

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 17 AUGUST 2014 EVENING SERVICE

Sing before: Scripture Versification 19-1 ; Psalm 68:12

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: Psalm 36:2

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 34:6

Scripture reading: Ephesians 5

Scripture text: Ephesians 5:25 – 27; Heidelberg Catechism Sunday 21

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

(Ephesians 5: 25-27)

We so often, and without really thinking, talk about the church and what it is. We read in newspapers and magazines and hear on the radio and TV about people who change the contents of the Bible and who start new churches. Can it really be done just like that? The answer is: The Church is the property of God and He instituted and set out the rules for the church. A church is a very complicated institution.

- The church is a very intimate communion between Jesus Christ and the chosen people.
- It is a love relationship between God and us.

- It is also a sacred relationship between God and us.
- In addition it is a relationship in which the church (the chosen people) are under the protection of God.

This is why – in the passage we've read – the Lord compares the relationship between a man and his wife with that of Jesus and his church.

We focus on the following two matters:

1. **The essence of the church of the Lord**
2. **The task of the church**

1. The essence of the church of the Lord

Let's first consider the essence of the church. What is the church?

- First of all we should know is that the church belongs to the Lord.
- The word **church** means: **that which belongs to the Lord**, and
- the word **congregation** means: **the chosen**.

Remember what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 16:18. The Lord had a conversation with Peter after Peter had confessed that Jesus is the Son of the living God.

- Then Jesus said that He would build his church upon this rock.
 - This clearly shows that Jesus Christ is the head of the church.
- We also read in Acts 2:47: And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.
- In summary: Jesus himself builds his church, and every day He adds people to his church.

Just think about why the Lord calls the church his property.

- First of all it definitely is because He is our Creator
- And another reason is that the Lord brought us back to Him after we had estranged ourselves from Him.
 - This was done through the salvation and propitiation of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Christ died and conquered death and made propitiation for the sins of the church.
 - Therefore the reason for us belonging to God is twofold.

From the above Scripture passages it is clear that the church is an institution established by God and that God also manages the number of members of the church. Every day He adds to the church those who have been saved.

It is also clear, especially from what is revealed in Acts 2, that the church is not only a group of people who belong to God,

- They also practice real fellowship with one another.
- Every day they gathered in the temple and at one another's houses to pray and to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

They would not have gathered in worship so often had they not known that it was the will of the Lord. This is why the Lord had this written down!

- With this the Lord emphasises the importance of attending public worship.
- This reflects the principle of the faithful who are united at all levels.
- In addition: Belonging to the church also means that you enjoy – in an invisible (hidden) way the fellowship of the Triune God. In Colossians 3:2, 3 we read about it.
2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.
3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
 (Colossians 3:2-3)

In 1 Corinthians 1:9 it says that God invited us into this friendship with his Son.

- We therefore share in the redemption of Jesus Christ, and in his mercy for us – therefore also in the guidance and comfort of the Holy Spirit, because we received the Holy Spirit by virtue of the Jesus Christ's se redemptive sacrifice.

2. The task of the church

Let's consider – in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ's redemptive sacrifice and salvation – what exactly the church should do.

- We should bear fruit of faith. This means that everything we do should reflect our faith.
- Through the redemptive sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ we received forgiveness of our sins: The Lord died to reconcile God with the entire church so that not a single member of the holy catholic Christian church will be lost.
 - But then our lives should reflect the fact that God has been reconciled with us!
 - We should not be so involved with ourselves and our own interests that we call ourselves church, while we are actually serving ourselves.

Therefore the church should continuously:

- Pray for forgiveness of their trespasses against the Lord an against one another;
- Reflect on what is right and what is wrong – based on what the Bible says!

The church should clearly show that God is at home in it.

- History has taught us that the church has often gone astray in the past and that reformation was required to get it back onto the right path.

This brings us to the features of the true church. What should a church do to really be the body of the Lord and that would prove that its members are the chosen people whom God called and added to his church?

- Firstly, this church practises the pure preaching of the gospel.
 - A church that preaches heresy cannot claim to be the body of the only true God and that it would be in the presence of this God in the hereafter.
 - In order to practise pure preaching of the gospel the church should also make sure that its members live a pure life.

- This implies that church discipline should be exercised to bring those who believe and live contrary to the Word of God to repent, and if they would not repent to ban them from the church.
- Also, the true church administers the sacraments as Christ instituted them, because sacraments are also a way in which the gospel is preached.
 - When are sacraments administered in a pure way? Only when they are administered as the Lord instituted them.
 - All human additions and inventions or variations are falsification of the sacraments.
- But administering of sacraments are in essence closely related to discipline, because the church should make sure that those who do not believe and act according to the Word of God do not partake in the sacraments.
 - Therefore the third feature of is exercising church discipline.
 - The moment this is neglected, the other two features also collapse, because if a preacher of heresy is not banned from the church, he will soon influence the other members of the church.
 - Soon he will establish a group of followers, resulting in degeneration of the congregation.

It is of no use to know all these wonderful things and confess that the church belongs to the Lord while our lives do not reflect it.

- We know what the church is, but what about ourselves? Are we the body of the Lord? Can we prove beyond all reasonable doubt that we are the body governed by our Head – the Lord Jesus?

We should be living members of God's church at all times – hence: our salvation should be clearly visible in the way we live and in our fellowship with God and one another.

- Otherwise I/you simply are here, but I/you and my/your faith is dead.
- In that case our membership of the church is no proof of our communion with God and our salvation through Him.

Let's read together Catechism Lord's Day 21.

Sunday 21

54. Q. What do you believe concerning the holy catholic Christian church?

A. I believe that the Son of God,[1] out of the whole human race,[2] from the beginning of the world to its end,[3] gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, [4] by His Spirit and Word,[5] in the unity of the true faith,[6] a church chosen to everlasting life.[7] And I believe that I am[8] and forever shall remain a living member of it.[9]

[1] John 10:11; Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 1:18. [2] Gen. 26:4; Rev. 5:9. [3] Is. 59:21; I Cor. 11:26. [4] Ps. 129:1-5; Matt. 16:18; John 10:28-30. [5] Rom. 1:16; 10:14-17; Eph. 5:26. [6] Acts 2:42-47; Eph. 4:1-6. [7] Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:3-14. [8] I John 3:14, 19-21. [9] Ps. 23:6; John 10:27, 28; I Cor. 1:4-9; I Pet. 1:3-5.

55. Q. What do you understand by the communion of saints?

A. First, that believers, all and everyone, as members of Christ have communion with Him and share in all His treasures and gifts.[1] Second, that everyone is duty-bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members.[2]

[1] Rom. 8:32; I Cor. 6:17; 12:4-7, 12, 13; I John 1:3. [2] Rom. 12:4-8; I Cor. 12:20-27; 13:1-7; Phil. 2:4-8.

56. Q. What do you believe concerning the forgiveness of sins?

A. I believe that God, because of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins,[1] nor my sinful nature, against which I have to struggle all my life,[2] but He will graciously grant me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never come into condemnation.[3]

[1] Ps. 103:3, 4, 10, 12; Mic. 7:18, 19; II Cor. 5:18-21; I John 1:7; 2:2. [2] Rom. 7:21-25. [3] John 3:17, 18; 5:24; Rom. 8:1, 2.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 32:3

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

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