

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #27, Lord's Day 21, part 1

The Holy Catholic (Universal) Church of Christ



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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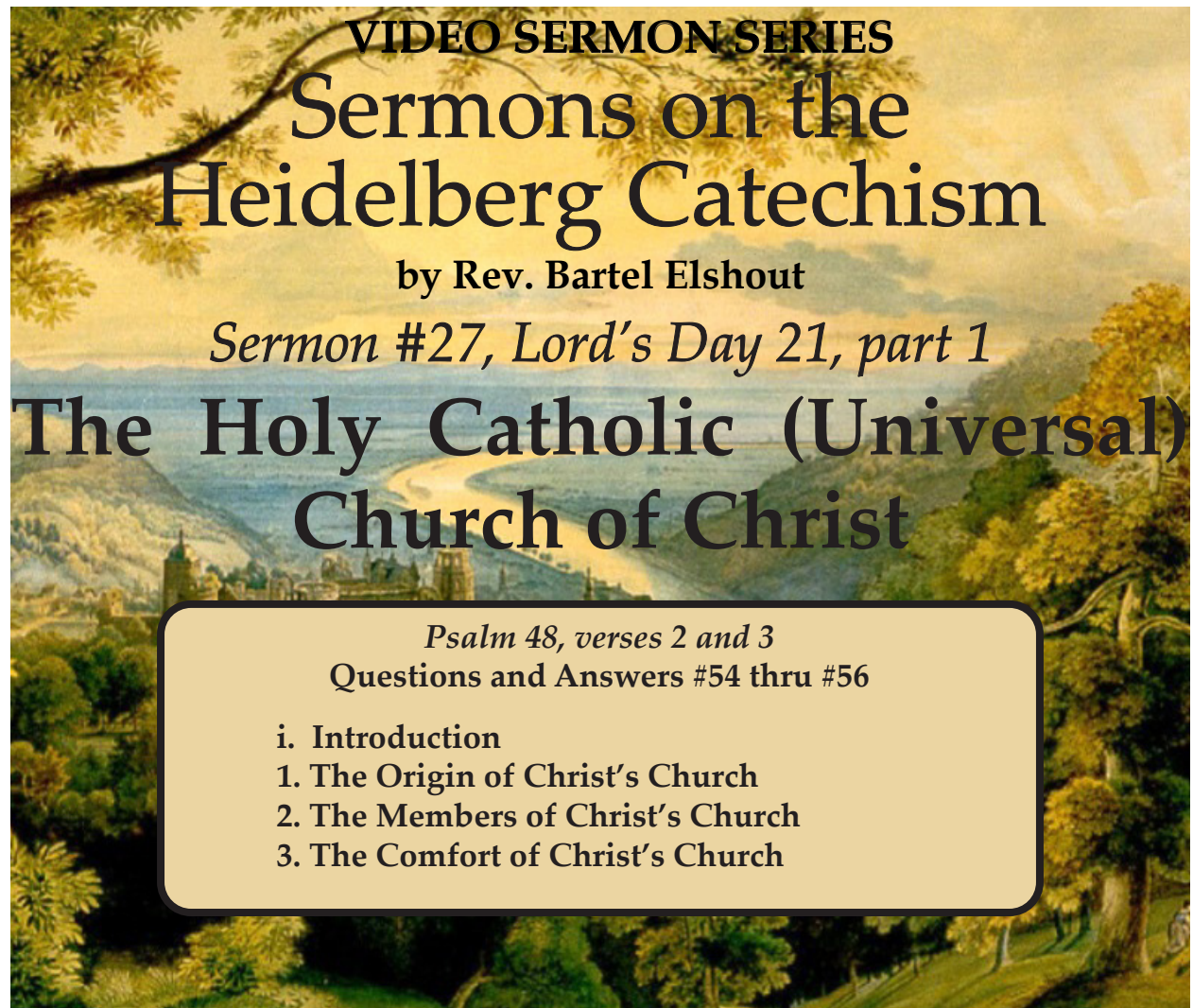
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Sermon #27, Lord's Day 21, part 1

The Holy Catholic (Universal) Church of Christ

Psalm 48, verses 2 and 3

Questions and Answers #54 thru #56

i. Introduction

- 1. The Origin of Christ's Church**
- 2. The Members of Christ's Church**
- 3. The Comfort of Christ's Church**

Introduction

Congregation, boys and girls, every Sunday, when you drive up here, by the entrance stands a sign that identifies this building—Kalamazoo Reformed Church. The word “church” we are so very familiar with. Throughout the city, we will find churches, all of them called “one church or another.” And yet, we know that even though there are many churches, and yet there is such a difference between many of them. Some churches belong to a certain group of churches, others belong to other groups of churches. And you see this throughout the world. But ultimately, in spite of the fact that what we witness, what we see with our eyes is a church that is divided in so many different ways, yet we believe, and we confess that we believe in one holy catholic, or universal, church; that ultimately, there are not many churches, but ultimately, there is one church, one church with a capital “C,” one church which we will find throughout the world, one church united to Christ by a living union. And so, even though that church of Jesus Christ, in its visible form is, sadly, very, very divided; yet, in Christ, there is but one church, with a capital “C”. And we are going to focus on that, with the Lord’s help, in this evening hour, by way of Lord’s Day 21, of the Heidelberg Catechism.

And we are now in the section that is labeled, “The Holy Ghost,” and not only does that apply

to Lord's Day 20, but 21, 22, 23, 24, until we get to Lord's Day 25, where we see the heading, "The Sacraments."

So, Lord's Day 21:

Question #54: *What believest thou concerning the "holy catholic church" of Christ?*

The Answer: *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.*

Question #55: *What do you understand by "the communion of saints"?*

The Answer: *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.*

Question #56: *What believest thou concerning "the forgiveness of sins"?*

The Answer: *That God, for the sake of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long, but will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God.*

And so, this Lord's Day deals with that *Holy Catholic, or Universal, Church of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Three simple thoughts. First of all, the origin of this church. Why is there a church in this world? Why does there continue to be a church in this world? Where does all of this originate? Secondly, we will then see the members of this church. Who are those that belong to that one holy catholic church? And thirdly, we will then focus on the comfort of this church, the foundational message of that church, which revolves around the forgiveness of sins in Christ, beautifully explained for us in the Answer to Question #56. So, *The Origin of Christ's Church, The Members of Christ's Church*; and, *The Comfort of Christ's Church*.

1. The Origin of Christ's Church

So, the word "church" occurs in our New Testament English translation eighty times. It's a translation of the word *ekklēsia* in Greek. And that word, in various forms, occurs one hundred and eight times in the New Testament, and is sprinkled all through the New Testament. It's a very remarkable word. It simply means, in the Greek, "to be called out of," *ekklēsia*, a combination of *ek* and the word *kaleo*. And how beautifully that describes the very nature of this very unique organization—or organism—in the world, which we call "the church."

What is it that defines the members of that church throughout the world? What defines it is that all of them had this in common, that, by the grace of God, they have been called out of the mass of an ungodly humanity, out of the mass of a perishing world, they have been called out by God, to establish a new humanity in the midst of a fallen world. Because that's ultimately what is going on, congregation, and that's been going on from the day Adam and Eve fell. From that day, God began to build a new humanity. And that would be the ultimate outcome. When the history of this world ends, there will be a new humanity—human beings that have been called out of the world, out of a life of sin, out of the mass of a fallen humanity, called irresistibly by the power of the Holy Spirit, to become members of that new humanity, that will once populate that new earth, where there will be a new heaven and a new earth, in which righteousness will dwell. And when that new earth will be populated by redeemed sons and daughters of Adam, who have been called out by

God to become a people for himself.

The Catechism beautifully defines that church, and how that church has come into existence, how that church continues until this day, when it says: *That the Son of God*. And so, we're going to look, first of all at the main clause. What is the main clause in this Answer? *The Son of God... gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word... a Church chosen to everlasting life*. And so, for the origin of that church, for the origin of that new humanity, that new gathering of redeemed sons and daughter of men, we have to go back to the stillness of eternity. That's where that church originates, *chosen to everlasting life*. This is only one of two places where the Heidelberg Catechism addresses specifically *the doctrine of election*.

And congregation, to understand the doctrine of election, we need to understand the doctrine of creation. We need to ask ourselves, why was it that God created human beings? He created human beings in order that in them, his only begotten Son would be supremely glorified. And so God has eternally purposed that he would create a creature in the image of his only begotten Son, a creature, in, with, through his Son, with whom he would be able to enter into a loving relationship. And such it was with Adam and Eve. God created Adam by and for his Son. He created Adam in the image of his Son. He created Adam specifically, so that, in his Son, He would be able to have this intimate love relationship with human beings.

And we know that, as a result of our fall, that wonderful relationship was broken. And how amazing it is that, no sooner has man fallen, and God immediately reveals that in the fulness of time, he would send his only begotten Son to be the seed of the woman, so that through him, fallen sons and daughters, after all, would become his sons and daughters again. And so the whole purpose of God's eternal counsel of peace, the whole purpose of election, of predestination, is to bring forth sons and daughters of Adam, who, through the Lord Jesus Christ, would be redeemed, and be restored to be forever the sons and daughters of the living God.

And it says here that, in Christ, God's children have been *chosen to everlasting life*. And what is everlasting life? Let me explain that again. What did it mean that Adam and Eve were "living souls"? It didn't just mean that they were physically alive. They were spiritually alive. They were created to forever enjoy that intimate relationship with their Creator, and to live in fellowship and communion with their Maker. And that's what we lost in our fall in Adam. And that is what, by God's grace, is restored to fallen sinners like we are. That is the blessed benefit of all those who, by grace, may belong to this church with a capital "C." And because of God's eternal sovereign purpose, they are the partakers of everlasting life, a life that begins here, a life that already functions here. And it is within the community of God's people; it is within the community of God's church that that life functions again. Because, ultimately, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is the gathering of those who, by grace, are united to God, through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; and who, in his Son, again, enjoy the privilege of dwelling in communion and fellowship with him.

That's ultimately what goes on here every Lord's Day. That's why we call the Lord's Day a day of worship. That's why we call our church services, worship services. Because, what goes on here? What goes on here in this very building?—God communicating to us; God revealing himself to us; and we, his people, responding to that which he reveals to us. So, here, in this very house of God, this original relationship that God created Adam and Eve in, that relationship functions again. And this is but the beginning of what awaits the redeemed people of God, when that day comes when they will again experience what life means in the fullest sense of the word. That's what makes the existence of God's church here on earth so very amazing. And it's all connected, it's all related to God's only begotten Son. Because, ultimately, God's objective in gathering a people for himself,

his ultimate objective is the glory of his only begotten Son.

And so, this church has been chosen, therefore, to everlasting life in the Son. Open your Bibles, please, to Ephesians 1, where we read this so powerfully stated—Ephesians 1, verses 4 through 6. And there, we read this: “He hath chosen us”—God the Father—“He hath chosen us in him 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, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” So Paul talks here about being chosen in Christ, in order to be accepted in Christ; chosen in him, in order, ultimately, to become like him. And so, all of God’s purposes revolve around his only begotten Son. And that’s why, not only did he create the world by and for his Son, but the whole work of redemption, the establishment of his church, is by his Son, and ultimately for his Son. And that’s why the existence of the church revolves entirely around God’s Son.

And so, we can say, of all true believers throughout the ages, that they have been chosen in the Son; they have been given to the Son; they have been redeemed by the Son; they are drawn to the Son; they are united to the Son; they believe in the Son; they are being conformed to the Son; to be forever with the Son—chosen in the Son; to become like the Son; and to be forever with the Son. That’s why the Catechism defines the church around the Person of the Son. It says, *That the Son of God*. As I’ve said here many times—this is important to remember—all of God’s dealings with man are always in the Person of the Son. That’s why the whole work of redemption revolves around the Person of the Son. And so, *the Son of God...gathers...by his Spirit and Word...a Church chosen* unto eternal life.

And he *gathers* that church unto *Himself*. What a beautiful statement that is, congregation. What an amazing truth that is. And so, if by the grace of God, we may belong to that church with a capital “C”; if by the grace of God, we may be living members of that church, it’s because God’s Son, by his Spirit, and by his Word, has been pleased to draw you unto himself. And it emphasizes again that the very essence, and the very nature of all spiritual life revolves around his Son. That’s why, when Christ, by the mighty work of his Spirit, when he makes us spiritually alive, his one objective, in all of his dealings with us, is to draw us to himself, over and over again.

He gathers his church, a church that he has purchased with his precious blood. We read of that in Acts 20, verse 28, when Paul was addressing the elders at Ephesus, and when he reminds them of their responsibility, he speaks of “the church of God, which,” it says, “he hath purchased with his own blood.” He gathers that church. He gathers throughout all the generations, from the beginning, here, to the end of the world, he gathers them. He gathers them irresistibly. He gathers every one of those fallen human beings for whom he gave his life; all of those fallen sinners, who in the counsel of peace were given to him by his Father; all those for whom he committed himself, in the fulness of time, to purchase their redemption. And that work continues. And that work goes on unhindered, in spite of all that comes up against it. And that work will succeed. Christ will succeed, ultimately, in gathering them all.

And that’s why the world still continues. That’s why history has correctly been called “His story.” That’s it. It’s His story. That’s what’s going on. That’s why the world continues. That’s why, in the midst of all of the confusion that we see in this world; that’s why all of those horses that are running in Revelation, the horse of death, the horse of hunger, the horse of calamity, whatever they may be, that one horse is running, the white horse, on which Christ rides victoriously through history, gathering his church, gathering them out of the whole human race. That’s why, when it’s all said and done, the promise made to Abraham that in him, all the families of the earth will be

blessed (Genesis 12:3)—that promise will be perfectly fulfilled. We read, in Revelation 7:9, “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.”

Oh, he gathers it, but he also defends it, and he preserves it. And I’ve already alluded to that. In other words, we have a Savior who is completely committed to that church; not only a Savior who gave himself in the fulness of time to secure the redemption of fallen sinners, but a Savior who is absolutely committed to the wellbeing of that church, who is committed to her protection, defending her, in the midst of a very hostile world, a world that would love to eliminate that church; a world instigated by the prince of this world, Satan, the king of darkness, whose malicious objective it continues to be to destroy the church of Jesus Christ. And how comforting it is to know that he has never succeeded, and that we may know that he never will succeed. Christ will accomplish his purpose.

And so, he defends his church, and he preserves his church, also our own congregation, because, by means of us, that’s how he perpetuates his church. It’s by means of the church that he builds the church. That’s why we have the great, great responsibility to be the proclaimers of the gospel of this church, proclaiming it, not only to the ends of the world, but proclaiming it, as you have been reminded of last Sunday as well, proclaiming it precisely where God has placed us to be.

Then the Catechism goes on. It says, when it begins to shift now toward the members, the living members of that church, and it describes it so simply: *Agreeing in true faith; and that I am and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof.* And so, when we look at this church in its visible form, around the world, that we find many true believers who do not agree on everything; who have differences of opinion on certain essential components of the Christian faith. There’s one thing they all have in common. They all agree in a true faith. They all have in common that Christ is the object of their faith. They all have this in common that they love the Lord Jesus Christ. They all have in common that Christ has become their all in all, and that they have put their trust in him.

If you travel around the world, you will recognize those true believers. There is an amazing thing happens. I once heard, years ago, I heard someone say, “Whenever true believers meet, the invisible church becomes visible.” It becomes visible. There is that mutual recognition, and that mutual recognition centers around the very Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is that recognition that we love the same Savior, that that Christ is our all and in all. And as I said this morning, that’s what we see in the story of Mary (John 12:1–8). That is the essential component of what we see in Scripture. Here is woman who absolutely loves that Savior, who loves him so exceedingly that she poured out an entire flask of expensive this ointment over his head. That’s the mark of every true believer.

2. The Members of Christ’s Church

And so, we go on to the next Question: *What do you understand by “the communion of saints”?* The communion of saints—and so, this Question emphasizes that when Christ saves sinners, when he gathers them by his Spirit and Word, and brings them into an intimate relationship with himself, he always establishes a communion of saints. And so, it is his sovereign will that his people do not live independently of one another. For wherever the Spirit works in the world—you see it in the book of Acts—wherever the apostles go and preach the gospel, it always results in the establishing of a communion of believers. That’s how the church functions until this very day. That’s why we have a congregation here.

What are we to understand by “*the communion of saints*”? Remarkable, is it not, that he uses the word “saint,” and Scripture uses that word. I realize that believers don’t always behave like saints. Sadly, they don’t always behave like saints. And yet, we are saints, we are “holy ones”, holy ones in Christ. That’s precisely it, because we are living members of him, because we are united to him, that we are holy ones, not because of any holiness in ourselves, which we have none, but precisely because of that vital relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, who is called “The Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 30:12; and throughout Isaiah). And so, when we are united to The Holy One of Israel, the Bible calls us “saints.” And what that word really means, “holy one,” that means that we are set apart by God for a very specific purpose; set apart, separated from a fallen humanity—there’s this whole idea of being called out—separated from a fallen humanity, and consecrated to live a life to the glory of the Christ who has redeemed us.

And that’s why the Answer focuses, first of all, on our relationship with Christ. It says, *First, that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are in common, partakers of Him, and of all His riches and [His] gifts.* And it’s really important that that’s emphasized. Because, you see, there will never be a horizontal communion of saints, unless there is a vertical relationship with the King of the church, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. And again, look how beautifully and precisely the Catechism defines who a believer is: *Every one who believes*—there is that essential spiritual exercise—*Every one who believes, being members of Christ*—being united to Christ—*are in common, partakers of Him, and of all His riches and [His] gifts.* And so, what this is telling us is that that living community, that community of redeemed sinners, is that the functioning of that community flows out of that vertical relationship with Christ. And the more believers live out of that relationship, the more believers live out of Christ, the more they abide in him, the more it will manifest itself horizontally. And so, what happens when a church becomes backslidden, when many of its members do not faithfully abide in Christ, it will begin to manifest itself also horizontally. And so, why is it that, sadly, we do find in the church, we find lovelessness at times, we find discord, we find disunity? It’s all because, so often, we’re not living out of that relationship. But the more we abide in him, the more we experience the reality of what he declares in John 15, that if we abide in him, he will abide in us, and we will bear much fruit. That’s why, in the early Christian church, we read of such remarkable manifestations of that love manifesting itself horizontally, because they lived so very close to Christ. They lived in such close and intimate communion with him.

And before I go on to the second part—I wanted to do this earlier; it just reminds me—let’s turn to the Belgic Confession,¹ because there is a beautiful description of what it means to be a living member of Christ. So, let’s turn, I think it’s on page 19 and 20, if I’m not mistaken, in the back of your psalter. And I just want to read part of Article 29, which so beautifully defines what it means to be a member of the church of Christ. So Article 29, it’s the third paragraph, towards the bottom of the page. So let’s read this carefully. It says,

With respect to those who are members of the Church, they may be known by the marks of Christians, namely, by faith; and when they have received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof. But this is not to be understood as if there did not remain in them great infirmities; but they fight against

1 *The Confession of Faith*, popularly known as the *Belgic Confession*, is a confession of faith subscribed to my many Reformed churches. It is part of what is known as the *Three Forms of Unity*, the subordinate standards of the Dutch Reformed Church. Influenced by the Gallic Confession, the initial text was prepared in 1559 by Guido de Brés, a minister in the Reformed church of the Netherlands.

them through the Spirit all the days of their life, continually taking their refuge in the blood, death, passion, and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ, *in whom they have remission of sins through faith in Him.*

Congregation, this is a wonderful description of what it means to be a living member of the Lord Jesus Christ. You can turn to this passage, and you can examine yourself in light of that passage whether you recognize yourself in that description.

Then it goes on, it says, *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.* So what that simply is saying, that by virtue of our relationship with Christ, we have an obligation of love towards show who also belong to that same Christ, who belong to the same spiritual family, who belong to the same spiritual household. That means we are obligated to manifest love towards them. We are to do so readily and cheerfully. And we are to employ our gifts that God has given us for the advantage and salvation of all other members. Actually, something like this is worthy of entire sermon, but I just need to be very, very brief here. That means what is true in a nuclear family, in other words, your personal family, in your personal family, it ought to be that your children, who have one set of parents in common, by virtue of their love relationship with their parents, they ought to love their siblings as well. And so it must be in the household of God.

What the Catechism is saying is that the saints of God, the living members of the church, have an obligation towards one another; have an obligation to be engaged in seeking the wellbeing and the welfare of each other; to use the gifts that God has given us, and those gifts vary. We don't all have the same gifts. But what we are called to do is to use those gifts, those gifts that God has uniquely given us. We need to think to ourselves, "What can I do to promote the advantage and the salvation of other members of our congregation?"

And so, I'll give you a challenge. Go home and go through the Directory, and see if there's anyone in our church family that you've never had any real personal contact with. And if you haven't, I would encourage you to do it. Because we are to do it cheerfully and readily. We are to do it unconditionally. That means that we are called to love all the members of this church family, all the members of the household of God, regardless of their personality, regardless of whatever may pertain to them. And I know, that's who we are. Some people are more lovable than others. Some people we feel more naturally attracted to than others. We are to be no respecter of persons. We have an obligation of love towards all the members of the family and the household of God; to be committed readily and cheerfully to use our gifts for the advantage and the spiritual wellbeing of the other members of the household of God.

3. The Comfort of Christ's Church

And that brings us to Question #56, that speaks of the comfort of the church: *What believest thou concerning "the forgiveness of sins"?* And why is that important? Because sin remains a reality in the church of Jesus Christ. Sadly, sin remains a reality. Sin remains a reality in the life of every believer, in spite of the fact that we, by grace, are united Christ. Yet, every believer, though they are united to him, has to struggle with the reality of sin until their dying day. And we, as a church family, have to deal with the reality of sin. That's why, from time to time, the office-bearers of the church have the task of administering discipline in the body of Christ, because of the reality of sin. We know that the Apostle Paul so powerfully expressed that reality in Romans 7, that reality of struggling with that wretched incarnation within, when he says, That which I desire to do, I do

not do; and that which I hate, that I do. (verse 19). And then finally, he groans in holy despair, and says, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (verse 24).

But the beautiful thing is that it’s precisely within the church that the gospel continues to be proclaimed. And that’s why, time and again, Christ is lifted up; that’s why, time and again, the gospel directs us to return, even when we sin, even when we fail, to return to a God who will always be ready to forgive. And that’s why the doctrine of forgiveness of sins is such an essential component in the message of the gospel. That is our sacred obligation as the servants of God, to so proclaim the Word of God, that Lord’s Day after Lord’s Day, we are redirected to Christ. When we come here, and when we have, perhaps, stumbled through the week, and have failed in many ways; to come to the house of God as a spiritual oasis, and be redirected to the Lord Jesus Christ, to be redirected to find the pardon of our sins. Not just once, because, of course, when a sinner puts his trust in Christ for the first time, that simple act of faith secures the full pardon of sin. But the gospel gives us more than that, because the gospel also tells us that when, as believers, we continue to fail, and we continue to stumble, and we continue to falter, that we are ever and again redirected to the Lord Jesus Christ; redirected to that fountain open against sin and uncleanness, against all uncleanness.

And so, the Answer is very beautiful, here, is it not? *That God, for the sake of Christ’s satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long.* Do you recognize that, congregation? Do you recognize that statement? There are those who profess Christianity who don’t seem to have that struggle. But the true members, the living members of Christ, they live with that reality. Not only that we commit sins, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. But that corrupt nature, oh, what a burden that becomes to the living members of the church. And the reason it is a burden, and the reason it grieves us, and it weighs us down, is precisely because of that living union with Christ. Oh, what a vile thing sin becomes. I heard someone once say, “Before conversion, we pursue sin. After conversion, sin pursues us.” That’s the difference, you see. Because, yes, believers do sin, and sometimes they sin greatly, and sometimes they sin grievously, as we know from biblical examples as well. And it’s a matter of grief to them. That’s why David was a miserable man for so many months. Just read Psalm 32, where he describes how miserable he was until Nathan came, and finally he confessed his sin. But then, what do we read, that no sooner does he confess his sin, and Nathan, immediately, in God’s name, says to him, “Your sins are pardoned.” Such is the nature of the gospel. And that is a sacred obligation that we have, as God’s servants, to preach again and again, the fulness and the completeness of the satisfaction of Christ.

The wonder expressed here, that he will *graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ*—that’s what happens, when we take hold of Christ. God imputes to me the perfect, flawless righteousness of his only begotten Son. And that is an irreversible gift; that is a gift that cannot be cancelled by my corrupt nature against which I have to struggle all my life long. Because God’s gifts, the gift of salvation is without repentance. That’s why, what a blessing it is, you may come to the house of God, and that the gospel redirects us to Christ; redirects us to him and his finished work; redirects us to his satisfaction, to his finished work, which he accomplished on the cross.

So that, it says here, I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God. What an amazing statement that is—*never be condemned before the tribunal of God.* Because Christ, dear believer, Christ was condemned before that tribunal in your case. So is it not true, then, that in the last day, all men will be judged according to their works? Yes, that is true. But for the true believer, that day will be the day of his public justification, when Christ will declare before the whole world that you

are redeemed, and that you are complete in him, never to *be condemned before the tribunal of God*. What an encouraging truth that is!

That's why, in Romans 7, verses 24 and 25, are followed immediately by Romans 8, verse 1. Because in Romans 7, verse 24, we are listening to a man who condemned himself, a man who said that "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But then, he rejoices, and he says, "[But] I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." And then, he begins triumphantly, in Romans 8: "There is therefore"—even though he had to condemn himself—"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." That's why this part of the Apostles' Creed is so very precious. That's why the church of Jesus Christ here on earth, that militant church, the church that is still engaged in warfare; that's why the militant church is encouraged time and again by the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why the message of salvation in Christ never grows old. That's why that message needs to be preached over and over again. That's why we are called to comfort, comfort God's people, and to say to Jerusalem, "Your warfare is accomplished, your iniquity is pardoned, for you have received of the LORD's hand double for all your sins" (Isaiah 40:2).

Oh, the wonder that even though I continue to struggle my entire lifelong against my corrupt nature, after grace, after having come to Christ, struggling until my last breath, that that struggle will not disannul my salvation. That's how complete the work of Christ is. And Christ, who has chosen, who has gathered his church, and who does gather his church, gathers all those who have been chosen in him, to be redeemed by him, ultimately to be like him; this Christ is completely committed to the spiritual wellbeing of his church. He is truly a Christ who will never forsake the work of his own hands.

Oh, congregation, are we living members of this church? Jesus said, in John 6, verses 53, 54, and 56: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." So what he is saying is, except you derive all of your spiritual strength and energy from my sacrifice, you have no life in you. "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day... He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." And so, what Christ is saying here is, the living soul, the living member of his church, finds his life in Christ, cannot live without Christ. The living member of the church finds their salvation in that precious sacrifice, finds their rest in that finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why we have the Lord's Supper on a regular basis, to remind us over and over again that we need to live out of that sacrifice. Are we living members of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ?—lest we perish, having belonged to the visible church, without having been members of the invisible church. And to belong to the visible church is a great privilege. To grow up under the preaching of the gospel, but to perish, not having believed in the Christ of that church, not having believed in the Christ who is preached in that church, who is offered to you freely, without money and without price, will be a hell in hell. Oh, God forbid that any of us would die, having been but lifeless branches attached to the vine outwardly, but without a living relationship with the Vine himself.

And so, may it be true of us, by God's grace, that we, by a true faith, are, and forever shall remain, a living member of that church, which the Son of God gathers, defends, and preserves to himself by his Spirit and Word.

Let's Pray.

Lord, wilt thou bless thy Word? We have been reminded in this evening hour what it means to

be a living member of the church of Jesus Christ—chosen eternally in him, given to him, a church purchased by him, a church that he gathers, protects, and defends, a church chosen to everlasting life, in and through him. Lord give us no rest unless we may know, on biblical grounds, that we are living members of the church of Jesus Christ. And so, go with us into this coming week. We ask for thy blessing upon all that we may undertake, either in the workplace, or at home, or wherever though didst call us to be. Keep us safely. Gather with us this Wednesday, as we will gather for our monthly Topic Night, and we ask for thy blessing upon the instruction that will be given. And bring us here again this coming Lord's Day, and graciously pardon our sins, even of this day and hour, only for the sake of thy Son, in whom thou art a God ready to forgive. We ask it in his name alone. Amen.