

Church Membership For Reformed Believers
Speech #1: THE OBLIGATION OF MEMBERSHIP IN A TRUE CHURCH

Introduction:

1. This is a significant subject for each child of God personally, for it bears directly on our salvation.
2. It is also significant because many professing Christians today are not members where they ought to be.

"The Obligation Of Membership In A True Church"

I. An Urgent Question

- A. Every sincere believer faces and asks a crucial question: "Which church should I be a member of?" We don't ask this question just once, but should always be conscious of it.
- B. The believer asks this question about the church as an institute.
 1. An instituted church is an organized congregation where Christ is acknowledged as Head. He is represented by officebearers. Believers and their children gather there to worship.
 2. The believer realizes he needs to be a member of such an institute. He does not say: "I'm a member of the universal body of Christ, and therefore I don't need to be in an institute."
 3. We need to be in an institute for our salvation. Belgic Confession, Art. 28: "This holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and out of it there is no salvation!" Hebrews 10:25.
- C. This question is urgent.
 1. Many religious institutions exist that call themselves churches and claim to be true churches of Christ.
 2. Many false churches exist – something we can expect to increase as the end of time approaches.

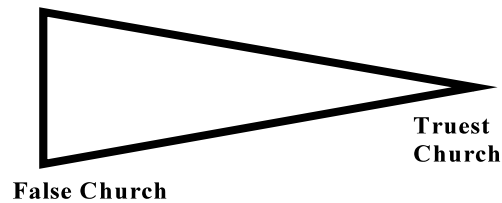
II. The Identifying Marks

- A. This question is answered by means of the Three Marks of the Church!
 1. The marks are identifying characteristics, by which we can easily recognize a true church of Christ.
 2. We know what they are because the Spirit has led the church into the truth. John 16:13-14.
 3. They are stated in the Belgic Confession, Art. 29. Also in the Westminster Confession, Ch. 25.4.
- B. The first mark: "Is the pure doctrine of the gospel preached there?"
 1. Scriptures – Matt. 16:18, John 10:5, 27-28, Eph. 4:11-12, I Tim. 3:15, II Tim. 4:1-2.
 2. This is the main mark. The other two are dependent on it.
 3. The true church (1) preaches "pure" doctrine; (2) preaches the "gospel"; (3) is a "preaching" church.
 4. The child of God needs this, and needs to be in the church that does this. John 10:27.
- C. The second mark: "Does this church purely administer the sacraments as Christ commanded?"
 1. Scriptures – Matt. 28:19, Mk. 10:14-15, Acts 16:15, Matt. 26:26-28, I Cor. 11:23ff.
 2. This involves administering only 2 sacraments, and using proper elements in the sacraments.
 3. It also involves having the proper candidates for Baptism, and for Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:28-29).
 4. This mark has an important implication: Proper worship, as regulated by the Scriptures (John 4:24).
 5. The child of God needs to be a member in such a church because the sacraments are means of grace.
- D. The third mark: "Is church discipline exercised in punishing of sin?"
 1. Scriptures: Matt. 16:19, Matt. 18:15-18, I Cor. 5:11, Titus 3:10.
 2. The true church disciplines for errors in life and errors in doctrine.
 3. This discipline always begins through the sound preaching of the Word of God. II Cor. 2:15-16.
 4. This mark has an important implication: Proper Church Government.
 5. The child of God needs to be in such a church, for there Christ is working, through the elders, to preserve His people in holiness and to restore those who stray.

III. The Application Of This Truth

- A. The marks are easy to use.
 - 1. It is easy to understand and remember what these three marks are.
 - 2. It is easy to apply the marks because they are objective (not subjective).

- B. We must use them to determine our church membership.
 - 1. This clearly implies not using other supposed marks/criteria: such as the lives of the members, personal preferences with regard to worship or church activities, the minister, location, etc.
 - 2. We may never join a false church. And if one is in a church that is false or apostatizing, after striving to reform/correct it, he/she must seek and join a true church.
 - 3. There is no pure church on earth. Christ calls us to be members of the church that most clearly manifests the three marks.



- C. This is a most serious matter.
 - 1. Membership in a church has to do with being either near to, or far away from, Christ.
 - 2. Proper membership is crucial for your own salvation, and for the salvation of your children, etc.

- D. Be thankful for the true church and cherish her and membership in her above all earthly good (Psalm 27:4).