

Belgic Confession 27 – How to View the Church

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Some people refuse to join Christ's church and simply hop from church to church looking for the best spiritual "deal" in town. Of course there is nothing wrong in finding a godly church, and that can take some time, but often people move around for flimsy reasons. Often they want a place where they can get to display their talents and be in a prominent position. Or maybe they are looking for friends for their kids. Others look for churches where they can do good business or get soft clients. They view the church as something that provides for their own advantage.

But an erroneous view of the church is not limited to individuals. Churches sometimes don't view themselves properly. They don't see themselves as the gathering for God's people for worshipping the Savior and for the spiritual encouragement of each other. Instead, they see themselves as existing to meet the "felt needs" of those who attend. Their focus is man-centered.

Hear God correcting these erroneous views today.

Our headings are:

The **Personality of the Church**

The **Preservation of the Church.**

Our goals are: That you **understand the nature and blessings of Christ's true church, join her, and strengthen her.**

The Personality of the Church

We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, **all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit** 我们相信并承认一大公教会是圣洁的会众，真正的基督信徒，都盼望在耶稣基督里得救，由他的血洗净，并由圣灵成圣受了印记。

1. We do not believe in a church, but we believe in the existence of the true church of Jesus Christ. RC's believe "in" the church and so they believe that the church is always true. That is heresy 异端. If you believe "in" a church it means you trust the church. Christians are to trust God, not the church. The church is still being built up and needs God's help, so don't believe "in" the church. Don't trust in the creature; trust in the Creator.

2. Who is the church? The church is the visible assembly of believers called by God and serving under the direction of the Good Shepherd. The church is his flock. The church is also called the Bride of the Lamb, Christ's bride, the body of Christ, the House of God, and the family of God. These names reflect many levels of the relationship God has with his church. Trouble comes when someone views his relationship with Christ in a limited way. He might say: "Christ is like a husband." ...but Christ is also master...and he is also a friend...and he is also the judge! But if you limit Christ to one aspect then you will treat him in contempt in other areas. If Christ is seen as only loving, then it allows for bad behavior, as one would not see him as a serious father! This is a major error. (Justin Bieber said that he loves Jesus and that is his salvation. He didn't want to hear about hell or judgment.

One more important lesson: Since the church is the visible assembly of believers under the Good Shepherd, places like the United Church of Canada which has sunk into a spiritual pit, the true church is no longer found there. Many of those churches now deny the Good Shepherd actually died for his church. **Make judgments about those institutions.** Surely you are not to pick on a church for small issues – like if they don't sing certain great hymns of the faith. **But when a church has departed far from God, your judgments and condemnation are essential.** Doing this will guard your children and warn those who are in those apostate churches.

3. What are the characteristics of Christ's church?

a. The church is universal 普世.

It is not confined to a time. The church in the OT was the same as the New Testament Church. The writer of Hebrews pointed out that we have faith in the same Christ as OT saints and Apostle Paul made it clear that the wall of division between the Jews and Gentiles has been removed by Jesus. We are part of the same family.

Ephesians 2:19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

The church is not confined to a place. The church in Africa, with their drums and dashikis 颜色花哨的宽袍, as long

as they are redeemed by Christ and serve under his direction, is the same church that is in Scarborough with the 3 Forms of Unity. It may not be as pure is some places, but Christ's church is never perfectly pure, just like you might consume foods without 100% knowing what is in them! (That's why you must not believe in the church.)

The church is not confined to race. I grew up hearing that Christianity was a White Man's religion. (But

Christianity did not even start with the cannibalistic 吃人 whites.) Christ had Moabite (Ruth), and Canaanite ancestry (Rahab). **Jesus was not a pure Jew.** And all kinds of people joined Israel- Egyptians, Syrians, etc. Abraham was told that in his Seed all the nations of the world would be his spiritual children. In the NT we see Christ's clear command that the church is to be established in all the nations of the earth. You can see this coming true today, often in spectacular ways – China, Korea, Argentina, etc. And you see it at New Horizon.

b. The church is holy. The church was bought with Christ's blood and separated from its past owner – the Devil. The world may see the church as corrupted and led by weak men, but God sees her as pure, because she is washed in the blood of Jesus and is judicially 司法上 white as snow.

1Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

While the church is only judicially holy, God's Word and Holy Spirit continue to guide the church into purity.

c. The church is Christian; she belongs to Christ; he puts ownership on her. He, and only he, regulates her activity. Matthew 16: 18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

So if a church does not yield to Christ's Word, then it is not his church. The church must not adjust to please people.

d. The church has one Gospel. Great judgment (hell) is pronounced on anyone who tries to change the Gospel.

Galatians 1:8 - But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

e. The church is united 合一. Consider our confession.

Furthermore, this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and **yet is joined and united with heart and will**, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit 此外, 此圣教会不能受限制于某一地域或仅限于某些人, 乃普遍于全世界; 并以心志借信心的能力, 同一心灵加入而联合之团体.

The church is united in worship and fellowship.

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

What is the evidence of that worship? The first evidence of corporate meeting of the church was in the days of Enosh, when men "began to call on the name of the Lord." Those who shun regular worshipping shame the Savior.

Genesis 4:26 And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the LORD.

"Call on the name of the Lord" referred to worship. And even though it was a small flock, it was a flock. The church then expanded to all the Patriarchs 族长 (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.) who clearly worshipped the Lord publicly. Then at Pentecost 五旬节 the church was empowered by the Holy Spirit to spread the Gospel (and therefore the church) to all ends of the earth. Today you are not to run away from the church but are to join with each other to worship. This is why we like to welcome those from different denominations 宗派 to join us in the Lord's Table. It is fellowship meal.

4. Denominations are necessary today because the church is more or less pure. The church is more or less pure because of sin and lack of understanding of the truth of the Bible. As congregations become purer, they will work more and more together for Christ's glory. So the church must always be reforming 归正中 ...so it can draw closer to the truth. **This further means that you must reject those who say "We have not creed but Christ."** Those people are not spiritually pure or pious. They are ignorant or they are arrogant – acting as if they know everything! **As we draw closer to truth, we will draw closer to each other.** How can you do this without truth? **So when you have friends who are not Reformed, have some doctrinal discussions.** Even if you lose friends over this, your desire for the purity of the church and the glory of Christ will well be worth it. And remember, God gives his Holy Spirit who always leads to unity, not to division. Paul said where division exists man is yet carnal and in need of the milk of the Gospel. **But remember all separations are not bad.** Some denominations are necessary because of language differences and customs (some sit on the floor, some sing differently).

The Preservation of the Church

This Church has been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this that Christ is an eternal King, which without subjects He cannot be. **And this holy Church is preserved or supported by God** against the rage of the whole world; though it sometimes for a while appears very small, and in the eyes of men to be reduced to nothing; as during the perilous reign of Ahab the Lord reserved unto Him seven thousand men who had not bowed their knees to Baal 教会既然从世界开始就有，直到世界的终了，从此就证明基督就是永远的王，一定有他的百姓。此圣教会蒙神保守并支持，与全世界的怒潮相抵抗；虽然有时它在人的眼中显得很渺小，不被人重视，正如亚哈作王的时期，主耶和華还保守七千人未向巴力屈膝。

1. God has always and will always keep his church. God's church was chosen before the foundation of the world and secured for eternity. Ephesians 1:4,13. World philosophies and religions will fall and fail but the church of Jesus will be preserved to the end of the age.

2. Even though the church may seem small or polluted, God never abandons 抛弃 his church. Elijah found this out with certainty. Though with a scornful 鄙视 wonder men see her sore oppressed... by schisms 分裂 rent asunder... by heresies distressed, and their cry goes up "how long?" But soon their night of weeping shall be morn of song.

1 Kings 19:10 So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." 18 "Yet I have reserved **seven thousand** in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

To think that the church is hopeless is a sign of faithlessness! The church is always alive – just as it was alive during the Dark Ages 黑暗时代. God kept his church strong (in spite of low numbers) so at the time of the Reformation, those leaving the RC's religion had something to come back to. So don't despise the day of small things here at New Horizon. Bigger does not guarantee better.

3. (Dieleman): When missionaries were forced to leave China when the communists took over, people thought that the church would keel over and die. But God kept his church strong. Today there are probably more evangelical Christians in China than in the USA.

Conclusion:

The church is the visible assembly of believers called by God and serving under his directions. So don't trust in the church, but trust in the God who preserves his church. God made his church universal, holy, and Christian, with one Gospel, and he will ultimately bring her into full unity at the end of the world. While the church is imperfect today, God sees her as perfect because Jesus Christ redeemed her from all her sins. It is in this church (that is imperfect in man's eyes, but perfect in God's) that you worship today. Here you listen to preaching, submit to discipline, and enjoy baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Do you view the church the right way?
2. Do you thank God for bringing you into his church?
3. Do you cherish this gift of church membership?
4. Do you work to bring others in this church?
5. Do you support those who are already in the church through you time, talents, and tithes?

Finally, if you are not a part of the church, part of the body of Christ, you are missing the only thing that guarantees a future outside of this world. How can you become part of his body? You can become part of his body by asking the Father to accept Christ's death on the cross as payment for all your sins. You will then have a new heart and be incorporated into the church.