

## **Belgic Confession 27 – Your Relationship with the Church**

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: There is a major problem with **how we (clergy and laity) view the church today.** Many view the church as **an institution that is “there for them,”** and they believe the church **must change with their evolving desires** and concerns. They see the church like one sees a cell phone or car manufacturer: **The company must come up with new and innovative ways to meet the desires of the people or they won’t buy.**

So learn today how you are to view the church of Jesus Christ.

Our headings are:

The **Portrait of the Church**

The **Preservation of the Church**

Our goals are: That you **understand the nature and blessings of Christ’s church**, that you then will **be moved to join her, strengthen your union with her, and serve her, so her Savior will be glorified.**

### **The Portrait 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.

#### **1. The church is not something in which we trust!**

**We do not believe in a church.** Roman Catholics believe “in” the church and that the church is always true. (There is a popular “worship” song that has this false doctrine in it.)

**If you believe “in” a church it means you trust the church.** Christians trust in God, not the church. The church is still being built up and needs God’s help, so don’t believe “in” the church.

**We simply believe that the church of Christ exists.**

#### **2. Who is the church?**

**The church is the visible assembly of believers called by God and serving under the directions 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 relationship God had with his church.

**Trouble comes when someone tries to view our relationship with Christ in a limited.** **For example, Christ is considered the husband to the church but the relationship is more.** Christ is also **master** of the church. Christ is also **friend** of the church! Christ is also **judge** of the church. (A bridegroom may not punish his wife, but Christ can and does punish his church!)

**There are two implications to consider regarding the church.**

**In those places, like the so-called United Church, where the church has sunk to the level of being a social club, the true church is no longer found there.** Some don't believe the atonement for sins was necessary. Some don't believe Jesus died on the cross for sins. They have repented for evangelizing in the past. They no longer serve under the direction of Jesus.

**Don't be afraid to make judgments about those institutions.** Surely you are not to pick on a church for small things, but when a church has so far departed from God, like denying the work of Jesus and the necessity of salvation, your judgments and condemnation are essential. People who go there die and go to hell. Don't remain silent while they go to hell.

### **3. What are the characteristics of the church?**

#### **a. The church is universal (catholic).**

**It is not confined to a time.** The church in the Old Testament was the same as the New Testament Church. The writer of Hebrews pointed out that we have the **same faith**, in the **same Christ**, with the **same Gospel**, and Apostle Paul made it clear that the wall of division between the Jews and Gentiles have been removed by Jesus, so we are in the **same church**.

**Because the church is universal, it is not confined to a place.** The church in Africa, with their drums and dashikis, 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 in some places, **but Christ's church is never perfectly pure**, just like you might consume foods without knowing what is in them and you are perfectly fine!

**Because the church is universal, it is not confined to race.** I grew up hearing Christianity was a White Man's religion, but

i. Christ himself had Moabite (Ruth), and Canaanite ancestry (Rahab). Jesus was not a pure Jew.

ii. All kinds of people joined Israel- Egyptians, Syrians , etc. Many left with the Jews when they left Egypt.

iii. Abraham was told that in his Seed (Jesus Christ) all the nations of the world would become his spiritual children.

iv. In the New Testament we see Christ's clear command that the church is to be established in all the nations. Matthew 28:19.

v. The Ethiopian (scorched face) eunuch was saved!

vi. You can see this coming true today, often in spectacular ways – China, Zimbabwe, Argentina, etc.

**b. The church is holy.**

The church was bought with Christ's blood and **separated from its past owner** – the Devil.

It is true the world may see the church as corrupt, especially when some of its leaders have fallen into sin, but God sees her as pure, because she is washed in the blood of Jesus and is judicially (justified) 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 it.**

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 it isn't "your church" except in the sense that you belong to it...or Pastor Mitchell's church...but Christ's church.

**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.

This was the same Gospel Adam had...and Noah...and Africans...and India. No wonder "going to hell" is promised to anyone who changes it!

**e. The church is united-many different people living as one.**

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.

There is nothing like being lost and finding someone with an ICTHUS – fish sticker at the back of their car! Blood brothers!

**But the church is particularly united in corporate worship and fellowship.**

Ephesians 4:4 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 unity in corporate worship and fellowship?**

In the Old Testament we see worship and fellowship since the days of Enosh, when men “began to call on the name of the Lord.”

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 (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.) who clearly worshipped the Lord publicly.

In the New Testament this is outlined and exemplified in the Book of Acts?

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the **apostles’ doctrine and fellowship,** in the **breaking of bread, and in prayers.**

Today you are not to run away from the church but are to join with each other to worship God and for Christian fellowship.

**4. What about denominations?**

**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 churches become purer, they will work more and more together for Christ’s glory.

**This is why the church must always be reforming ...examining its doctrines** ...so it can draw closer to the truth. Those who say: “**No creed, but Christ,**” are not **spiritually pure or pious.** They are arrogant – acting as if they know everything they must know! They think they can love God without knowing God. This is why you must love doctrines! They help you to love!

**When we draw closer to truth, we will draw closer to each other.** So when you have friends who are not Reformed, have some doctrinal discussions. Be patient! But 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. Then again, what blessing you can take to them if they are enlightened by truth! Jesus will be praised more.

**And remember, God gives his Holy Spirit who always leads to unity, not to division.**

**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.

**1. God has always and will always keep his church.**

This assumes that there will be those who will attack her and try to destroy her.

**But 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 will be preserved to the end of the age.

**2. Because of the attacks from the world and the Devil, the church will at times seem small, but God never abandons his church.**

This Elijah found out with certainty. Though with a scornful wonder men see her sore oppressed...

1 Kings 19:10,18 – 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. God kept his church strong (in spite of low numbers) so at the time of the Reformation, those leaving the Roman Catholic religion had something to join.

**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 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.** You are not to 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,** here **you tithe,** here you **submit to discipline,** and here you **enjoy baptism** and the **Lord's Supper.**

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, so what is your response:

**1. When you view the church the right way you will thank God for bringing you into his church. You can thank him in your heart, with your lips, and in living a godly life.**

**2. Work to bring others in the church so they too can receive all her benefits and serve her Savior.**

**3. Support those who are in the church through you time, talents, and tithes so they can grow in grace.**

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. Without being in Christ's church you will die in your sins and you will have to pay for your sins for eternity. But it doesn't have to be so. Why not receive the pardon for all your sins that God offers to you today? If you want pardon, ask for it. It's free.