

Belgic Confession 28 – You Have a Duty to Join the Church

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: The government allows 1 rat hair per large chocolate candy bar and it allows 20 maggots (蛆) in one can of mushrooms. The government allows this because they know that is a certain amount of impurities, while distasteful, will not seriously harm you.

And neither is the church perfect. She has hypocrites (假冒伪善者). She is sometimes fighting among herself. She is sometimes lazy. And she might be distasteful to some. But you still have an obligation to join her – and when you do: serve her, submit to her, and separate from wicked people. This is what you will hear from God.

Our headings are:

Join the Church and serve her

Join the Church and Submit to her

Join the Church and Separate from Non-believers

Our goals are: **That you will be moved to join the church and fulfill your duties in the church for the glory of the Lord, and for the good of your neighbor.**

You have a Duty to join and serve the church

We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and outside of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it; maintaining the unity of the Church; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; **bowing their necks under the yoke** of Jesus Christ; and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them.

我们相信此圣教会既然是那些得救之人的聚集，并在此之外无救恩 1，就无一人，不论情形如何，可以置身度外，离开教会而生活 2；都当与教会联合，维持教会的合一 3，服从教会的教义与纪律：在基督的轭下而虚怀若谷 4，互相为肢体 5，按着神所给的恩赐彼此服事，造就弟兄。愿大家共同遵守，根据神的话，这是众信徒的本份，要与那些不与教会来往的人分别为圣 6，加入此教会，不拘神在何处设立的 7，甚至受到执政掌权者的反对，或受到死亡与身体之刑罚的威胁 8。因此，那些凡离开此教会，或不加入此教会的人是反对神的旨意而行事。（Translated by Rev. Charles Chao D.D.

1. You should **want** to join the church of Jesus Christ. Why?

a. The church is built by God. It has a sure foundation and will last forever. Your nationality might be good now which Canada is still relatively rich, but that will pass. But the church of Jesus Christ stands firm.

b. The church is God's special bride to whom he gives all kinds of rights and privileges.

c. The church is united, holy, and universal.

2. You **need** to join the church of Jesus Christ. You **cannot have salvation** (得救) if you are willfully outside of the church.

a. The church is where the Gospel is preached. And when the Gospel of Christ is preached faith comes. And faith is the means by which you are nourished and strengthened. If you don't regularly go to church you will die...or at least **be spiritually malnourished** (营养不良). And your elders recognize that 30 minutes of preaching is not enough for rigorous growth! This why you have 2 services!

b. The church is where the sacraments (圣礼) are ministered. These are the secondary means of grace.

Acts 2:42 - And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine (使徒的教训) and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

c. There church is where you will receive discipline (管教). All 3 of these things are essential. A wise man will know this. You can't discipline someone outside your house. So you must be a member.

3. You are **commanded** to join, stay in the church, and attend regularly. You have a duty to not withdraw from the visible church. "You cannot have God as your Father and refuse to have the church as you mother." (John Calvin) It is a sin to withdraw from the church. It is legal to leave the church but it is not moral. It is a sin.

Hebrews 10:25 - **not forsaking the assembling** of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day [of judgment] approaching.

You may move to another good congregation – but better make sure it is better. You may not leave the church to nothing without incurring guilt. It is also wrong to leave one congregation to go to another congregation because it

demands less accountability (责任). You must not want to “jump ship.” Baptism (洗礼) joins you to the church. This is particularly relevant as you see more churches close than are planted in North America.

4. You must attend worship regularly.

a. You must worship God corporately (集体地). Through worship you are equipped for your duty with gifts that you are to use for the service of the other members: elders (长老), deacons (执事), showing hospitality (热情好客), counselors. (So it is not all about you!)

b. You must fulfill your duties to your brothers and sisters. You may not ignore God and you may not ignore your brothers and sisters. You are to work to maintain the unity of the church by helping others – building them up. If you don't fulfill this duty you allow Christ to see a black-eyed, bruised, and limping bride. (Who wants that?)

All parts of the church work better when they work in conjunction with other parts.

1 Corinthians 12:21-22 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

You need others as well to do your work. This is why we read stories of Christians meeting in caves to have meetings that were forbidden by civil governments ...or meeting in Siberian (西伯利亚的) forests to avoid the communists. One man put it nicely: Many logs make a brighter fire. (众人拾柴火焰高)

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and **members of the household of God,**

Consider the teacher of the catechism (教理问答).

55 Q. WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY “THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS” (圣徒相通)? A.

First, that believers one and all, as members of this community, share in Christ and in all his treasures and gifts. Second, that each member should consider it his duty to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the service and enrichment of the other members.

c. You even have a duty to help those who are coming to Christ. Take note!

Zechariah 8:23 –“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”’”

5. You are blessed when you join the church of Jesus Christ. And you have a duty to seek out God's blessing. David describes his love for the saints, and this caused David to not want to be by himself.

Psalms 16:3 As for the saints who are on the earth, "They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight."

What greater reward can there be than true happiness?

You have a Duty to Submit to the church

1. Each one must work to maintain the unity of the church by submitting to the elders of the church. This is what “bowing under the yoke” meant. Yoke = offices and responsibilities Christ gave to his church. Like the church, there may be some “maggots and rat hairs” among the elders, but there are still benefits that you must not refuse.

2. You show this submission (顺服) when you submit to the Word of God that is preached. You have to faithfully listen to and submit to their corrections and rebukes.

3. You show this submission when you submit to Christian discipline.

Matthew 18:17 "And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen (外邦人) and a tax collector."

This might not seem like a good thing in our age of selfishness, but those with wisdom recognize the benefits.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Even if what the elders are asking you to do is hard, you must submit...you may only refuse to submit if they ask you to something unbiblical (不合乎圣经原则的) or ungodly.

4. Private or public churches, without elders and discipline, are unbiblical and ungodly. Don't touch them with a 39 ½ foot pole.

You have a Duty to Separate from Unbelievers

And that this may be the more effectually observed, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the Church, and to join themselves to this congregation, wherever God has established it, even though the magistrates and edicts of princes were against it, yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment. Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same or do not join themselves to it act contrary to the ordinance of God.

愿大家共同遵守，根据神的话，这是众信徒的本份，要与那些不与教会来往的人分别为圣 6，加入此教会，不拘神在何处设立的 7，甚至受到执政掌权者的反对，或受到死亡与身体之刑罚的威胁 8。因此，那些凡离开此教会，或不加入此教会的人是反对神的旨意而行事

1. If you are going to submit better to Christ and his Word, and if you are to serve your brothers better, you will have to separate from those who would hinder you from doing those things.

Those who are non-Christians live for themselves, not for the Lord. You and the non-Christian have two different lords...two different loyalties. (This is not a command to leave an unbelieving spouse, but a warning that sometimes you have to give up friends who hinder your service to the Lord.)

2. Join the church and separate from unbelievers even if the world insults you or threatens you.

This willingness to separate from the wicked was seen in Ruth's life when she left her family and joined with her mother-in-law's people.

Ruth 1:16-... "Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God.

This is what believers in Muslim and Hindu countries face every day – like Indonesia, Iran, and Afghanistan. This is what believers have to deal with in communist countries – like Cuba, China, and North Korea. But this is not new. This is what the church faced during her days Israel in Egypt. This is what Christians faced from the Jews and the Romans in the 1st century. This is what Christians faced during the time of the Reformation. This is what you will face more and more from companies in Canada and in the US. And remember David's warning:

Psalms 1:5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners [stand] in the congregation of the righteous.

Don't be joined in marriage with those who reject the Lord.

3. No one is saying that the church (pastor and members) has no sins. We have maggots and flies.

Yet God separated you to be his children, and you are to stay in the church as he cleans you out. This is why Paul referred to the sinful people as the church at Corinth...or the church at Ephesus.

Conclusion:

God calls, gathers together, forms and secures the church for eternity. This church teaches, disciplines, and loves her children. You need to be a part of the church.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Don't stay away from the church! Join her and attend her worship services faithfully. Thank God for his blessings. Submit to the teaching and discipline of the elders. Work hard, using your gifts, for the good of the other Christians. Accept the help of other Christians. Call others into Christ's church by teaching them God's Word about who they are, what God has done for them, and how they could get the benefits of Christ. Remember, membership is not only a privilege; it is a responsibility as well. Don't be an "island," but a part of the community of believers.

Finally, it is not enough to attend church. You need to be joined to the church of Jesus Christ and regularly attend to receive the full effects of his blessings. To become part of the church and receive her benefits, you need Christ's obedience and death counted as yours. You can ask God the Father to do that for you; it is free.