

“Is not Jesus in John 5:40 (“And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life”) expressing disappointment or frustration that some refused to ‘come’ to Him? Does not this text express a desire or wish of Christ that these individuals receive Him and so ‘have life’ and be saved (although ultimately these individuals perished)? Does not this verse imply that redemption and salvation were *available* to those who perished in their sins, if only they had come to Christ and received Him (i.e., a universal, hypothetical redemption available for all, upon condition of repentance and faith)?”

In the last sentence, the questioner describes a position known as Amyrauldianism. Shortly after the great Synod of Dordt (1618-1619), this error arose in France. It was taught in a somewhat different form in England and this view was represented at the Westminster Assembly by several delegates. It was advocated also in Scotland and is said to have been adopted by the Marrow Men. The view of the Marrow Men was condemned by the General Assembly of the Scottish Presbyterian Church. It was also rejected by the Westminster Assembly, although not by name. The *Westminster Confession* says that Christ died for “the elect only” (3:6; cf. 8:8).

The questioner asks whether John 5:40 does not express disappointment or frustration on Jesus’ part that they did not come to Him. Such a view, that of the well-meant offer, which holds that God earnestly desires to save the reprobate, immediately raises the question: Can the incarnate Son of God who is “very God of very God” be frustrated? He created the worlds and upholds them, giving life and being to every creature. He frustrated? He does whatever pleases Him (Ps. 115:3; 135:6)!

The answer to the reader’s question is, even on the surface, a resounding NO. Here Jesus states a *simple fact* concerning these hard-hearted Jews: “ye will not [i.e., do not wish or want to] come to me.” In the context, Christ explains that they *cannot* trust in Him because they seek honour from men not God (John 5:44), do not have “the love of God in” them (42) and do not even really believe the five books of Moses (46-47).

In brief, as our confessions teach, especially the *Canons of Dordt*, the preaching of the gospel comes with two things: 1) the promise that whoever believes in Christ will be saved; 2) the command that comes promiscuously to all men to repent of their sins and trust in the Saviour (II:5). For more, you could read my book, *Corrupting the Word of God*, which deals with the history of the well-meant offer, as well as theological and exegetical issues (available from the CPRC Bookstore for £16.50, inc. P&P).

You can ask, of course, “Doth not God then do injustice to man, by requiring from him in His law that which he cannot perform?” The answer is, “Not at all; for God made man capable of performing it; but man, by the instigation of the devil, and his own wilful disobedience, deprived himself and all his posterity of those divine gifts” (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 9). God does not excuse man from serving Him because of his own foolishness in disobeying God when He had warned him, “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17).  
*Prof. Hanko*

## Reformed Ecclesiology: Costly but Worth It!

A major reason for the widespread disinterest in ecclesiology and the low views that many hold regarding Christ’s church is that ecclesiology is often, from a very practical perspective, the most costly truth for evangelical Protestants.

Consider the various elements in the biblical, Reformed and confessional doctrine of the church: God’s election, gathering and preservation of the church; Christ’s sole headship over His church; the four attributes of the church (spiritual unity, true holiness, scriptural catholicity and biblical apostolicity); the three marks of a true church (faithful preaching, sacramental administration and discipline); the three offices of the church (pastor, elder and deacon), excluding lay preaching (*Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q. & A. 158) and women office-bearers (I Tim. 2:11-15); covenantal or household baptism (Acts 16:15, 31-33); the catechetical instruction of the children of believers; close communion supervised by the elders; the regulative principle of worship (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 96); etc.

In our day of the drift and departure of many churches, even a brief statement of these ecclesiological topics is enough to scare many. “But my church falls a long way short of this!” many are compelled to confess. “There is no way I can honestly call my congregation a ‘pillar and ground of the truth’ (I Tim. 3:15).” Thus the believer feels the heavy burden of the difficult calling to engage in church reformation. This involves earnest praying to the Lord of the church, humbly protesting erroneous congregational or denominational doctrines and/or practices, and, if necessary, suffering at the hands of a church that does not want to be admonished regarding its departures from God’s truth. “There is no point even trying to reform my church,” many immediately lament. “There is no way that they will listen! My congregation does not even have proper biblical and Reformed procedures for protesting!”

Others, who are not even in a church or who realize that they need to leave their false or departing churches, know that they ought to join a faithful congregation. This also brings up a number of hardships, hardships which many, sadly, are not willing to bear for the sake of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 14:25-35). “This would mean the loss of friendships!” laments one. “But then I’d have a much longer drive to church,” complains another. “Then I’d have to move house!” exclaims a third. “I would need to leave my country!” yells another, throwing his hands into the air in despair. “What would all this mean for my spouse, my children, my job, my relatives, etc.?”

“Sure, I would drive further for my dream job or move house for a better paying position. Admittedly, I would not see some friends and family so much, yet it would be

worth it. But suffer these losses in order to become a member of a true church—never, that is way too much!” In short, many think that their earthly bread, worldly treasures and physical family count for more than spiritual bread, treasures in heaven and the family of God. The Lord Jesus teaches us true priorities: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

The cost of obeying Reformed ecclesiology is even borne out if one compares the relative unpopularity of the subject of Christ’s church (ecclesiology) with those, say, of salvation (soteriology) or the end times (eschatology). The latter attract greater attendance at lectures and more sales of books or box sets of CDs or DVDs than the former. Who wants to hear, watch or read about a difficult, if not “impossible,” calling regarding the church, especially when it may involve so many aspects of our lives? Ecclesiology is often, so to speak, where the rubber hits the road, where mere talk ends.

To help us all grasp the biblical perspective—that is, *God’s* perspective!—on all this, let us consider Psalm 87, a Zion psalm which is ultimately about the “Jerusalem which is above” (Gal. 4:26), which is manifested in faithful congregations.

In Psalm 87:1, we read, “His foundation is in the holy mountains.” The physical foundation that God laid for Zion bespeaks its firmness, its elevation and its fortification. The spiritual foundation of the church is her crucified and risen Saviour: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 3:11). The unconditional election of the church and her true spiritual members in Christ is also spoken of in this way: “the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his” (II Tim. 2:19).

Psalm 87:2 asserts, “The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob” (cf. 78:67-68). Clearly, God loves the devout assemblies of His people more than the flat of one believer or the home of a Christian family. We should too, even to the point of moving house, if need be, so that we and our families enter “the gates of Zion” twice every Lord’s day with a good conscience, confident of the abiding presence of the living God with His worshipping and faithful church.

Thus we read in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, “What doth God require in the fourth commandment? First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; and that I, especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, to hear His word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian. Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by His Holy Spirit in me; and thus begin in this life the eternal sabbath” (Q. & A. 103).

Psalm 137:5-6 is very forceful: “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.” That is, what is the point in using all one’s skill with a musical instrument or being able to sing like a *prima donna*, without love for, and membership in, a true church? Each child of God must be able to say that this is “above my chief joy.”

“Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God” (87:3). It will not do for us, as Jehovah’s people, merely to utter nice things or pleasant sentiments about the church. “*Glorious* things are spoken of thee, O city of God”—by Jehovah, by Scripture, by other believers *and by me too!* I must not only express this in words but also in very deed, by doing all I can to join a faithful congregation and serve in her as a living member.

Psalm 87:4-6 speaks three times of the new birth or the grace of regeneration: “I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was *born* there. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was *born* in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was *born* there.”

Notice here that the new birth is spoken of in connection with the church: “this man was born *there* ... And *of Zion* it shall be said, This and that man was born *in her* ... this man was born *there*.” Elsewhere we learn that the elect are regenerated according to the sovereign will of the Triune God (John 1:13; 3:8; James 1:18) and in connection with the preaching of His Word (I Pet. 1:23-25).

Psalm 87:4-6 also indicates that it speaks of the New Testament church. Verse 4 refers to “Rahab” (or Egypt), “Babylon,” “Philistia,” “Tyre” and “Ethiopia”—Gentiles!

Out of the gift of spiritual life, through the new birth of each and every member of God’s catholic or universal church, comes congregational worship: “As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there” (7). What a beautiful scene: the church praising Jehovah out of renewed hearts!

The believer, addressing God’s beloved church, proclaims, “all my springs are in thee” (7). This is the Christian confession concerning the God who regenerates us in connection with His church. The God who gives us new life through the new birth also strengthens us with the bread of life (Jesus Christ) and the water of life (the Holy Spirit), through the two official means of grace (the preaching of the Word and the two holy sacraments) which He has placed in His church.

Admittedly, it is costly (to our sins and earthly-mindedness) to join, remain in and serve in a true church. Yes, it is costly but it is well worth it! It is cheap (being easy on the flesh and requiring no holy sacrifices) to remain outside the church or in a false or departing congregation. But is very costly for your witness (you have nowhere, or nowhere good, to bring anyone who is willing to hear the gospel) and for your own spiritual life, your spouse and your children (Ruth 1:20-21)! Remember that haunting Word of God: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children” (Hos. 4:6).

*Rev. Stewart*

---

### Covenant Protestant Reformed Church

83 Clarence Street, Ballymena, BT43 5DR • Website: [www.cprc.co.uk](http://www.cprc.co.uk)  
Lord’s Day services (11 am & 6 pm) with live video streaming ([www.cprf.co.uk/live](http://www.cprf.co.uk/live))  
Pastor: Angus Stewart, 7 Lislunna Road, Kells, N. Ireland, BT42 3NR • (028) 25 891851  
[pastor@cprc.co.uk](mailto:pastor@cprc.co.uk) • [www.youtube.com/cprcni](http://www.youtube.com/cprcni) • [www.facebook.com/CovenantPRC](http://www.facebook.com/CovenantPRC)