

January 15th, 2017

—The Church—

## THE MEANING AND MARKS OF THE CHURCH

Hebrews 12:18-24; Psalm 87; Ephesians 1:22-23

This year marks the 500th year anniversary of the Reformation. October 31st, 1517, Martin Luther nailed the 95 thesis to the church door in Wittenburg, Germany sparking the greatest revival of Christendom since the apostles.

One of the major conflicts between Rome and Protestants that existed then, and still exists to this day, is the definition of the church. What is the church? Why does it exist? Who are it's leaders? What does it mean to be a member of the church?

We need to be able to answer those questions. If we don't know who we are, or why we exist, we will abandon the calling to which we have been called. As **Proverbs 28:19** says "Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint." Therefore, God-willing, this is where I hope to be taking us over the next five or so weeks.

The Meaning and Marks of the Church

The Mission of the Church

The Ministers of the Church Pt. 1

The Ministers of the Church Pt. 2

The Members of the Church

### Setting the Stage

Let's set the stage by listening to Wilhemus A Brakel give us a reality check: "...consider first of all that there are but two kings in this world, each having a kingdom: the kingdoms of Christ and of the devil, which are mortal enemies to each other. A third kingdom does not exist. Every person upon earth is either a subject of the King of Jesus or of the devil, the prince of darkness. No matter who you are individually, you are truly a subject of one of

these two kingdoms. You are neither neutral nor a subject of both kingdoms simultaneously. Therefore, to which kingdom do you presently belong?"<sup>1</sup>

The world tells us to pick whatever truth that we want to. Every religion is basically the same, all roads lead to Rome. False. There are only two kingdoms. Jesus said "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." (Luke 11:23). Over and over again in the gospels, our Lord constantly sets only two paths before us: You are either wheat or you are a tare (Matthew 13:24-30), you are either a sheep or you are a goat (Matthew 24:31-46), you are either a child of God or you are of your father the devil (John 8:42-44), you are either a branch that bears fruit or one that is thrown into the fire (John 15:1-2), you either belong to the church or you belong to the synagogue of Satan (Revelation 2:9). On that Great and Final Day, King Jesus will separate these two kingdoms *forever*. Bringing the one into everlasting, ever increasing glory with Him, and sending the other to unending destruction in the lake of fire. That is ultimate reality. And there is no other. If you don't belong to the church, meaning if you have not been united to Christ by a lively faith, you belong to the kingdom of darkness.

### **The Church is Christ's Precious Bride**

The church is *why* God created the world. We said during our Gospel Changes Everything series that Christ *was the reason* why God created the world. To display God's great glory. **Colossians 1:16** "For by him [Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and *for him*." The world was created by Christ and *for Christ*, that He might be on display. So how can I also say that the church is *why* God created the world?

Because the church is fullness of Christ! Look with me at **Ephesians 1:22-23** "And he [the Father] put all things under his feet [Christ's feet] and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, **the fullness**

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhemus A Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service, Vol. 2: The Church and Salvation*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 1993), pg. 56

of him who fills all in all.” Who does the “fullness of him” refer to? The church! The Father appointed Christ to be the head of the church, and the church is His body. Christ considers Himself in some way incomplete until He is united to the church, which is His body.<sup>2</sup> The church is the fullness of Christ. This is an unbelievable verse! Listen to what Calvin says.

“This is the highest honor of the Church, that, until [Christ] is united to us, the Son of God reckons himself in some measure imperfect. What consolation is it for us to learn, that, not until we are along with him, does he possess all his parts, or wish to be regarded as complete!”<sup>3</sup>

Now if I just read Calvin without reading Ephesians 1:22-23, I simply would not believe what he just said. But this is Paul’s argument. Look at the verse again “the church, which is his body [is] the fullness of him.” How could a head be complete without a body? Likewise, Jesus Christ, as the Mediator, wouldn’t be complete if he didn’t come into the possession of His church.<sup>4</sup> Listen to what Jonathan Edwards says on this verse:

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<sup>2</sup> Christ is not complete without His body, just as the soul is not complete without it’s body.

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XXI*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 218

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Henry says “...the church is said to be his fullness, because Christ as Mediator would not be complete if he had not a church. How could he be a king if he had not a kingdom? This therefore comes in to the honor of Christ, as Mediator, that the church is his fullness.” Unabridged Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, OSNOVA’s Kindle Edition, location 283140

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Likewise Francis Turretin says “[The Son of God] came into the world and performed the mediatorial office for no other reason than to acquire a church for himself and call it (when acquired) into a participation of grace and glory.” Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology Vol. 3*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 1997), pg. 1

“...the church is said to be the [fullness] of Christ...*as if* Christ were not complete without the church...man is incomplete without the woman, she is himself; so Christ is not complete without his spouse.”<sup>5</sup>

The church is *why* God made the world. God created the world for His glory ultimately, and He achieves this by securing a bride, that is, the church for His Son. This is why Paul can say such stunning things to the Corinthians. “For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Therefore, dear congregation, let us put away any low view we have of the church. Yes she is imperfect now. Yes she will disappoint us in this life. But the culmination of all of history is when the bride will finally be given to her Husband and they will share in the everlasting marriage feast of the Lamb of God. That is why the world was created! “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.” (Revelation 19:7)

### *The Big Idea...*

“The world was created so that the Son of God might have a spouse — that is, the church.” — Jonathan Edwards (WJE 13:272-73)

☆ The Meaning of the Church

☆ The Marks of the Church

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<sup>5</sup> <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlzby9nZXRvYmpIY3QucGw/cC4xMjoyNzMud2plbw==>

## I. The Meaning of the Church

### The Church from Genesis to Revelation

First, we must see that the church did not begin in New Testament. That view was developed in the 19th century under a theology known as dispensationalism. Dispensationalism radically divorces O.T. Israel and the N.T. Church. We admit that there are differences between the Old and New Covenant. Geerhardus Vos says “The church under the old [covenant] was more than church, it was equally state...it was also essentially a national church —that is, limited to one nation”<sup>6</sup> To become part of the Old Testament people of God, if you were a pagan, you had to convert to Judaism.

So there are some differences in form and manifestation, but the **essence** of the church remains the same throughout the entire Bible. Now our dispensational friends may object and say that the Church is defined as “the body of Christ” which is only found in the NT, whereas the OT church was labeled as “Israel” or “Jerusalem” or “Zion.” Thus we see in our passage from **Psalm 87:1-3** “On the holy mount stands the city he founded; the LORD loves the gates of *Zion* more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things of you are spoken, *O city of God*.” Notice the OT people were called *Zion* and the *city of God*. In our passage from Hebrews, the church is called by the same titles in **v.22** “...you have come to *Mount Zion* and to the *city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,*”

The NT stresses this point by continually calling the church by very decidedly OT names such as “God’s temple” (1 Cor. 3:16)<sup>7</sup>; “the Jerusalem above” (Gal. 4:26); “Abraham’s offspring” (Gal. 3:29);<sup>8</sup> “the circumcision” (Phi. 3:3); “true Israel” (Gal. 4:26).

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<sup>6</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 5: Ecclesiology, The Means of Grace, Eschatology*, Trans. and Ed. by Richard B. Gaffin Jr., (Bellingham, WA.,: Lexham Press, 2016), pg. 7

<sup>7</sup> Also the “holy temple” (Ephesians 2:21)

<sup>8</sup> Also “a Jew” (Romans 2:29)

Likewise the NT recognizes all the saints of the OT as having true faith in Christ: the gospel was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8); “[Moses] considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward (Heb. 11:26); David “foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:31).

Therefore although we admit that under the New Covenant, the form and manifestation of the church has changed from that of the Old, yet the essence of the church has always remained the same.

### **Ekklesia: the Essence of the Church**

What is the essence of the church? The NT uses the word ἐκκλησία *ekklēsia* (ek-klā-sē'-ä). It is a compound of two root words ἐκ which means “out of” and καλέω *kaleō* which means “call.” So *ekklēsia* means to “call out of.” The Bible uses *ekklēsia* to point to the assembly of people that have been “**called out** of the mass of the human race by the preaching of the gospel to [form] a society of believers.”<sup>9</sup>

We can see the NT using this definition in at least four different ways:<sup>10</sup>

1) *Ekklēsia* points to a group of believers in a particular location *even if* they are not gathered for worship. When Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit, Acts 5:11 says “And great fear came upon the whole church (*ekklēsia*) and upon all who heard of these things.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology Vol. 3*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 1997), pg. 6

<sup>10</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), pg. 556

<sup>11</sup> Also see Acts 11:26; 1 Cor. 11:18; 14:19, 28, 35; Romans 16:4; 1 Cor. 16:1; Gal. 1:2; 1 Thess. 2:14

2) Ekklēsia can also point to a group of believers that met in homes for worship. **1 Corinthians 16:19** "...Axauila and Prisca, together with the church (ekklēsia) in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord."<sup>12</sup>

3) Ekklēsia can also point to the entire body of professing believers throughout the world, who gather for worship under appointed elders. **1 Corinthians 12:27-28** "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church (ekklēsia) first apostles, second prophets, third teachers..." etc.<sup>13</sup>

4) Ekklēsia points to the complete body of the elect, those in heaven and on earth, who are or will be united to Christ as their Savior.<sup>14</sup> **Ephesians 5:25** "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church (ekklēsia) and gave himself up for her."<sup>15</sup>

### **The church is NOT a building**

One of the most fundamental misunderstandings of the word church in our time is to reduce the word to a building. The "church" is where you go to worship. Now I use the word "church" like this all the time. It's a spiritual slang of sorts. But the problem is that, it can begin to gut it's glory.

To truly belong to the church *means* that you belong to the **body of Christ**. Meaning not only have you been united to Christ by faith, but you have been united to the whole body. You are connected to Abraham, to David, to brothers and sisters and on the other side of the planet in a most excellent union that surpasses every human relationship.

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<sup>12</sup> Also see Romans 16:23; Col. 4:15; Philemon 2

<sup>13</sup> Also see 1 Cor. 10:32; 11:22; Ephesians 4:11-16

<sup>14</sup> Berkhoff says "Finally, the word in its most comprehensive meaning signifies the whole body of the faithful, whether in heaven or on earth, who have been or shall be spiritually united to Christ as their Savior." Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), pg. 556

<sup>15</sup> Also see Eph. 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23-24, 27, 32; Col. 1:18, 24

To truly belong to the church *means* that you along with other fellow believers constitute **the temple of the Holy Spirit** on earth. Paul says “the whole structure (every individual believer) being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (**Ephesians 2:21-22**)

To truly belong to the church means that when we gather together, we constitute the **very dwelling place of God** on earth. **Hebrews 12:22** says that we are “the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” In the OT Jerusalem was the city that God dwelt in between the cherubim in order to commune with His people.<sup>16</sup> That’s who we are. When Christ is preached in the gathering of His saints all over the World, the Living God dwells among them.

To truly belong to the church means that we are the very **pillar and ground of the truth**. **1 Timothy 3:15** says that the church is the “...pillar and buttress of the truth.” Meaning, as Louis Berkhoff says “the Church is the guardian of the truth, the citadel of the truth, and the defender of the truth over against all the enemies of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>17</sup>

No. When we go to church, we are not going to a building. We are going to the center of the universe. When the saints gather, when the Word is preached, when prayers are prayed, when sacraments are given, we are ushered into the very throne room of the Living God.

### **Visible/Invisible Church**

But there’s another urgent distinction we must consider when thinking about the church. There is a visible and invisible aspect to the church. In Romans 9 Paul is struggling with the fact that many of his fellow Israelites had

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<sup>16</sup> Berkhoff says “In the Old Testament Jerusalem is represented as the place where God dwelt between the cherubim and where He symbolically established contact with His people.” Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), pg. 556

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, pg. 557-558



rejected God's purposes. Many who belonged to the *ekklēsia*<sup>18</sup> under the Old Covenant had been cut off from Christ. And Paul said that he had "great sorrow and unceasing anguish in [his] heart" over them (**Romans 9:2**). But how could people from the OT church be cut off from Christ? Paul answers in **Romans 9:6** "It is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel."

Paul is saying that belonging to the state church, and being natural children of Abraham did not mean that they truly belonged to God. You see, dear congregation, a person can merely belong to **the visible church**. The visible church consists of all who profess Jesus Christ along with the children. Throughout the New Testament the apostles write to local congregations that consist of believers and their children—that is who constitutes the visible church.<sup>19</sup>

But just like Israel, many in under the New Covenant can perform all the outward signs of being a Christian: they can give lip service to Christ, partake of baptism and the Lord's supper, and be a faithful attender, do good works, and yet *not* be united to Christ. The tares and wheat grow together, and they are often indistinguishable until the harvest.

To truly belong to the **invisible church**, that is God's elect means that you have been genuinely converted. Solomon Stoddard, Jonathan Edward's grandfather once said that "Conversion is the greatest change that men undergo

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<sup>18</sup> "We should not close our eyes to the patent fact that the name "Church" (Heb. *quahal*, rendered *ekklēsia* in the Septuagint) is applied to Israel in the Old Testament repeatedly, Josh. 8:35; Ezra 2:65; Joel 2:16. The fact that in our translations of the Bible the Old Testament rendering of the original is "gathering," "assembly," or "congregation," while the New Testament of it is "Church," may have given rise to misunderstanding on this point; but the fact remains that in the Old Testament as well as in the New the original word denotes a congregation or an assembly of the people of God, and as such serves to designate the essence of the church." *ibid*, pg. 571-572

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 1:1 says "To the saints who are in Ephesus"; and in 6:1 the Apostle addresses the children: "Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Likewise in 1 Corinthians 7:14, the Apostle says the the children of believers are "holy."

in this world.”<sup>20</sup> Those who have been truly united to Christ are new creatures. The old has passed away, all things have become new. True believers hate the sin they once loved. This doesn’t mean that they don’t sin anymore. We do. But it grieves us, because we know it dishonors Christ. True believers desire to please Christ, to be near to Him, to commune with Him. Is that you? Have you truly closed with Christ? The Son of God put on flesh so that He could win His beloved bride through His death and resurrection. Have you truly put your faith in Him? Have you repented of your sin that has separated you from God and called upon Christ for mercy?

## II. The Marks of the Church

### The Word of God Sincerely Preached

How do you know if you are in a true church? Are there marks or signs of the true church? What does Scripture tell us? The one indispensable mark of a true church is the Word of God sincerely preached. If this is lost so is the church.

Jesus said in **John 8:31-32** “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” If a church doesn’t abide in God’s word, it is not a church.

When Paul said his farewell to the Ephesians in **Acts 20:27**, he declared that he fulfilled his duty to them and that he was innocent of their blood. Why? Because, he says, “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”

In the pastoral letters, when Paul was instructing Timothy on how to care for the church, the very first charge he gave him was “...remain at Ephesus so that

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<sup>20</sup> Ian H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2008), pg. 24

you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine,” (1 Timothy 1:3) And just in case Timothy missed it, it was also the very last charge that he gave him in 2 Timothy 4:1-2 “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

Preaching the truth of God’s Word is the indispensable mark of a true church. It is why Jesus’ last words to Peter in the book of John were “Feed my lambs... tend my sheep...feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-17)

This doesn’t mean that the preaching has to be perfect in order for a church to be considered a true church. If that were the standard, there would be no true church on earth. Churches will be more or less pure in their doctrine, more or less pure in their practice but can still be considered true churches. It’s when a church denies the fundamental doctrines of the faith, *such as* the Trinity, or that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, or that justification is by faith alone, that they become a false church.<sup>21</sup>

### **Are there other marks of a true church?**

The reformed tradition often adds two other marks. For instance the Belgic Confession says that the three marks of the true church are the pure preaching of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and church discipline.<sup>22</sup> On this point I think it’s important to distinguish between those elements that are necessary for a church’s *being*, and those elements which are necessary for its *well being*.<sup>23</sup> And this distinction is made within the

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<sup>21</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), pg. 577

<sup>22</sup> Belgic Confession, Article 29

<sup>23</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), pg. 576

Westminster Confession. It says that the “profession of the true religion” is the only indispensable thing, while the practices in discipline and worship will render churches *more or less pure*.<sup>24</sup> The Puritans did not think it was Biblical to call the Baptists or Quakers false churches because they didn’t practice the sacraments the same way they did. And regarding church discipline, as vital as it is to the health of a church, a church does not cease to be a church if they fail in church discipline. The Corinthian church was almost wholly corrupt. It had divisions, lawsuits, incest, abuse of the gifts, abuse of the Lord’s table, failure to love each other. And yet the Apostle Paul did not abandon them, but called them “the church of God” and “saints.” Why? Because the gospel of Jesus Christ still held sway with them. They were still willing to be taught by the Word of God and repent for their disobedience to it.

Dear congregation, that is what it means to be reformed church ultimately. Being a reformed church doesn’t mean that we are lining up on teams. There is only one church *ultimately*. “One body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:4-6) Being a reformed church means that we are constantly reforming the church according to the Word of God.

## Application

Our Doctrine: There is no salvation outside the church

There is a very wrong way to understand this sentence. Historically, Rome has applied this to mean that outside of her visible boundaries, outside of her rituals, outside of the pope as the distributor of blessings, there is no salvation. We know that to be wrong. And so we don’t mean that unless one is baptized, or unless one is accepted as a member, or unless one partakes in the

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<sup>24</sup> WCF 25.2, 4, 5

Lord' supper one cannot be saved. We *don't* mean that. Neither do we mean that a person can't be saved outside of a church building. Remember *ekklēsia* is never defined like that in Scripture. Physical location is not the issue.

What I mean is that just as there would have been no physical salvation for Noah and his family outside of the ark, so there is no spiritual salvation outside of the church. How can there be? The church is Christ's own body. To be outside of union with Christ, is to be naked. To be outside of union with Christ is to stand condemned under the weight of your own sin before a holy God. If we do not belong to the church, that is, if we are not united with Christ, we cannot be saved. Turn with me again to **Psalm 87**. Let's look at v.4-6

"Among those who know me [Christ] I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush— "This one was born there," they say. [Christ is pointing forward to the opening of the kingdom to all the Gentiles. Notice what He says about them: 'those who know me...are those who are born there.' Born where? The city of God—the church—that's the context of v.3. And remember what **Hebrews 12:22** says about us "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God..." If we have come to Christ, we belong to Zion, the city of the living God. Now look at v.5 "And of Zion it shall be said, "This one and that one were born in her"; for the Most High himself will establish her." [v.6] "The Lord records as he registers the peoples, "This one was born there."

Three times, the Psalmist says "This one was born there." We are born into the invisible church. Which is why **Galatians 4:26** says that the Jerusalem above is our mother. As Louis Berkhoff says "the Church...is the mother of believers, a means of salvation, and agency for the conversion of sinners and the perfection of the saints."<sup>25</sup>

How do unbelievers get saved? Unbelievers are saved when the church arms itself with the Word of God and proclaims to them the gospel. As Paul says "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how

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<sup>25</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), pg. 567

they to hear without someone preaching?” (Romans 10:14-15) Dear congregation, bring your unsaved family members and friends, and co-workers the gospel of Jesus Christ. Unless they are united to Christ, unless the church becomes their mother, they are ruined.

**That is our doctrine:** There is no salvation outside of the church. Therefore our duty is to love the church like God loves the church.

### Our Duty: Love the church like God loves the church

Even amongst evangelicals (especially American evangelicals), there exists a very low view of the church. And I mean here the local visible church that gathers to worship. As one author has said: “Christianity is often reduced to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”<sup>26</sup> And as a result of that radical individualism, church is seen as something you can take or leave. How tragic! How dangerous John warned his readers of those who abandon the visible church in **1 John 2:18** “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

Dear congregation, if you have been united to Christ, you became His property. The word “church” (English), or Kerk (Dutch)<sup>27</sup> or Kirche (German)<sup>28</sup> do not come from the word *ekklēsia*, they came from the word *κυριακός* *kyriakos*,<sup>29</sup> which means “belonging to the LORD.”<sup>30</sup> The church belongs to God. If you have been born again you are the property of Jesus

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<sup>26</sup> The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible, Ed. Joel Beeke, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), pg. 1822

<sup>27</sup> <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/kerk#Dutch>

<sup>28</sup> <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Kirche>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?strongs=G2960>

<sup>30</sup> This word is used in **1 Cor. 11:20** to speak of the “Lord’s table,” and in **Revelation 1:10** to speak of the “Lord’s day.”

Christ.<sup>31</sup> Just as wives take on their husbands name, so you are to take on Christ's name and support His family, and give up your rights for Him. You are to love the rest of the family as your husband does. Oh how Christ loves His church. Look again at Psalm 87. v.1-3. "On the holy mount stands the city he founded; the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. *Selah*" Do you see? God loves certain events more than other events, certain places more than other places. He loves the gates of Zion more than all the other dwelling places in Jacob. To translate for us: God loves the gathering of His people on the Lord's day more than any other thing in the universe. When the bride gathers for her husband, Father is passionate for His Son. And as Joel Beeke says "God comes to us in a special way when His people meet together, even more than in private or family devotions."<sup>32</sup> Dear congregation, is that your view of the church?<sup>33</sup> Do you hunger and thirst for the nourishment that she brings? Do you have an expectation to meet with God at the gates of Zion? As we mature in our faith, we should love the church more and more. We should learn to see her the way that God sees her.

**That is our duty:** Love the church like God loves the church. Therefore our delight is to see that the church is the glory of Christ.

## Our Delight: The Church is the glory of Christ

Recall our big idea "The world was created so that the Son of God might have a spouse—that is, the church." Dear congregation, what accounts for the existence of the church? It has been the most attacked institution on the planet

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<sup>31</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), pg. 557

<sup>32</sup> Joel Beeke, *Parenting By God's Promises: How To Raise Children in the Covenant of Grace*, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust, 2011), pg. 197-198

<sup>33</sup> Do you love her above all other earthly things? As David says "As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight" (Psalm 16:3)

since the beginning of time. Dictators have tried to destroy it, armies have tried to defeat it, legislators have tried to ban it, families have cast out its members for joining it. And yet the church remains, though dictators have perished and armies have been conquered. Why? Because the church was why the world was created. The Son of God wanted a bride. And His bride—the church—is His glory on the earth. As Wilhemus Brakel says “The church is the glory of Christ. It is there that Christ is confessed and proclaimed throughout the world, being held forth as a banner upon a hill around which one must gather himself. This is the city upon a hill, and a light shining in the darkness. She is the means whereby the truth is made known and preserved, and is the means unto the conversion of souls.”<sup>34</sup>

The church is the gospel’s masterpiece. The church shows the world that Jesu Christ still forgives sinners through His bloody cross. That church shows that Jesus Christ can still transforms the vilest of men and the vilest of women into saints that He loves. The church is Christ’s megaphone to the nations, offering pardon for all who will trust Him alone. Yes the church is the glory of Christ. It is the gospel’s masterpiece. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for *her*, that he might sanctify *her*, having cleansed *her* by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that *she* might be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25-27)

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<sup>34</sup> Wilhemus A Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service, Vol. 2: The Church and Salvation*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 1993), pg. 56