

BELGIC CONFESSION - ARTICLE 27

The Catholic Christian Church

We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost.

This Church has existed from the beginning of the world and will last to the end,¹ which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal king who cannot be without subjects.² And this holy Church is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world;³ though she sometimes (for a while) appears very small and reduced to nothing in the eyes of men,⁴ as during the perilous reign of Ahab when nevertheless the Lord *kept for (himself) seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.*⁵

Furthermore, this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same spirit.⁶

ARTICLE 28

Every One Is Bound to Join Himself to the True Church

We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved and there is no salvation apart from it, no one ought to withdraw himself from it to live in a separate state regardless of their status or condition.⁷ Rather, all men are dutifully bound to join and unite themselves with it, maintaining the unity of the Church; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ;⁸ and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them.

And to preserve this unity more effectively, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from those who do not belong to the Church,⁹ and to join themselves to this congregation wheresoever God has established it, even though the magistrates and edicts of princes be against it; yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment.¹⁰ Therefore all those who separate themselves from this holy congregation or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God.

Verses for Consideration

1. 2 Samuel 7:16
2. Luke 1:32–33
3. Matthew 16:18
4. Luke 12:32
5. Romans 11:4
6. Acts 4:32; Ephesians 4:4
7. Isaiah 52:11
8. Matthew 11:29
9. 2 Corinthians 6:16–18
10. Daniel 3:17–18

Questions for Consideration

1. What does the confession say is the common expectation of all true Christians in the universal church?
2. When talking about the universal church, what does the confession mean when it says "there is no salvation apart from it"?
3. What does it look like to separate ourselves "from those who do not belong to the Church"? How are we to connect with people if we are also called to separate from them?