

# *The Church of God and Her Benefits in This Life*

SERMONS ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

XXI. LORD'S DAY.

## **Johannes VanderKemp (1664-1718)**

I Cor. i. 2. Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

*Q. 54. What believest thou concerning "the holy catholic church" of Christ?*

A. That the Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to himself by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am, and for ever shall remain a living member thereof.

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

A. First, that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are in common, partakers of him, and of all his riches and gifts; secondly, that every one must know it to be his duty readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members.

*Q. 56. What believest thou concerning "the forgiveness of sins?"*

A. That God, for the sake of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, and my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long; hut will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God.

TRULY God is good to Israel," saith Asaph, Psalm 73.1. "The Lord is indeed good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works," Psalm 145.9. Yea, there is no creature, whether rational, or irrational, animate, or inanimate, that doth not exhibit many evidences of the divine goodness. "He is kind also to the unthankful and to the evil." Luke 6.35. But God is good particularly to Israel from a hearty and fatherly love, "giving" himself "his Son, and all things with him" to Israel, Rom. 8.32. The Lord promised once with respect to Solomon's

temple, 1 Kings 9.3. "Mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." But this is especially true with respect to Israel, his spiritual temple; for God doth set his heart upon Israel with a special affection; he bestows himself wholly upon them for an inheritance, and a sufficient possession: "Israel is that happy people, whose God is the Lord, and whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance," Psalm 33.12. Yea, the whole divine Trinity is engaged in showing favour to Israel; the Father elected them, the Son redeemed them, and the Holy Ghost sanctifies them; and therefore the believing Israelites are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people," 1 Peter 2.9. They are "the church of God, sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints," as Paul saith in our text; and herewith agrees the description, which the instructor gives of the church, upon which God bestows such precious favours, both in this life, and in that which is to come.

Having seen thus far the lovingkindness of the three Persons in the divine essence, and that each person contributed his share to the salvation of the sinner, it behooves us now to show you who are the Israel, the church of God, to which he shows all his saving kindness.

It appears that three particulars are exhibited to us here:

I. The faith of Christians concerning the church, Q. 54.

II. Concerning the communion of saints, Q. 55.

III. Concerning the forgiveness of sins, Q. 56.

I. With respect to the faith of Christians concerning the church we will inquire (1.) What the church is, (2.) How we believe this church.

1. In order that we may learn what the church is, we must know that the word church is properly a Greek word, and that it signifies the Lord's, as this word is used of the Lord's supper, and the Lord's day, 1 Cor. 11.20. Rev. 1.10. And this word was also used thus by the Christians of old to denote the houses of worship, which they set apart for the worship of the Lord; but when we now make use of the word church, we understand by it not only the ordinary houses of worship, but particularly the congregation of the Lord. This is called by the Hebrew *gnedab*, Jer. 30.20, and *kabal*. The first word is sometimes translated by the Greeks "Synagogue," as we see in the Septuagint, Joshua 22.16, which word is commonly used by the writers of the New Testament to denote the Jewish houses of worship, which they had besides the temple; and sometimes also the assemblies of Christians, who were of Jewish extraction, as we may see, Heb. 10.25. James 2.2. But the Hebrews most commonly used the word *kabal*, as the Greeks did the word *ekklesia*, by which they translate that Hebrew word, as we may see, Psalm 22.22,25, which word, derived from *ek*, and *kaleo*, signifieth an assembly of men called from among others, and together. And so this word is used of the church and congregation of the Lord, which is called and gathered together by his

word and Spirit, Matt. 16.18, either with respect to her internal state; and so believers only are called "the church, which God hath purchased with his blood," Acts 20.28. Eph. 5.25,26, or with respect to her external state, in the publick administration of the word and sacraments, to which hypocrites also join themselves. This, considered by itself, and without respect to the leaders, is sometimes called "the church of the living God," 1 Tim. 3.15, as the leaders also, exclusively of the common members, are sometimes called the church, Matt. 18.17, "Tell it to the church." This word is moreover used to denote the body of believers, in this or that place; so the apostles wrote their epistles to particular churches, as John to the seven churches of Asia, Rev. 1.11. It is also used to denote the catholic (or universal) church of all times, nations, and places, of which the particular churches are particular members. "God gave him," namely Christ, "to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, and the fullness of him that filleth all in all," Eph. 1.22,23. And in this sense the church is spoken of in the creed) and in this Lord's day. And thus this church is also called *paneguris*, "the general assembly," Heb. 12.23, a word which was used to denote the body of men, who came together to the publick shows. And truly the most glorious publick show is exhibited in the church: "By the church is made known to the principalities and powers in heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord," Eph. 3.10,11. See also, verses 18,19.

Having explained thus previously the word church, we will consider more particularly, (A.) The nature of the church. (B.) The epithets of it, holy, catholic, and Christian, (C.) The different situations of it, and (D.) the manner in which it becomes a church, which the instructor explains in the fifty-fourth question.

A. To the nature of the church pertains, that it is the body of Christ, consisting of members, head, and the union of both.

1. The members of the church are not the angels; for although "Christ hath subjected the angels to himself," as Peter speaks, 1 Peter 3.22, and though believers "are come to an innumerable company of angels," Heb. 12.22, and they are "fellow servants" of the preachers of the word, Rev. 22.9, and "are sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation," Heb. 1.13, nevertheless the privileges and benefits of the church belong not to them. On this account also the reprobates, who join themselves in an outward manner to the church, are not true members of the church, which the Papists nevertheless imagine, because they will have that outward multitudes and splendour are marks of the true church, and that the Pope of Rome is the publick head of the church. Reprobates, who are outwardly in the church, are not in it as wheat, but as "chaff, which shall be burned with unquenchable fire," Matt. 3.12, as "evil fishes, which must be cast away," Matt. 13.48, as "vessels of dishonour," 2 Tim. 2.20. They may join themselves to the church, but they are not of the church, 1 John 2.19. "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but

of God," Rom. 2.28,29. See also what is said, Rom 9.6-8. And therefore elect believers only are true members of the church: "Those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints," as the apostle speaks in the text; "the called, the chosen and faithful, who are with Christ," Rev. 17.14, of whom Christ is "the Head and Saviour," to whom they "are subject; those whom Christ loveth, for whom he gave himself, whom he sanctifieth, and presents to himself as glorious," Eph. 5.23-27, for the church is "his body," Eph. 1.23, "his bride," Rev. 22.17, "his sheep," 10.26-28.

2. Christ alone is the head of the church; for his headship over the church is represented as the same with his sitting at the right hand of God, and with his universal lordship over all things, as Paul explains it, Eph. 1.20-23. And it therefore denotes (a) his dominion over the church, he is therefore called the Lord, Shepherd, King, Bridegroom and Husband of the church, (b) his glory and excellency above all that is glorious, (c) his union with the true members, and also (d) his influencing of all his members.

Therefore Peter is not the visible head of the church, much less is the Pope of Rome; for (a) then there would be two heads of one body, and the church would thus be a monster. (b) Such a glory belongs not to any creature, neither is any creature capable of exerting it; for it cannot influence the members. (c) Peter refused every kind of headship, and forbade others to assume it. See this 1 Peter 5.1-3. (d) If it were even so, that Peter was the head of the church, it would not follow therefrom that the Pope is the head, for he hath neither the doctrine, nor the life of Peter. (e) The Pope by arrogating this honour to himself, evinceth that he is "the man of sin, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, and that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God," 2 Thess. 2.3,4.

Therefore Christ alone is the head of his church; and he was the head under the Old Testament, as he is now under the New; for the church gloried in him as such, Isaiah 33.22, "The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king, he will save us." Therefore it must appear exceedingly strange to us, that certain persons will have, that the church of the Old Testament was in bondage under the elders, the priests and prophets, as other Lords, associates of Christ, Gods on earth, and Gods so called. What is this but saying that there were many heads of the church under the Old Testament contrary to its nature.\*

3. To the nature of the church pertains also the union of the members with the Head, and in the Head with one another; but as this constitutes the nature of the communion of saints, we will defer speaking of this matter, until we treat of that privilege.

B. This church is called "a holy, catholic, Christian" church. The church is (a) "a holy" church; for "she is washed, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our

\* By these persons the author understands the Coecciens, a party more especially in the Reformed churches of Holland, Switzerland and Germany, so called from their founder John Coecciens, a native of Bremen, and professor of theology in the university of Leyden, a man of eminent piety, but of a luxuriant fancy. They entertained several singular opinions in theology, but did not deviate from the standards

God," 1 Cor. 6.11. she is separated from the world, dedicated to God, and lives holily according to the will of God; and the Saviour "gave himself, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works," Titus 2.14. (b) The church is also "catholic," or universal. This applies not to the church of Rome, as though it were her peculiar privilege, and thus a title of honour, and an evidence that the true church is to be found with the Papists; for Roman Catholic is as great a contradiction as particular universal; the church of Sardis "had the name that she lived, and she was dead," Rev. 3.1. In the church of Philadelphia there were "those who said that they were Jews, and were not, but lied," Rev. 3.9. Thus also the Romish church saith that she is catholic, or universal, but she lies; for she hath apostatized from the doctrine of the universal church, and is become antichristian, as may be seen from a comparison of the Romish church with the word of God: but the church is called catholic, or universal, because it comprehendeth all the believers of all times and places; hath one universal doctrine in all times and places, and partakes of all the graces and privileges of all the true members: "There is one body, and one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all," Eph. 4.4-6. But the church of the New Testament is especially universal, because it is not, like the Old Testament church, limited to one nation and country, but is redeemed to God by Christ with his blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation," Rev. 5.9. This church, called and gathered from Jews and Gentiles, is named "the general assembly," Heb. 12.22. Therefore she is also surnamed (c) Christian, after Christ her Head, as hath been shown more particularly upon the thirty-second question.

C. This church may be considered in different situations, and indeed as (a) militant and triumphant. The church militant is here on earth, and hath many exceedingly mighty, crafty, and unwearied enemies; the devil, the world, and her own flesh; but she will overcome them, and triumph in heaven. That great champion Paul, having respect to this, said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give me in that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing," 2 Tim. 4.7,8. (b) The church militant is invisible and visible. The church is invisible, with respect to her true members, whose inward grace of the heart God alone infallibly knoweth: "The Lord knoweth them that are his," 2 Tim. 2.19. See also Rom. 2.28,29. Col. 3.3. The church is visible, with respect to her publick profession, worship, and holy conversation. And so the church is called "the light of the world, a city on a hill which cannot be hid," Matt. 5.14. (c) This visible church is sometimes manifest, when she enjoys great glory and prosperity in the world, and is not persecuted; when "kings are her nursing fathers, and queens her nursing mothers," Isaiah 49.23. See this also, Rev. 11.15. But the church is also sometimes hidden, when she is compelled, on account of the general prevalence of errors in doctrine and practice, and on account of grievous persecutions, to conceal herself, and "flee into the wilderness," Rev. 12.6, so that even a prophet, like Elijah, thinks "that he only is left," although the Lord God

"reserves seven thousand besides, a remnant according to the election of grace," who are not carried away with the flood of seductions, as we may see, 1 Kings 19.14,18, Rom. 11.1-5. Therefore it is no mark of the true church, that she enjoys always a great outward splendor in the world, as the Papists fancy; this is rather a mark of the whore of Babylon, "who saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow," Rev. 18.7. When we read so frequently in the Old Testament concerning the splendor of the New Testament church, this doth not indicate that she should always possess such glory, but we must understand it sometimes also of her inward and spiritual state; therefore none needs to ask us, where our church was before the time of Luther and Calvin, since, according to the prophecy, she was constrained to "flee into the wilderness for a thousand, two hundred and threescore days," Rev. 12.5. (d) The church is also considered as representative, being the leaders, who represent the whole church, and are therefore called the church itself, Matt. 18.17, and also "the presbytery," 1 Tim. 4.14. The church is also called the represented, which is the body of believers, who are represented by their leaders; as these are also called the church, Acts 20.28. 1 Tim. 3.15.

D. In order that we may learn what the church is, we must know also how she becomes a church. This is explained to us in a most beautiful manner, in the fifty-fourth question; in which we are taught, (1.) The essentials, that properly constitute her a church, that the Son of God gathers and unites her in the true faith, (2.) whence he gathers her, (3.) by what means, (4.) according to what plan, (5.) when, and (6.) how he defends and preserves her.

That we may not be too diffuse, we shall treat of each particular briefly: 1. The essentials, that properly constitute her a church, are, that "the Son of God gathers and unites her in the true faith," that is, that all the members believe one doctrine with one mind; one member conceives not differently from another of God, and of his revealed way of salvation. "Faith is common," Titus 1.3, as "salvation is also common," Jude verse 3. Yea, all the members have the same mind of faith, "one heart, and one way," Jer. 32.39. We have shown this also in treating on the epithet "catholic." To this they are gathered: before the Lord lays his hand on them, they are "the children of God, scattered abroad, but whom he gathers together," John 11.52, as "sheep that are not of his fold, which he brings in; and so they become one fold, and one Shepherd," John 10.16. And this inbringing and uniting constitutes the essence of the church, which consists in the communion of saint, whereof we shall speak particularly hereafter.

2. He gathers these "out of the whole human race." He doth not gather the whole human race, as the Socinians think, as though God revealed a general doctrine of salvation to all men; or, as the Remonstrants fancy, that God gave a general covenant of grace, and a general sufficient grace to all men, and called all men to salvation: for "God suffered in times past the Gentiles to walk in their own ways," Acts 14.16. Psalm 147.19,20. And in this manner doth the Lord God still deal with many nations, withholding his word and Spirit from them, See Acts 16.6,7. But the Son of God gathers his church out of the whole human race; he singles out this and that people, this and that person, and

brings them to communion with himself and with his church, while he leaves others to themselves. Under the Old Testament he confined himself to the posterity of Seth, Shem and Abraham; but under the New Testament "he hath visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name," Acts 15.14. See also John 10.16. & 11.52. Rev. 5.9.

3. The Son of God doth this "by his word and by his Spirit." He sends his ministers into the world to call sinners unto him, and to invite them to be reconciled to God, and come to fellowship with him and with his people; but the voice of his ministers is not powerful enough to subdue the stubborn hearts of sinners to the Lord; Jesus nevertheless willing to have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession, exerts his power, that he may render them obedient to his word: Mark relates of the apostles, chap 16.20, "that they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them." And thus he makes "his arrows sharp," and wounds with them "the hearts of his enemies, so that people fall under him," Psalm 45.5. "The rebellious dwell with him," Psalm 68.18. And so "he rules in the midst of his enemies, making them a willing people," Psalm 110.2,3, by which they also become inclined to "join themselves to the Lord and to his people," Isaiah 44.3-5. & 56.3-7. And so his calling is effectual and irresistible, since he doth not employ his word only, but also his Spirit, "the exceeding greatness of his power," Eph. 1.18-20. The Lord doth not however influence all men in this manner, but he bestows on them only a common operation of his Spirit through which some submit themselves feignedly, and others resist the Spirit, like the Jews, Acts 7.51. And when this is rightly considered, we see how the calling is external and internal, resistible and irresistible; and so the opinion of the Remonstrants, that this calling can be resisted by freewill, and their objections against our doctrine, fall to the ground.

4. As God worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will, therefore the Son of God also gathers his church according to the plan of eternal election: "The church was chosen for him to everlasting life," that he might gather her: for the Father who chose the church, gave her to the Son in the eternal covenant of redemption, that he might reveal his Father's name to her, which he hath also done, as he himself testifieth, John 17.6. This election is God's eternal counsel, by which he decreed, according to his free good pleasure, to favour certain persons with grace, and to save them by Christ, to the glory of his wisdom, goodness and power. He hath certainly not chosen all men, upon condition of their faith and conversion, as the Remonstrants imagine; for this is not an election, which selects some from among others, but a receiving; it is certainly not an election of persons, but only of conditions and qualifications. Eternal election respects particular persons, who are singled out as it were by name, in preference to others, Rev. 9.13, and "written in the book of life," Luke 10.20, Philip. 4.3, which elected persons are not the most, but the fewest in number; yea, fewer than even those who are called, Matt. 20.16. & 22.14. Luke 12.32. These are elected in preference to others, not on account of their foreseen faith and good works, as the Remonstrants and Jesuits pretend; for then man himself would "make himself differ from others,"

contrary to 1 Cor. 4.7, but they are elected, because it was the free good pleasure of God to elect them; for "he predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will," Eph. 1.5. Election is not from, but unto faith and good works, which flow from election, as Paul showeth, Rom. 8.29,30. Eph. 1.4. And it is for this reason, that the Son of God gathers the elect to the church, for "as many as are ordained to eternal life, believe," Acts 13.48.

5. Since now it hath not pleased God to bring all men into the world at the same time, but at different periods, therefore Christ also gathers his church "from the beginning to the end of the world." If time would permit, we would show how the Son of God gathered a church for himself in the families of the patriarchs before, during, and after the time of Moses, before he came in the flesh; how he did this, while he was on earth; how after his ascension into heaven, from Jews and Gentiles, and what he will yet do, in order to gather his church. Every person who attends to the word of God, and knows that Christ is the Head, the Lord, and King of his church, knows also that he hath never been without members, and subjects, and that he never will, nor can be without them.

6. This is still more evident, because he protects his church. The church is frequently and most grievously attacked and assaulted by her secret and open enemies; but the Son of God "defends" her. See this Psalm 139,1-4. Rev. 12.1-11. He is "a wall of fire to her; he who toucheth her toucheth the apple of his eye." Zech. 2.5,8. And he also keeps and "preserves" her so, that she will remain steadfast until the end, and will be saved. She is the bush which burns, but is not consumed: "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved," Psalm 46.5. "The purpose of God according to election shall stand," Rom. 9.11. The satisfaction of the Son cannot be frustrated: "God forgives the sins" of those who are redeemed by Christ, "that he may declare his righteousness," Rom. 3.25,26. "The Spirit abideth for ever" with the church, John 14.16. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance," Rom. 11.29. "Jesus loveth his own unto the end," John 13.1. "He gives his sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish," &c. John 10.28,29. "The covenant of grace, all the promises of that covenant, and the foundations of the church are immoveable, Isaiah 54.8-10, Matt. 16.18. Do any fall away, they are only certain particular members, or churches of this or that place, who evidence thus, that they never were true members of the church, as the apostle teacheth, 1 John 2.19, but no true member of the church will ever fall away, much less the universal church.

2. Having thus seen what the church is, we must further know how we are to believe a holy, catholic, Christian church. We do not believe in the church, which consists of men, like the Romanists, who trust in the church unreservedly for their salvation: "For thus saith the Lord, Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm," John 17.5. But we believe the church, which we do, (a) when we assure ourselves, that the Son of God gathers such a church for himself on earth, and when we earnestly desire to join ourselves to her. So the spouse acted, when

she said, Song 1.7. "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" (b) When we have a certain knowledge of the true church according to the word of God, so that we abide not in the true church from prejudice, or opinion, but from a discovery, that she hath the approbation of the word of God. Such was the faith of Paul, when he said, Philip. 3.3, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." (c) When we believe upon good and incontrovertible grounds, agreeably to the word of God, that we ourselves are living members of the church, and will always remain such. This was the faith of David, when he said, Psalm 23.5, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

II. We had so much to say on our first head: we proceed now to the second, to wit, the communion of saints. Many ancient creeds did not contain this article, because the communion of saints constitutes the essence of the church, and belongs thus to the church herself. But as the communion is now mentioned distinctly in every creed, as a benefit to the church, we will also explain it, as a distinct benefit. The Lord God, since he loves his church, bestows great benefits upon her, and particularly these four, to wit, two in this life, the communion of saints, and the forgiveness of sins; and two after this life, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Of the two last the instructor speaks in the following Lord's day. The first of the benefits, which God bestows upon his church in this life, is the communion of saints.

Although the saints, to wit, the souls of the blessed and the angels, have a communion with one another in heaven, and even the saints upon earth have also communion with those in heaven; for Paul saith, Heb. 12.22,23, that believers "are come to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect;" nevertheless the creed speaks of the saints upon earth, who are members of the church militant; who are saints, because they are members of the holy church.

These saints have a communion with Christ, and with one another.

1. The saints have a communion with Christ. We believe, as the instructor explains it, "that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are in common partakers of him, and of all his riches and gifts." For Christ is a publick person, the Head, the Lord, the Surety and Redeemer of his people, who is whatever he is for his people: which communion imports, (a) the strictest union of believers with Christ, like that of a building with its foundation and corner stone: "Upon this rock I will build my church," saith he, Matt. 16.18; like the union of inhabitants with their house; they dwell in him, he is an "everlasting habitation" to them, Deut. 33.27, "a sanctuary," Isaiah 8.14, and "he dwells in them," Eph. 3.17. They are "the house" of the Son of God, Heb 3.6. Yea, they are united to him, as the graft is to the stock, John 15.4,5. Rom. 11.17, the wife to the husband, Eph 5.32. Isaiah 54.5, the members to the head, Col. 1.18, and the body to the garments, Gal. 3.17. (b) This communion consisteth also in that special property which believers have in Christ, and in

all his benefits. He hath appropriated them and all theirs to himself; "Ye know," said Paul, 2 Cor. 8.9, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich." And thus he, and all that is his, becomes their property. The believer saith, "My beloved is mine, and I am his," Song 2.16. Believers being "of God in Christ Jesus, he is therefore made to them of God wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption," 1 Cor. 1.30.

2. By this communion with Christ believers have also communion with one another: "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus," saith the apostle, Gal. 3.28. This communion of the saints consists also, (a) in that most intimate union, whereby "they are all of one heart, and one soul," Acts 4.32. They all possess the same grace, Jer. 32.39. "They are likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind," Philip. 2.2. Yea, "they speak the same thing," 1 Cor. 1.10. They have all the same religion, the same property, the same enemies and friends; therefore they cleave to one another, as Ruth cleaved to Naomi, when she said, "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God," Ruth 1.16. The world knows nothing of this, and therefore wonders at it, "dares not join herself to these persons; but magnifies them," Acts 5.13. Yea, the world, cannot oppose them, without first putting out her own eyes. To express this strict union of the saints, they are likened to the compact stones of Solomon's temple, 1 Peter 2.5. They are like citizens of one city, inhabitants of one house, Eph. 2.19, table-fellows, who eat of the same bread, 1 Cor. 10.17, and members of one body, "being reconciled in one body," Eph. 2.16. This communion consists also, (b) in a mutual property, and a consequent actual exercise of fellowship one with another, by virtue of that union; just as one member of the body hath a property in the other members, and exerciseth fellowship with them. So Paul speaks, Eph. 4.25. "We are members one of another." He explains this beautifully by a representation of that mutual service and help, which one member affords to another, 1 Cor. 12.14-27. And this mutual property and exercise of fellowship is manifested by asking concerning each others welfare, and by a fellowfeeling for each other in difficulties. See Neh. 1.2-10. Heb. 13.3. Therefore they are forthwith ready to contribute whatever they can to assist each other, either by supporting dejected souls with good comfortable words, or by communicating their goods to the necessitous, in which the primitive church of Jerusalem greatly excelled, although they have not a general community of goods; or by doing every kind office to each other. Do they understand that the saints prosper, they "rejoice with them that rejoice, as they weep with them who weep," See all this, Rom. 12.4-10, 13-15. Yea, they exercise this communion not only in private, but also in publick, and they show with whom they hold. They conduct in this manner with respect to the publick administration of the word and sacraments, 1 Cor. 10.15, 17, the assembling of themselves together, Heb. 10.25, and their familiar conversation with the saints, though they be ever so mean, with David, 2 Sam. 6.20-22. He was "a companion of all them who feared the Lord," Psalm 119.63.

III. We should now proceed to our third general head, to wit, the faith of Christians

concerning the forgiveness of sins, as the second benefit, which God bestoweth upon his church in this life: but since we must treat of the forgiveness of sins in order, on the twenty-third, twenty-fourth and fifty-first Lord's day, we will omit this at present.

#### APPLICATION.

In order that we may now improve all these particulars to our advantage, we will exhibit this church in its lustre. Let every one "walk about Zion, and go round about her: let him tell the towers thereof; let him mark well her bulwarks, and consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following," as we are exhorted, Psalm 48.12,13. "Glorious things are spoken of the city of God," Psalm 87.3. The members of the church are "the saints of the Most High, who shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever," Dan. 7.18. The Head of the church is most precious, view him from his head to his feet, as described with respect to his wonderful excellency by her who knew him best and experimentally, Song 5.10-16. The union and communion of the church with him, and of the members with each other is inconceivable: "They are all one, as the Father in the Son, and the Son in the Father are one: yea, they are one in the Father, and in the Son." See John 17.21. 1 John 1.3. The means by which they have become a church are indeed excellent; for they have by them become "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people," 1 Peter 2.9. And truly the state of the church is unchangeable, she is "like mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever," Psalm 125.1. Who, when he beholds her, must not cry out with Moses, Deut. 33.29. "Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places."

But what will it avail us, that there is such a glorious church, if we know not where that church is? There are many assemblies, which severally pretend to be the true church, and there is nevertheless but one true church, which God will save. It is therefore necessary, that we inquire which is the true church. The Socinians, as if self-condemned, will not brook this; but the spouse was wiser, when she inquired of her bridegroom concerning the true church, Song 1.7. We must join ourselves to the church, as it was foretold of the Gentiles, that they should do this, Isaiah 2.2,2. & 11.10. Zech. 8.23. Indeed neither grace nor salvation are to be found out of the true church: "For there the Lord commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore," Psalm 133.3. "But the rebellious dwell in a dry land," Psalm 68.6.

That we may have a proper knowledge of the true church, God hath proposed a certain mark, or marks in his word, by which we may know her. I will not busy myself with the marks of others, and certainly not with the fifteen or sixteen marks of the Romanists, which are either derived from circumstances, or suit our church, and not the Romish, and those which agree to the Romish are heathen and Antichristian marks. But we will attend to that mark, which the word of God, the only

rule of the church, affords us. And this mark is the agreement of the doctrine with the word of God; for "he who is of God heareth the words of God," John 8.47. "Christ's sheep hear his voice," John 10.26,27. The church is built on the word of God, Eph. 2.19,20. "We must try the spirits thereby, whether they are of God," 1 John 4.1-3. "If any man bring not this doctrine with him, we must not receive him into our house," 2 John verses. 9,10.

If we now compare the doctrine of our church with the word of God, we will perceive with the utmost evidence, that she agreeth perfectly with the word of God, and that therefore the Reformed\* alone are the true church; which appears still more, since we submit our doctrine to the word of God only, and in conformity thereto, humble the sinner to the lowest degree, comfort, sanctify him, and glorify the free grace of God. We know indeed that all other churches, so called, do also claim this mark, as well as we, but we will find them to be liars; for they do all reproach the word of God, and wrest it, either according to natural reason, as all Pelagians and Semipelagians do, or according to enthusiasm, as the Quakers do, or according to lordship, with the Papists. How then can they boast, that they have the pure doctrine, according to the word of God, and so that they are the true church? yea, they decline this mark, and will either have no marks at all, or others. Therefore it is evident, that the true church is found with us.

\* See the Author's preface.

But, hearers, it will not suffice either you or me, to know that we are in the true church; for we may notwithstanding be still chaff, and vessels of dishonour. They who believe one holy, catholic, Christian church, say also that they are living members of the church, and will always remain such: is this so with you in truth? do ye say, yea? have ye then also true and living evidences? do ye ask, what are the marks of a living member? we will exhibit them to you according to the word of God.

1. He who is a living member is such not only outwardly by profession, but also inwardly, being changed and quickened by the Spirit of God, to serve God inwardly, truly and heartily in the Spirit: he is not satisfied with his outward service, unless it be accompanied with a heart that hath been changed, that is alive, warm and active; therefore he attends to the motions of his heart, bemoans his heartlessness, and excites his soul, and cries to the Lord, "Unite my heart to fear thy name," Psalm 86.11. "Incline my heart to thy testimonies," Psalm 119.36. That this is a true mark appears from Rom. 2.28,29. "He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, &c."

2. Such a person is united to the Head, even to Christ, truly, and hath communion with him, hath received him by faith truly, heartily, and in opposition to all besides, and affords him a dwelling in his heart. We see this John 1.12. Eph. 3.17. See this treated more largely in our discourse on the seventh Lord's day.

3. Such a person agrees also with the true members of the church; he knows, he loves them, and is familiar with them, and regards their profit and disprofit as his own, because he sees the life, the love and image of God in them: and the more these things shine forth in them, the more he loves them; yea, even when they oppose and smite him: "Let the righteous smite me," said that living member of the church, Psalm 141.5, "it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities." As he also exhibits this as a mark of a citizen of Zion, when he saith, Psalm 15.4. "In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord."

See now whether ye are living members. Alas! how many "have the name that they live, while they are dead," as many in the church of Sardis were, Rev. 3.1. For,

1. Many are misshapen members, who are monsters in the church, and deform her exceedingly: is it not thus with you, who are ignorant, irreligious violators of God's name and day.—revengeful, lewd, unjust, gluttons, drunkards, vain, worldly and earthly-minded. The Lord may indeed complain now, as he did formerly, Jer. 5.26, "Among my people are found wicked men."

2. How many hurtful members are there in this body of the church! Alas, that they were cut off! no profit accrues from them to the church, but only disprofit: certainly ye are hurtful to the brethren, who hanker so after new and unheard of things, which are contrary to the word of God, and utter those things: ye also who oppose the communion of saints, and strict and precise godliness, who betray the church and her privileges to unfit persons, and who abandon and trample upon them. He who hath eyes may see that now also "truth faileth" with many, and that "he who departeth from evil maketh himself a prey" Isaiah 59.15.

3. There are some, who only seem to be living members. They are devout, and have some knowledge of the mysteries of God, they are outwardly moral, yea, they associate with the godly; but their heart within is dead and rotten, and in secret they are as vile as the vilest, as the Saviour describes the Pharisees, saying also of them, that they "cannot escape the damnation of hell," Matt. 23.25,27,33. It is true, they conduct so that they escape censure; but are not ye they who will not be detected? Ye hate them who detect you: when ye can only find an opportunity, and will not expose yourselves too much, ye will reproach them, and will strive to render them universally odious. Conceal yourselves as much and as long as ye please, God will one day hereafter detect you, as he discovered Judas.

4. Others are rotten members, who have fallen from the truth, and godliness which they once professed. How zealous were some for the truth and godliness! they could relish these things, they associated with the strictest of the pious, who were pleased with them, and loved them; but as soon as the novelty was over, they abandoned all, and fell away; if they do not join themselves to some

apostate church, they abandon themselves to the world, which, like Demas, they begin to love again, 2 Tim. 4.10. See these also detected, 2 Peter 2.20-22. Ye who are thus, may be acknowledged members, but ye are not such in reality, any more than those who "said they were Jews, but were found liars," Rev. 3.9. Flatter yourselves as much as ye please, ye have nevertheless "no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem," Neh. 3.20. Ye shall neither in this life, nor after this life "stand in the congregation of the righteous," Psalm 1.5.

Doth this render you concerned, and do ye desire to become living members of the church, and to know how ye may become such? Behold, this is the way:

1. Endeavour to become assured that our church is the true church, according to the word of God, that it may be your steadfast persuasion, that with us alone the salvation of the sinner is proposed. Let it not suffice you, that your parents have told you this, and that ye were educated to it; but endeavour to obtain a proof of it your ownelves from the word of God; and do therefore like "the noble Bereans, who received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so," Acts 17.11.

2. Separate yourselves from your former companions, as far as they have tended to mislead you, or may yet do it: Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty," 2 Cor. 6.17,18.

3. Join yourselves to the saints, who are upon the earth in order to seek their portion, and to be directed and conducted by them to the privileges of the church, as it was foretold, that "ten men out of all the languages of the nations should take hold, should even take hold of the skirt of him who was a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you," Zech. 8.23.

4. Remain not by any means estranged from the Head of the church, but endeavour to be united to him, to receive him, and to join yourselves unto him; for "the Lord will give unto the strangers who join themselves unto him, within his house, and within his walls, a name better than that of sons and of daughters," &c. Isaiah 56.3-7.

5. But ye, who are true and living members of the church of God, maintain diligently the communion of the saints: it is certainly your privilege, and the glory of the church; therefore endeavour to converse familiarly with the Head of the church, and like "Enoch, to walk with God," Gen. 5.22,24. "Your life must be hidden with Christ in God," Col. 3.3. nevertheless in aiming at this, do not wholly separate yourselves from the saints, to which we easily decline, that we may converse and be satisfied in our solitary life with the Lord alone. No, the Lord hath called you for your happiness to his church, and to the communion of saints: the first Christians continued in the doctrine of the apostles, and in fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers," Acts 2.42. But we must carefully beware that our conversation with the saints do not degenerate into a mere civil

intercourse; we must converse one way with men as citizens, and another way, as saints, whose citizenship is in heaven; but avoid particularly strife and imperiousness, let others see in you that ye are of one heart, lowly, "like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." This Paul required, Philip. 2.2-4. Doth the church appear to you to be exceedingly corrupt, do not separate yourselves from her, as long as the truth and the godly are in her, and as long as the Lord hath not separated himself from her. Of this we will speak further on the eighty-second question.

6. Let every one promote the prosperity of the church, according to his condition and ability. Let magistrates, if they will be living members of the church, manifest themselves nursing fathers of her, cherishing her, as it was foretold of them, Isaiah 49.23. But ye, who have been set as watchmen upon the walls of Jerusalem, "be diligent to know the state of your flocks, look well to your herds," Prov. 27.23. See what that great apostle enjoins upon you, Acts 20.28. Therefore "ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth," Isaiah 62.6,7. Yea, "every one should pray for the peace of Jerusalem," Psalm 122.6, "should warn them who are unruly, should comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men," 1 Thess. 5.14. Yea, even women and maidens, though they ought to be silent in the church, should do what in them lies, both at home and abroad, for the good of the church; as "the daughters of Shallum repaired the walls of Jerusalem," Neh. 3.12. See also Philip. 4.3.

7. Manifest yourselves, ye living members of the church, visible by a bright and holy conversation, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world," Philip. 2.15. Your Head also requires this of you, Matt. 5.16.

8. If it should happen, that the church should be compelled to flee, upon account of grievous tribulation, do ye then always flee whither the saints flee: "Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents," Song 1.8.

Thus ye will not only be happy here, but will also be once translated into the church triumphant, since ye will say in due time with Paul, 2 Tim. 4.7,8. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Amen.

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