

\* **The Church: The Body of Christ**  
Ephesians 1:3-6

\* **The Church Institute**  
Titus 1:5

\* **The Marks of the Church**  
Romans 10:13-15

\* **The Communion of Saints**  
Ephesians 4:1-6

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**October 5, 2014 — No. 3744**

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lives outside of the church rather than within it. Then we begin to seek our friends outside the fellowship of the church. We begin to date outside the communion of the saints. We marry outside of the church and we hang around with other couples outside of the church. All we do is attend what we have to, and we do not believe we need the rest. Especially is this true when it comes to some of the social affairs of the church, which, of course, are not essential for communion, yet nevertheless flow out of our desire to be with the church and our fellow saints. It is possible to attend a church institute and fulfill all its requirements but fail when it comes to our organic life within the church. Have we failed? How much do you love the church?

### ***Blessed Communion***

True unity within the church results in a blessed communion. Suspicion and criticism do not characterize a good member of the church. A judgmental disposition toward everyone and everything that goes on in the church does not make for a good member of the

church. A person who has next to nothing to do with the church and her members does not make a good member of the church. A healthy church has active living members, who give their all for the sake of the church itself. And when that unity is experienced, then the church is happy. Her members are happy! And that is exactly the way Christ meant it to be! Joy and peace in Him, and that among the saints. May God grant that to you and me as members of the church.

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Then we can properly make the confession: I believe an holy, universal church, the communion of saints! I am a living—not a dead—member of the church of Christ. As the psalmist sings in Psalm 122:6-9, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions’ sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the LORD God I will seek thy good.” I pray that song will be on your lips too. May we not only sing it but also live out our confession. How beautiful is the church!

### **THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**

*October 5, 2014  
No. 3744*

*The Church: The Body of Christ  
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear Radio Friends,

### ***Introduction***

I count it an honor and a privilege to be able to address you again in the next several months on the Reformed Witness Hour. In the past I have worked my way through a particular book of the Bible. I intend to do that again. But for the next several broadcasts I would like to address a subject that is of grave concern to me. I intend to speak on the truth concerning the church. There are many heresies afloat in the church world of today, but one particular truth of Scripture that is horribly maligned today is the doctrine of the church. As a church planter I am forced to deal with, not simply a prevailing ignorance on this subject, but total disregard and disdain for the Bible’s teaching on the church. I am convinced that the reason we find so many unchurched people in our society is because it has shot itself in the foot, so to speak. Modern churches no longer teach the importance of church membership—the need to join and be committed to a faithful church institute. Churches do not insist on proper Sabbath observance or church attendance in order to sit beneath the preaching.

Churches offer stones for bread by way of their worship. The result is that the members of these churches are leaving by the hundreds, and our society is becoming more and more unchurched.

It is time to return to a proper understanding of the church and the indispensable place she has in the life of every believer. There is a beautiful confession of the Reformed churches known as the Heidelberg Catechism. This confession was written long ago, during a time when the church institute was yet held in high esteem. This confession follows a question and answer format. In Q & A 54, the question is asked: “What do you believe concerning the ‘holy, catholic church’ of Christ?” The answer the Heidelberg Catechism gives to this question is classic and beautiful! I wish the clergy of the churches of today would learn it and follow it. It reads: “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 forever shall remain a

living member thereof.” In the next few broadcasts we are going to examine where the Bible teaches us this.

### ***A Church Chosen***

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches us in Q & A 54, first of all, that the church is “chosen to everlasting life.” The reference here is to the plan of God before He created this world. From eternity in His plan, before time began, God chose to Himself a body of people known in the Bible as the church. So vital is this truth to understanding what the church is that we may not simply pass over it. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians addresses the *church* of Jesus Christ established in the city of Ephesus. Concerning that church he writes in verses 4 and 5, “According as God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” This

passage leaves no doubt that the church is made up of those whom God chose or elected unto eternal life. To define properly what the church is requires that we confess the truth of sovereign

predestination. As is clear from this passage in Ephesians, before the foundations of the world were laid God predestinated unto Himself a people, that is, He chose a certain people, He ordained a certain people unto salvation in Christ. The end to which He chose them is eternal life—that is their destiny; that is where they will go when they die.

Now, we are not interested in every aspect of this truth for what we wish to establish today. What we are interested in is this: the members of Christ’s church in this world are not chosen by God in an individualistic manner. Yes, they were chosen individually, no doubt about that. Each one of God’s people has his name written in the Lamb’s book of life from eternity. God chose each one of us in His great love for us. God’s election is not just some cold, uncaring procedure of God by which He chose to Himself a whole mass of people not really being interested in

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any one individual. God takes a deep interest in and cares for each one of the members of His church. But at the same time, we ought not to view our election in an individualistic manner—as if God does not care also for the body of the whole of His elect people. We were chosen

tain them enough, they leave it and go somewhere else. “I was just not getting anything out of that church!” That is a very selfish attitude. The question is not: what will this church do for me? The question is: what can I do for the church? What is my responsibility toward my church? What can I give to the church? What can I contribute? How, as a member, am I endeavoring to keep the unity?

And that can come down to some pretty concrete issues. One such issue is that of financially supporting the church. So much as I love the church, so also will I give to supply her needs! When I view its needs, I do not withhold to satisfy my own needs first. I do not go out and flip a five dollar bill on a restaurant table for a waitress, when I have not contributed to the cause of the church. I am a living member of the church and I remember the command of my Lord, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God!” That is my priority in life. Why? Because I am forced to give to the church? No, not at all, but because I count it a distinct privilege to be a part of the life and organism of the church! And as freely as Christ has given me the life that I now possess, so freely I give to the cause of the church. I love the church! Ask yourself the question once? What do I contribute to the church? How much do I love the church? How much do

I want my life to be a part of the church? I freely support the church where I am a member.

And that is just one example we can bring up about our organic life in the church. If I am indeed a living member of the church, there is also the whole matter of seeking to be a part of the communion of the church. I come to church, not because I have to, but because (and this is just one of the reasons) I love to be with God’s saints! I love to be with them! I love to be with them. They are my family! They are my love. I attend Bible studies with them because I know it is an intimate part of the communion of saints. It is a part of the organic life of the church. I go to various functions of the church because there I can fellowship with God’s saints around the Word of God. I am not an island who exists by myself. I do not divorce myself from the church because I just do not like being with my fellow saints. I want to be with God’s people because we are fellow members of the church of Christ.

You see, there is this whole life that goes on within the church. And sometimes we neglect the communion of saints simply so that we can carry on a life outside of the communion. We do nothing *for* the church! We do nothing *with* the church. We simply go our merry way and find ourselves carrying on our

is perfectly normal. He can think and reason just as well as any of us. But that perfectly healthy mind is in a body that will not obey the commands of the head. The muscles will not carry out the impulses the mind sends to them. And the result is that such a person cannot walk. His arms, hands, and fingers will not always do what they are told do. So, little can be accomplished. Such people cannot even speak much beyond a few sounds and words. Not because their minds are not sound and whole, but because the members of the body do not function in harmony.

Do you get the point? The church is a body, and when the members of the body disobey the command of Christ to keep the unity in the bond of peace, then the church becomes dysfunctional. It is no longer a place where one can live in joy and pursue his Christian life in happiness together with his fellow saints.

Above all things, therefore, members of the church of Christ, you and I, must endeavor with all that is in us to keep the unity! No, I do not mean that we must compromise the truth in order to ensure unity. That we may never do. True unity and peace

come from reliance upon and development in the truth of God's Word! When members together walk in truth, there is blessed unity and peace. But sometimes when there comes a sharp disagreement in the church, the members are so apt to polarize. They go to opposite extremes and refuse even to listen to others. They become bitter and cruel in their dealing with fellow saints. They become suspicious and doubtful even of the salvation of others.

What does it mean that we must endeavor to keep the unity in the church? From a negative point of view it means that we may not cut ourselves off from the life and communion of the congregation. Endeavoring to keep the unity means that we actively live within the sphere of the church. We are living members of the body of Christ right here. We need each other therefore. And we need the church. Each of the members of the church has a responsibility toward the church as a whole. In our selfish age many ask, "Well, what can I get out of the church? What will the church give me? How can I benefit from the church institute?" And when the church institute does not make them feel good about themselves, or does not enter-

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together with all of God's other saints. We were chosen together as the body of the elect from eternity. God does not view you and me apart from the whole. He sees us as an intimate part of that entire elect people from eternity. We were not elected as little islands in ourselves. We were not chosen by God to stand alone in this world, as if no one else counts but we ourselves. Our importance to God therefore is not to be found in ourselves, but in our connection with the entire body of His elect. A believer ought to remember that, when he thinks that he can live apart from other believers. That is the height of all pride! God chose unto Himself a people. And He views them from eternity to eternity as a whole.

With this body of elect God has chosen to carry on His covenant. Ephesians 1:5 tells us that we have been predestinated unto the adoption of sons. Paul also writes in verse 11 of this chapter that we have been predestined by God to obtain an inheritance. All of this implies that this body of the elect was chosen by God to be the children of His household and to receive the inheritance of their Father. And just as an earthly father loves all of his children, prefer-

ring none above the other, so also God. God loves this elect people. He is their Father and they are His children—those on whom He pours out all of His favor and care. He dwells with them in love. From eternity God chose these elect to share in the rich inheritance of heavenly glory—eternal fellowship with Him in heaven. The truth of the church and the truth of God's covenant cannot be separated. God chose a certain people—a definite number of people. He knows all of them by name because He chose them as a body of

people, a church to share with Him in the bliss of heaven to all eternity. And the fantastic part of it all is this: God laid all this out before He even created the world! He knows the beginning from the end, because He is the beginning and the end of all things. He chose a church unto Himself, and it is exactly the members of this church—no more, no less—that will share in eternal life with God.

Now, we might ask at this point, why place such emphasis on this fact? Well, I do so because there is a debate that has been going on for quite sometime. It is a hot debate. There are those who believe that the church of Christ did not become a reality

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until the day of Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out. All of God's saints that lived and died in the Old Testament were not members of the church. They were the kingdom people. This kingdom people was saved by the law. They are therefore a separate body of people that may not be mixed up with the New Testament church that began at the time of Pentecost. Those who maintain this view are known as dispensationalists. This debate is an on-going one in the churches of today.

But it is the error of the dispensationalist that destroys the scriptural truth of the church! It leaves shipwreck the blessed truth of God's covenant. It denies the truth of sovereign predestination. That is why we have emphasized the truth of predestination in our broadcast today. Predestination puts an end to all debate on this matter! It is this body of God's elect people that comes to manifestation in this world as God's church. God has elected from before time a church unto Himself. As God's people are born into this world and as God through the Word and the Spirit brings them to salvation, God builds that church. What He ordained in eternity is indeed coming to pass in time! The members of the church from the beginning of time to the end are born and reborn in this world exactly according to God's decree of elec-

tion. At the very beginning of time God created the first two members of His church when He gave life to Adam and Eve.

After the fall of man into sin, God called and saved those whom He had chosen from eternity, and they manifested themselves as members of His church in this world. With them God established His covenant. Adam, Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, believers out of the nation of Israel. Then Christ came, to whom all of these saints looked in faith in the Old Testament. At the time of Pentecost and afterwards God sent out his salvation to people of every language of the earth—all of them chosen unto life everlasting and still looking to Christ in faith. The Son of God has been gathering and preserving unto Himself a church chosen to eternal life. He has been doing that throughout all of history—in the old as well as the new dispensation! Stand back, once, people of God who now live in the last times, and observe what God has done and still is doing! The church that was chosen with all of its members in eternity God has been gathering from the beginning of time. Saints have come and gone. These elect saints have attained their inheritance already. They are in heaven. They have triumphed in Christ.

Now, observe again with me the church. There are also

each member of the church has his own personality, his own circumstances of life, his own place in this world. But together they make up the body of Christ—all the members working out of that one principle of the life of faith in them. And again, this is true of the church institute as well, where that church comes to manifestation. Each local congregation is a manifestation of that church organism. Each functions under Christ through its officebearers. And each reflects the life of Christ. Christ dwells in each local church as the Head, and He works in her midst by means of faithful officebearers. In our local churches we are members of Christ and members of one another!

Now, certainly we can apply that more broadly too. We are grateful that we can. Each local church joins itself together with other churches in denominational unity. After all, we are of like faith with others too. The church of Jesus Christ is not limited to one little or large church. We confess that there is a universal church of Christ. When local churches join together with a denomination of churches we confess that we are one body with them too! There is a certain organic unity that

exists within a denomination as a whole. Then too, the church universal comes to manifestation in this whole world. There are mission fields, and sister churches, spread over the world, as well as other denominations with whom the church has contact, even handfuls of people scattered here and there.

### *Living Members*

The chief calling of every member of the body of Christ is this: verse 3 of Ephesians 4, "Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." That is the chief calling we

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have toward the church institute where we are members:

we must endeavor—work diligently—to maintain the unity of the body. And that unity we must strive for is a unity of peace and harmony between ourselves and the church and between ourselves and our fellow saints. There is nothing more pleasing to our chief enemy, Satan, than to see the church divided and quarreling. He knows that he can divide and conquer the church institute that is characterized by strife and hatred. In fact, our chief foe strives to do that in the church in any and every way possible. Did you ever see a person with muscular dystrophy? His mind

From eternity we have been chosen in Christ. The church has never been viewed apart from Christ. Christ was chosen as the Head of the church in the eternal counsel of God. Christ was also sent into this world as the head of the church.

That truth stands before us today as we consider the church as organism. The church, fellow believers, is alive! It always has been alive. It will live unto all eternity. And the life that is in the church is the very life of Jesus Christ Himself—a life that is in Him and a life that He has earned for His people who are in Him. To understand the communion of saints we must understand that all who believe are members of Christ. Faith is that work of God in us by which God in His grace grafts us into Jesus Christ. Christ is the vine. In Him is life. There can be found eternal life in none other. By faith we who are wild branches are grafted into our vine Jesus Christ. When this happens, the life that is in Christ flows forth into us and we become alive. All the riches and blessings of the life of Christ become ours at the cross.

This means that all believers, all of God's elect, become *living* members of the church of Jesus Christ in this world. This is true not only in an abstract way. Out of that life in us we indeed join ourselves together

with the church institute in this world, and within that church institute the life of Christ in us becomes manifest to others by means of our confession and walk. When we look at each other in the church, therefore, we see in each other the life of Jesus Christ. The church consists of different families and individuals all having their own set of struggles, all looking at life from a little different perspective, but all having in them the life of Christ.

The result of this life of Christ in us is the organic life that exists in the church as a whole. Notice what Paul writes in Ephesians 4:4-6: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Do you see, there, the organic whole of the church? It is one living organism—one body, with one faith and one confession. It has one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! We are one body, having the life of Jesus Christ flowing through us. Because He is Head of the church, His mind is in the church, His desires are in the church, His heart is the church's heart! The church fulfills the will of its Head—the one who is the life of the church. But the body of Christ, the church is also made up of many individual members. Many of them. And

elect saints alive today whom God still gathers from the nations. These elect have not yet attained unto their inheritance. But they know that they are elect—chosen unto the adoption of sons. They are God's children in this world and they will attain! They know that! In the meantime, they battle long and hard against sin and Satan. They are the church militant! But they are the church, because they belong to the body of the elect.

Now, one last time we look at the church. Christ has not yet returned. He has not come because He is still gathering the body of the elect believers from this world. Not all of the elect are born and saved as yet. This is the church latent—the elect that yet must be gathered in before that body of the church is complete.

Christ has not returned yet because He is not willing that any of the members of the church should perish but that all of them should come to repentance. When all of God's people are born and brought to glory, the end of all things will come. Then the body of the elect, the church, will be gathered before God adorned as a bride is decked for her bridegroom. All of God's saints will stand together as a whole. The body of Christ shall shine forth in all her beauty—the beloved bride

of God! It is only that concept of the church that is the teaching of Scripture. What a beautiful picture the Bible gives us of the church—the body of God's elect.

### *A Church Saved*

But there is much more that can be said as regards this church elected by God to receive her inheritance. We may not forget that the church was elected before time began *in Christ*. This elect body of people was chosen by God in Christ, that is, in intimate union with Christ. God chose Christ first. According to I Peter 2 Christ is the elect cornerstone on which the entire church is built. We read in Ephesians 1:4 that God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world. This means that the church of Jesus Christ has never been viewed apart from Christ. The church is the body of Christ. It was chosen in Him and it is saved by Him. In the working out of His plan in time God gave the church to Christ. Christ died on the cross to save that church. Christ Himself recognized this: John 17:2, "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." Or John 17:6, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept

thy word.” Christ did not come into this world to save a large number of people whom He did not know, a number of people of which He was not sure. Christ came into this world to save the specific number of people that God had chosen and had given to Him from eternity. It is exactly because the church was chosen in Christ and saved by Christ that it can be defined as the body of Christ. It is that body of people born and saved out of this world that are united to Christ by a true faith in Him.

This is why I said earlier that our salvation is of no value except it is inseparably connected to the salvation of the entire body of God’s people. Christ did not die just simply to save me from my sin. He died to save the world! He died to save the church that is gathered from the beginning of time to the end and from every nation. Never do we view our salvation therefore apart from the salvation of the church as a whole.

Neither does it matter if many of the elect were born before Christ was born. The dispensationalist likes to argue that point: how can people be saved in Christ if He came after they had already died? Is that so difficult to understand? How are we who are born after Christ’s death saved by Christ? We are saved because God unites us to Christ by the gift

of faith. We believe in Christ. Well, so did the saints in the old dispensation. The prophets, the ceremonies of the law, the promises all directed their faith to Christ who was to come. Was their faith any different than ours? Were they united to Christ any differently than we are today? God’s church was chosen in Christ from eternity. And God’s people before Christ were one with Him just as well as we are today. This is what we confess when we say that we believe an holy, catholic church! The true church of Christ in this world, therefore, is made up exclusively of believers. Faith is the earmark of membership in the church. But then we must understand that too.

It is true that all the members of the true church of Jesus Christ are believers. It is impossible to be a member of the holy, catholic church without being a believer. We might be able to be a member of a church institute without being a believer. But we cannot be a member of the elect church of Christ in this world without believing. That faith, however, is not the ground for being a member of the church. We are not accepted by God into His church because we believed first.

The sole grounds for membership in the church is the work of Christ on the cross. There is not a member of the church

believers also confesses with the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe the church is a communion of saints.” With this confession the church is seen from a little different point of view. She is seen also from the viewpoint of her organic life. The church is an organism. Do you remember the Reformed confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, that we referred to a couple of weeks ago? Well, that confession has another Q & A that applies in this regard. Q & A 55 reads, “What do you understand by the communion of saints? 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.” It is this that we intend to deal with in the next couple of broadcasts. We want to examine the truth of, and our calling toward, the church as an organism.

### **Church Organism**

It is important that we understand what we mean when we speak of the church as an organism. An organism, first of all, has life. A rock is not an

organism. A piece of gold is not an organism. These have no life. A plant, an animal, a man—these are organisms because they have life in them. This is why the church is often compared to a vine or olive tree or the body of a man. It is an organism that has life. Secondly, an organism is one structure made up of many different parts—all of these parts working harmoniously together to serve the function of the whole. A plant has many different parts. It has branches, leaves with stems and veins, and so on. But all these parts work together toward the life of the tree as a whole. The church is just such an organism. It has many different members serving different functions in it, but all working harmoniously toward the function of the whole. Thirdly, an organism grows. Just as a sapling becomes a tree, so also the church grows throughout the ages until the end of time. God adds daily to the church such as should be saved. The church is an organism. How this is true of the church, however, cannot be separated from the blessed truth of our salvation in Christ. It is true that the church is the body of the elect. But we noted, a number of weeks ago, that even our election is rooted in Christ.

||| *There is a life that goes on  
within the church institute  
that is all important  
for our lives in this world.* |||

**THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**

*October 26, 2014  
No. 3747*

*The Communion of Saints  
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear Radio Friends,

**Introduction**

As believers we confess together, in the Apostles' Creed, a holy, universal church. That is quite the confession. Not only do we express our great love for and commitment to God and to Jesus Christ, but we express our love for and commitment to the church as well. Not that we are placing the church on a par with God and our Savior. We believe *in* God and *in* Jesus Christ, whereas we only confess that *there is* a holy, universal church. Nevertheless, we still express our commitment toward that church. If we have no love for the church, then we are not true believers.

We have now considered what membership in the church means. It means that we are, by virtue of our election and salvation, made members of the church by God Himself through Christ. It means, secondly, that we are called upon to join ourselves to the church institute in this world that faithfully exhibits the marks of the true church. It means that we commit ourselves, devote ourselves, to that church where

we are members. We rejoice in that church! And every day we express our thankfulness before God that He has made us living members of that church.

But there is more implied in our confession that we are living members of the church of Christ in this world! We have thus far considered the church only from the point of view of her organizational life. We have taken a close look at the offices and the functions of the church institute. We have looked at the truth that we must become members of the church institute. But there is something more to our being members of the church than merely being on the membership roles of the church. That is a very easy thing to do. Thousands of people have their names on church rosters. They even think that this very act is meritorious. But just being members of a church institute is nothing. There is a life that goes on within the church institute that is all important for our lives in this world.

And it is that life within the church institute that concerns us as well. This is why the

who is worthy of His place there. There is not a member of the church in any age that has merited a place in that church. No one has earned that right. We are members of the church only because Christ has earned us that right on the cross! He

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has paid the price for the sins of all of God's people. He has covered them all in His blood. He went to the cross for those given Him of the Father. He died the death for each and every one of those given Him—not one was overlooked. And as a result of this work of Christ in God's elect people, they believe. Not before, but after Christ's work they believe!

But they do believe—every one of God's true people are brought to faith and repentance—and they believe. The church is made up believers. And that faith is what unites us together with Jesus Christ. The church is one living organism with Christ.

**A Church Preserved**

It is this church that the Son of God gathers, defends, and preserves throughout all time. It may be that the church is at times small and seemingly insignificant in this world. At all times the church is weak and

helpless in itself. God's people are powerless in themselves against their mighty foes. If it were not for God's grace, we would be swallowed up alive. Certainly, we have no reason to boast in ourselves. Yet when we walk about Mt. Zion and go around about her, we consider her bulwarks and palaces. She is mighty and strong. She is beautiful and attractive.

But this is true only because God is in the midst of her! God is her refuge and strength! She will not fail because God preserves His people.

And she is beautiful because she is holy. She is clothed in the righteousness of Christ. She is holy in Him. And for that reason the church of which we are a part is all-glorious. Christ preserves His church by His Spirit and Word. He dwells in her in all His holiness. And we are the beloved of God! Ephesians 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." The church, elect and precious! I am a living member of that church! And I am glad. I would not want to be found anywhere else. The world may go its merry way. Give me a place in the church of Christ!



**THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**

*October 12, 2014  
No. 3745*

*The Church Institute  
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear Radio Friends,

**Introduction**

“I believe an holy, catholic church and that I am and ever shall remain a living member thereof!”

What a beautiful confession the child of God makes concerning the church of Jesus Christ in this world!

But what a serious and consequential confession that is too.

In our last broadcast we began our study of what the Bible teaches about the church. We found that the Heidelberg Catechism, an old confession of Reformed churches, teaches us that the church is the body of Christ, which is made up only of elect believers. The church is made up of those whom God has predestined to eternal life in Christ. For that reason, the members of the church are those whom God has gathered from the beginning of time to the end and from every nation

of this world. All of them are saved in the blood of Jesus Christ and are therefore a part of His body in this world. That church is catholic and holy. When we confess that we are a living member of the church of Christ our confession means therefore, first of all, that we are elect believers who stand united with all other believers in this world and in history. But this confession we make concerning the church includes more.

Did you realize, friends, that when we confess to be a member of the church of Christ in this world we must confess our need to join ourselves to a church institute? One cannot be confessed without the other. And it

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is this that we set ourselves today in our broadcast to prove. When we belong to the church as the body of Christ, we are called by God to join ourselves to a church institute. Now, to come to this conclusion requires of us a further examination of the Bible’s teaching on the

any church will do, will it? Not if we are going to be faithful to the Word of God! Do not take my word for it today. Go to the Scriptures and search out for yourself what the marks of the true church are. Then go to that church that most purely manifests them and maintains them. We do not look for the church that is the most famous in this world and has thousands of members, or that has all kinds of humanitarian programs, or that offers great entertainment. If these are the determining factors, we will soon grow weary of such a church because it will leave our souls empty and unfed.

There is one thing that is of the essence: the preaching of the gospel must be heard there! That is what we must search out for ourselves! We must do that for the salvation of our souls and the souls of our children. We must hear Christ speak to us.

With this, we must also come under the proper administration of the sacraments. We must be strengthened in our faith and love of God and His kingdom. Christ does this where those sacraments are performed according to the command of Scripture.

And, finally, we must willingly submit ourselves to the rule of Christ by submitting to the rule of elders who are concerned about the welfare of our souls. When searching

for a church institute to which we can join ourselves, what we must look for is as objective as Scripture itself.

***Its Confession***

Again, just a word to young men and women who may think going to church is foolish. God has chosen the foolishness of preaching to save His people. Do not walk away from that powerful means of grace found in the church institute. In this age when there is little commitment to anything or anyone, be convicted and commit yourselves to the church. Those members of the true church of Jesus Christ in this world are convinced in their hearts that it is in their church that the marks of the true church are most clearly displayed. There is conviction. So convicted are they that they are willing to die on behalf of that church. That same conviction we desire to be in you! That is the conviction of faith. In faith confess: “I believe a holy, universal church and that I am and forever shall remain a living member of it!” It is in that church that I want to be! *That* we confess, because that is what we believe. And in the conviction of faith we join ourselves with that church in this world and stand together with God’s saints of all ages. Behold the beauty of Zion!

this world. If individual Christians desire to do these things in order to help others, that is commendable. But this is not the work appointed by Christ to the church. The church is given an official work that it is called to perform by means of its offices. The chief task of the church, according to the Bible, is to preach the gospel! This is the means of grace Christ has given into the hands of His church. By means of the preaching, Christ calls sinners to repentance. We find in I Corinthians 1, the last half of the chapter, that the preaching is the power of God unto salvation therefore. Romans 10 asks, how can a person call on the name of Christ unless he believes, and how can he believe except he hears Christ, and how can he hear Christ if there is no preacher called and sent by the church? Pastors are given the task to preach the Word, and elders the work of guarding the preaching from heresy. In this way—through the preaching—Christ will gather His church in this world. He will call His people out of darkness into His light. That is the work given to the church. The church must preach the gospel.

In the second place, the

church is called by Christ to administer the sacraments—which are also means that Christ has given His church to use. Baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted by Jesus Christ Himself, not to be used in homes, not to be used in parachurch organizations, but to be used by the church institute in this world. The church is given this task—and the work of ministers, elders, and even deacons is to maintain and perform this work of the church.

There is a third work Christ gives His church to do: administer Christian discipline. Matthew 18 lays this out for us very clearly. The church must excommunicate out of the church all those who walk contrary to God's precepts and Word. In this way the church is kept holy!

These three tasks: preaching, sacraments, and Christian discipline make up the distinguishing marks of the true church of Jesus Christ in this world. We can sift through all the denominations that are available right now. Finding a church with proper church government and these three marks already narrows our search substantially. Not just

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church. Remember: a shallow understanding of the church, ignorance of what the Bible teaches us about the church, can only result in misconception of the church and of our place in her. That is why it is important for us to continue to examine what the Bible teaches us about the church itself.

### *A Church Visible*

There are many in our society that are familiar with Christianity because at one time they, or at least their parents or grandparents, were a part of the Christian church. The argument that is often heard when speaking with these about church is that they can be good Christians without belonging to a church institute. They belong to the body of Christ in this world and that is all that is important. In their thinking, the church institute is made up of hypocrites and judgmental people. Besides, the church institute, in their mind, has nothing to offer them. But there is a fallacy in their reasoning that we hope to point out. A true believer is chosen by God to be a part of the church in this world. This means he will do all that is in his power to be a part of the church.

Let me try to explain. You see, literally, the term "church" means "called out." This points us to the truth that God throughout the course of time calls His

elect people out of the darkness of sin and into His light. When God does this He also calls this people out of the wicked world and into the body of His church. In other words, by means of this call of God, the body of Christ becomes visible in this world. Of course! Believers do not belong to some secret, ill-defined, unrecognizable body that no one is able to trace.

Oh, it is true that every believer is given the invisible blessings of salvation. Believers are called unto faith in Jesus Christ. Every one of Christ's people is saved in the blood of Christ and therefore is regenerated, called, given to believe. They are righteous and holy in the blood of Christ. These are works of the Spirit in the heart of the child of God. All of these make up the internal spiritual life of the members of Christ's body. These gifts are invisible because they take place within us. Nevertheless, these invisible spiritual gifts make up the life of every member of the church of Christ. Every one of the members of the church shares these gifts in common with each other. So, elect believers share together a spiritual life of regeneration and faith. When we speak of this fact we are referring to the church invisible. The members of the church are spiritually different from the unbelieving people of this world. That which motivates them

in life is different. The inner principle of the heart is different. What they do, what they say, where they go in this world, all this flows out of the faith that is found in them. While the wicked live on in their sin, those whom God has called out of this world, called out of the bondage of sin, live on in faith. They are substantially different from the wicked. This is why they are called the church. They are “called out.”

The point is, however, that when this kind of life characterizes the members of the body of Christ, the church, then such faith cannot be hidden. Their faith, first of all, will openly reveal itself in their confession. We read in Romans 10:10, “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” When I believe in my heart on Jesus Christ, confession is also made with my mouth. I will speak of my faith to others. I cannot help but tell others of that spiritual life that dwells in me. So I make confession. I witness to others about Christ.

In the second place, our spiritual life of faith results in good works. The fruit of faith is good works. Faith without works is dead, James tells us. When I believe, then the fruits of the Spirit become evident in my life. I walk and live in holi-

ness before God. And again, when I do this I cannot do it in a vacuum. Others see my good works—other believers as well as the wicked in this world. The other side of this matter is this: I see others walking in faith too! I am deeply aware that I am not the only one that has been called out of darkness and out of this world of sin. Others make confession of their faith too. I see the fruit of the Spirit in others. And (and here is the point) I am attracted to them! Birds of a feather flock together, is the saying? It is true, kind seek kind. If there is in me this principle of faith, then it is also in others. If that faith becomes evident in the life of others as it does in our lives, then we are going to seek out the fellowship of others. We will want to be with them and do things with them. We actively will seek out other believers! We do not belong to a church because it is a fun place to be or because it is a great social club. We belong because in our hearts we desire the fellowship of others of like faith. That is the point: elect believers seek out other elect believers in this world because there is among them a spiritual affinity.

This is the church, then, as she becomes visible in this world. When the believers reveal their faith by means of their confession and walk, the church becomes visible. I hope I did not

shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” Christ has chosen to teach His church—not just rule His church—by means of the office of the pastor and teacher. In order to find a proper church institute, therefore, there must be men trained, called, and sent by the church to preach the gospel. These ministers of the gospel take their place alongside of the elders in caring for the needs of the church. Just as the elder rules on behalf of Christ, so also does the preacher proclaim authoritatively the Word of Jesus Christ. Christ dwells in the church that has faithful pastors and teachers.

But there is also a third office to which men are called in the New Testament church. Paul in I Timothy 3 gives a whole list of qualifications for men called to serve in the office of a deacon. This office was ordained by Christ too. This is why the apostles in Acts 6 called the church together to elect deacons. Christ chooses to serve His church with His mercy and love by means of the office of deacon. Christ not only *rules* over the church, Christ not only *teaches* His church, but Christ also *dwells* in His church by means of the office of a *deacon*. In this way Christ chooses authoritatively to administer His

mercy to His people in need. We do not look for a board of deacons to rule the church, but we do look for deacons to be present to handle the financial affairs of the church of Christ. Where these men are present together with the elders and pastors we find the church of Christ properly instituted. And when these officebearers bend the knee to Christ and submit to Christ’s Word and command as given in Scripture, Christ the Head of the church is present. And that institute properly represents the church of Jesus Christ in this world.

### *The Marks*

Now, these offices will come to clear manifestation in the labors they are called to perform. What are the proper labors of the church institute? What particular work does Christ call His church to do? What must we look for in a church in order to determine if it is faithful to Jesus Christ and therefore the institute where we must be living members? Well, dear listener, the church is not commanded by Christ to become the best of all social institutions in this world. Neither does Christ command His church to carry on all kinds of special ministries or to establish humanitarian programs. The church is not called to be an entertainment center or relief agency for the homeless of

In the second place, this rule of Christ over His church is a visible rule. It is true that Christ Himself sits in heaven and rules over His church there. Christ is no longer present with His church bodily. He is here by His Spirit and Word, but Christ has also chosen to rule over His church by means of visible representatives. We touched on this in our last broadcast. Christ in His Word has appointed certain offices in this church, through which He can rule over His church. The men the church chooses to serve in these offices are under-shepherds of Christ. It is under these offices, therefore, that the church is properly organized. A faithful church institute must reflect these offices of Christ.

The first office is that of elder. We already showed that last week when we spoke of the fact that Christ instituted His church. The apostles and missionaries appointed elders in the various churches organized in different places. That this office represents the rule of Christ in His church is evident everywhere in Scripture. Paul's final instruction to the elders in Ephesus is recorded in Acts 20:28: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Christ through His

Spirit chooses the elders to be overseers of the church. The terms bishop and presbyter also used in Scripture both make reference to this same office.

So, in order to find a faithful church of Jesus Christ among the myriads of denominations, we must look for a church governed by a body of elders. These elders are responsible to Christ—not to the body of members in the church, as is the case in a democratic system of church government—but to Christ, their Head.

The second office in the church is that of the pastor. You see, there are really two types of elders: the ruling elder and the teaching elder. We read in I Timothy 5:17, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." Those men who labor in the Word and doctrine, that is, the teaching elders, take on an office of his own in the church—an office, once again, that Christ, the King of the church, has ordained. This is the office of pastor and teacher. We read of this office in Ephesians 4:11. We read of this office also in Romans 10:14, 15: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how

lose you in all of this! Here is the logic once more. First, the body of Christ is made up of God's elect people, who through the course of time are called out of sin and darkness and into the body of Christ. Second, the members of this elect church are characterized by the internal, invisible life of regeneration and faith. Third, this life of faith manifests itself visibly in the confession and walk of believers. And fourth, believers seek out other believers because of the spiritual bond that exists between them. In this way, the elect church at any given time in history becomes visible. It becomes known in this world. Believers seek to band together with other believers. The result is that, no matter what time or age in history, no matter where in this world these believers may live, the church becomes visible. And it is this visible manifestation of the church that gives rise to the church institute.

### ***A Church Instituted***

The church institute is the result of believers uniting together into an organization under properly ordained officebearers. It is the church, not now from the view of her

organic life, but from the point of view of believers seeking to fellowship with other believers. It is the church from the point of view of a legally established body of people under the rule of legally appointed rulers and representatives. It is the church from the point of view of a certain recorded and maintained membership. When believers seek other believers for mutual fellowship in this world, these same believers are called to become an instituted church. This is not what some power-hungry individuals seek to accomplish in many so-called churches today. It is not what men for themselves decided to form. Christ, who is the Head of His body, the church, demands this of believers! It is a command that must be obeyed!

The church from earliest times was instituted. Already in Genesis 4:26, after God gave Seth to Adam and Eve in the place of Abel we read, "then began men to call upon the name of the Lord." Already then, men gathered together in order to worship God. The church at that time may have been instituted differently than it is today, but it was instituted. At that time the head of the clan was responsible for the

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fellowship with other believers. It is the church from the point of view of a legally established body of people under the rule of

worship of his entire family and household—his children, their spouses, his grandchildren, and the servants of his household. When the kingdom of Israel was established, the church took on the form of an earthly nation under the rule of prophets, priests, and eventually kings.

And even if this does not serve to convince anyone of the need of the church to organize itself, the New Testament Scriptures abound in this. We read in Titus 1:5, “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.” There were groups of saints in the various cities of Crete. Titus’ job was to organize them under the rule of elders. If we read on in Paul’s letter to Titus, or if we read I Timothy 3, we find that each of these officebearers or elders had to meet special qualifications. When such elders were established and in place, there began the church institute. On his missionary journeys Paul did not leave behind mere groups of believers who simply met together for mutual fellowship. We read in Acts 14:23, “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”

Neither was there a ques-

tion of what the membership of these churches ought to be. There was a specific membership. There were people who joined themselves together with these churches as members. Elders, deacons, and pastors were elected out of the membership of these churches. That membership was also exclusive. Not just anyone was allowed to be a member of those churches. Only those who were professing Christians could be members in that church—only those who confessed their faith in Jesus Christ. Those who walked in unbelief, those who refused to confess Christ either by mouth or walk were barred from membership, or, if members, excommunicated out of the church. And although I will not bring up passages to prove each one of these contentions, it is not difficult to find that proof in the Bible. After all, even Paul’s letters were written to instituted churches made up of a certain membership together with its officebearers. Membership therefore in the church institute is made up of all confessing believers who walk according to that confession and their children. This means, of course, that the church institute, in distinction from the elect church of Christ in this world, can have within its confines unbelievers. Men can be hypocrites. Children born into the church, and at times those who join from outside, can

in history as the Erastian form of church government. This system maintains that, though the church has her own offices, the government of the church must be given over into the hands of the civil magistrates. The secular government therefore rules over the affairs of the church. There is also the hierarchical system of church government practiced in the Roman Catholic Church and several others. This gives ultimate power to one man—the pope—and then there are different levels of power and authority under him: archbishop, bishops, priests, and so on. A third system of church government is known as the democratic system—a system used by many protestant churches today. These set up a board of men to run the affairs of the church. Sometimes this board is called a Board of Deacons. The men of this board are merely representatives of the people, however, and have no power of themselves. Anything done in the church has to be taken to the congregation as a whole and put to a democratic vote. The board of directors is answerable to the members. It is puzzling that in all these various systems of church government churches do not seek out what the Bible

itself teaches. It is almost as if this unimportant. The question must be asked, however: how has Christ, the Head of the church, chosen to rule over His people and His church? That is what is of the essence! To answer this question we must turn to the Scriptures.

The fundamental principle of faithful church government is that Christ is the highest authority in the church. That almost goes without saying. Everywhere Scripture testifies of His rule over the church as its Head. The Word of God instructs us in Ephesians 1:22 that God put all things under Christ’s feet and “gave him to be the head over all things to the church.” Christ, then, is the highest authority in the church institute, which in turn means that God’s Word is the highest authority. The Scriptures are the word of God and therefore the word of Christ Himself. What Christ

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our Head commands His church is recorded in the Bible. Here Christ tells us, His body, the church, what we may do and

may not do. This is the law that governs His kingdom and church. So, first of all, it is through proper church government that Christ rules over His church by His Word and Spirit.

even more difficult is that there is a scale from better to worse on which many other churches appear. There are those who are searching to be faithful and there are those who are in the process of apostatizing. In this maze of church institutes and denominations we are called to join with the church institute in this world. Which one do we choose? That can be a tough question for many today.

One thing is for certain, however, and that is that we must use the Scriptures alone to guide us into where we ought to be members. There are denominations that faithfully maintain God's Word and that are truly manifestations of the elect church. There are other denominations that are not. And there are still other denominations that are so, partially. But one thing is for certain: God's Word points out to us what institute is the one we ought to attend. God's Word alone must determine this for us—not our feelings, not friends, not what is popular, but the Word of God alone. For that reason, we want to search the Scriptures today in order that we in faith might determine where to be a living member in the church of Jesus Christ in this world.

***Its Offices***

Our search for a faithful church institute begins with its essential organization. In order for a church to be called the church of Christ, it must be organized in the way that Christ Himself has ordained for it. There are many today who call themselves church, but when it comes down to the offices of the church, they are far from faithful to the Head of the church: Jesus Christ Himself. In other words, the church institute is not some man-made organization

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that may institute itself the way that men please. Men may not simply take it upon themselves

to start up an organization they call church, using their own form of governing the church. Christ stands at the Head of the church. The church is organized under Him. And for that reason men must follow their Head in order to determine how Christ would rule over His people in the church institute. The true church institute in this world will be organized in such a way that Christ can rule without the interference of men.

Now, there are many forms of church government that are used to rule many a church institute. There is what is known

be unbelievers who put on a false front for others. Nevertheless, the church as manifested in the church institute is made up of believers and their seed.

The church institute, therefore, is not made up of just a number of people who simply enjoy one another's fellowship and, as a result, get together to sing, pray, and read God's Word. The church is a highly organized institution, with officebearers who exercise the authority of Jesus Christ Himself.

Yet, the question may legitimately be raised: what benefit is there in belonging to the church institute? We answer that with another question: why would Christ find it necessary for the church to be organized visibly? Christ has given His church a particular function to perform in the lives of believers. The official means of grace are found in the church institute. We are told in I Corinthians 1 that the preaching is the means that God uses for the salvation of His people. In Romans 10 we learn that there is no preaching except by one who is sent by the church to preach. God has ordained in the church institute certain

...the reason we must join ourselves to the church institute is that Christ has appointed in His church certain means of grace to be used by believers for their spiritual lives.

men that He has officially called to preach the gospel. And that preaching we are called to hear. Then, too, there are the sacraments, which are not just given to any man to administer at his whim. These sacraments are entrusted into the care of the elders ordained in the church institute. They are called to take oversight of them. Scripture also makes it clear that as believers we must make use of these sacraments. We cannot do that unless we are members of the church institute. It is abundantly evident, then, that the reason we must join ourselves to the church institute is that Christ has appointed in His church certain means of grace to be used by believers for their spiritual lives.

There is one additional reason why we are commanded by God to join ourselves with the church institute in this world. It is because Christ has chosen to rule over His people by means of the officebearers of the church. We read in Hebrews 13:7, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." Or again in verse 17, "Obey them that have the rule

over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” Obviously, Christ has chosen to rule over His church visibly by means of certain men ordained to that office. These are the elders that rule in the church institute. We are called to bow beneath the yoke of Christ by bowing ourselves beneath the rule of the elders. These elders in turn receive the call from Christ to feed, nourish, care for, and yes, even discipline, God’s people. In other words, Christ exercises spiritual oversight over the members of His body by means of officebearers in the church. Christ has chosen to care for His people *in the church institute*.

### ***A Church Defended***

It is in this concrete way that the church of Jesus Christ in this world is preserved and defended. Christ dwells in the church institute where God’s Word is faithfully maintained. It is true that there are institutes that do not maintain the truth of God’s Word. These institutes must be rejected. We will consider that in our next broadcast. But this does not detract from the fact that Christ dwells in the church institute and that He has chosen officebearers to defend the truth and preserve the church.

It is not by some mystical

way that the church is preserved. Christ uses concrete means to do this. Outside of the institute, God’s people wander aimlessly and will fall prey to the wicked. Inside the church institute we are preserved safely and securely by the preaching of the Word and the care of the officebearers.

Before concluding, I want to make a special point of calling the attention of young people to this point. You may not walk away from the church institute as if it is was good for mom and dad but has nothing to offer you anymore. You may not do that. You too need to join yourselves to the church. It is absolutely necessary for your spiritual life. You may not live outside of the church. You will find no salvation outside of the church! In the church is safety and security. Do you want to give that up to lead a life of sin? Do not be afraid, do not even hesitate, to join yourself with the church of Christ in this world. Christ is in His true church!

And when all of us together confess, “I believe an holy, catholic church,” then we are confessing that too! It is all implied in that simple short confession. I believe there is a church and that I am a living member of that church! Proof? I have joined myself together with the church institute in this world! Have you?

### **THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**

*October 19, 2014*  
*No. 3746*

*The Marks of the Church*  
*Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear radio friends,

### ***Introduction***

**W**e confess that we are living members of the church of Christ in this world. Here is what is included in that confession. First, confess that we are elect believers whom God by His grace has called out of unbelief and into the body of Christ. We are members therefore of the body of Christ gathered from the beginning of time to the end and from all nations. Second, we confess that we belong to the church militant, the church that is in this present world of sin and fighting sin and the devil. Third, we confess that we are living members of the church visible, i.e., the church as she comes to manifestation in this world by the confession and walk of her members. Finally, we confess that we are living members of the church institute, i.e., the church as she becomes organized under duly ordained officebearers. We also noticed, in that regard, that a person cannot ordinarily be a member of the church universal if he or she is not a member of the church institute.

Already we have found that

the Bible teaches us much about the church. Yet, we have only covered the half of it. There is more implied when we say with the Heidelberg Catechism: “I believe I am and forever shall remain a living member of the church.” And it is this that we wish to consider today.

You see, there are many church institutes in this world. Among these there are true but also many false churches. There are faithful churches and apostate churches. This ought not to surprise us. Neither ought it to offend us. Jesus says in Matthew 24, “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.... For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders.” Paul writes to Timothy about this too in II Timothy 4:3, 4, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” What makes it