

Belgic Confession 28 – Church Membership is not an Option

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Which woman here has perfect in-laws...mother-in-law, father-in-law...sisters-in-law? No one for sure. But **you still love your spouse and won't trade him for the world!** And **you would not say, "I'd rather remain single and rob myself of the joys of marriage because my in-laws are not perfect."**

Who here has always eaten perfect foods? There are hairs in hamburgers and maggots in mushrooms, but you still enjoy food. But you don't stop eating.

Similarly, brothers and sisters, neither is the church of Jesus Christ perfect. She has hypocrites. She is sometimes fighting among herself. She is sometimes lazy. And she might be distasteful to some. If you want the blessings of the Bridegroom you still have an obligation to join her, 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 and yourself.**

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.

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. Like great empires of the past, Canada too will fall apart – and you see signs of it now, but the church of Jesus Christ stands firm. Where are Egypt, Assyria, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Rome? Even Communism has fallen...and they said it could not be stopped!

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.

Who wouldn't want to join a church like this?

2. You need to join the church of Jesus Christ; you cannot have salvation 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 through faith you are nourished and strengthened. If you don't regularly go to church you will die...or at least be spiritually malnourished. 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 are ministered. These are the secondary means of grace, but they are a means of grace. And there are no private sacraments, as Roman Catholics do. It is in the community of believers that you get them!

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

c. The church is where you will receive discipline. Outside of the church you live without accountability. And while individualism is worshipped in our Canadian society, God wants you to be together to hold each other accountable. You can't discipline a child who is not in your home.

All 3 things are essential. A wise man will know this. So find the right church and be a member.

3. You are commanded to join the church.

You may not withdraw from the visible church into nothing. **“You cannot have God as your Father and refuse to have the church as you mother.”** 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 if your church departs from truth – **but better make sure it is better.**

And surely you must not leave one congregation to go to another congregation **because it demands less accountability.** You must not want to “jump ship.” Baptism joins you to the church. The church has many congregations!

4. You must attend worship regularly and corporately.

a. In doing this you will glorify God.

b. In doing this you will be equipped for your duty with gifts for the service of the other members: elders, deacons, showing hospitality, counselors. (So it is not all about

you!) You must work to maintain the unity of the church by helping and building her up. If you don't fulfill this duty you allow Christ to see a black-eyed, bruised, and limping bride. Who likes a bride like that? But **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.

Yes, you are mutually dependent on each other! This is why we read stories of Christians meeting in caves when they were forbidden by civil governments...or meeting in Siberian forests to avoid the communists. One man put it nicely: **Many logs make a brighter fire.** Everyone can stay warm.

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.

55 Q. WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY "THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS"?

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 and want to join his church. 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 to want to be by himself.

Psalm 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?

6. Be warned not to simply attend church without commitment.

Who wants a boyfriend or girlfriend who refuses to commit? No one. The Lord died to make you his bride.

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 when you submit to the Word of God that is preached and you allow yourself to be nourished by the Lord’s Supper.

You have to faithfully **listen** to and submit to their corrections and rebukes, and you must reflect on the Lord’s work on the cross when you participate in the sacraments.

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 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 elders asked you to do something hard, submit. You may only refuse to submit if elders asked you to something wrong.

4. Private or public churches, without elders and discipline, are unbiblical and ungodly.

Don’t touch them with a 39 ½ foot pole. There is no accountability to others that could lead to chaos. You could be crushed by tyranny.

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.

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

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 and positions that hinder your service to the Lord.) If Jesus is precious to you, you will make the sacrifice!

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

See this willingness to separate from the wicked Moabites in Ruth's life. She left her family and joined with her mother-in-law's people. (It wasn't her mother-in-law who was perfect...but her God!)

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.

See the suffering of believers in Muslim and Hindu countries (India, Iran, Afghanistan) and learn how they depend on each other. This is what believers have to do in communist countries – like Cuba, China, and North Korea. 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 Reformation. This is what you will face in Canada and in the US as persecution increases. Don't lose hope. **Don't be joined in marriage with those who reject the Lord.**

3. No one is saying the church (pastor, elders, and members) has no sins; she has many.

We have maggots and flies – sometimes more than we care to admit. 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**. God is purifying us together.

Conclusion:

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

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Don't stay away from the church! Join her and attend her worship services faithfully.

2. Thank God for his blessings you get from being part of his church.

3. Submit to the teaching and discipline of the elders.

4. Work hard, using your gifts, for the good of the other Christians.

5. Accept the help of other Christians. That what Christian brothers and sisters do!

6. 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 living, active 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.