 - If those standards become lax, it means nothing—
 - a certified surgeon is then no different than a guy with sharp knife operating out of garage.
 - b. It is supposed to mean something to be a member of the church of Jesus Christ—to be on the roll of the congregation of God's people...
 - It's supposed to mean that you believe certain things and that you live in obedience to God's commandments...
 - If those who deny that Jesus is the only way of salvation are admitted, it no longer means anything to be admitted...
 - The church then ceases to uphold the gospel and it ceases to be a light in the community.
 - Church discipline makes it clear that it means something to be a Christian.
 - If unbelievers and fornicators and adulterers and idolaters and covetous persons and blasphemers are allowed to maintain membership,
 - what does it mean any more to be numbered with God's people?
 - c. It loses all meaning and the witness of the congregation dies...
 - it ceases to be salt and light.
 - It ceases to be God's City

Conclusion:

Oh brothers and sisters, what a privilege it is to be numbered with God's people in the City of God!

- Consider what God has done for us to make us His people!
 - Consider the promises that are given to us and the hope that we have!
 - Surely this is not something you want to walk away from!

I beseech you to earnestly pray that this congregation will have...

- faithful preaching
- covenant renewal
- and active discipline!

And see to it that you, wherever you go, always support and seek out these things.

- Jesus Christ has often had to come and remove His lampstand from unfaithful congregations...
- May He keep us in the means of preservation that we might continue in ardent love for Him.