

## Lecture 2 – Characteristics & Responsibility: Irreconcilable Tension?

1. Last time:
  - a. Triune God from heaven works on earth to gather church: Father, Son, Holy Spirit
  - b. Church not mystical, invisible, but concrete gathering, with location, real people
  - c. So: church not human work, but God's!
2. What Christ busy with is magnificent – and need to draw that out more this evening, ie, **characteristics** of what Christ is building/gathering
  - a. "One" = Christ not gathering many churches, but one.
    - i. Church is work of one Person (God in Christ), ∴ one way to be saved, not many (no pluralism), cf Mt 1:21; John 14:6; Acts 4:12.
      1. This true in OT already. God gathered one people around Mt Sinai (Ex 19), made with them one covenant (Ex 20:2; 24:8, cf vs 4b), gave them one tabernacle proclaiming one gospel (Ex 25ff). See Dt 6:4f: one God, one people ("our", "your")
    - ii. ∴ those saved have intrinsic unity, cf Mt 16:18; John 17:20-23; Ephesians 4:4-6.
      1. Ibid OT: though 12 tribes, yet one people. Repeatedly addressed as unity, cf Ex 19, Dt 1:1; 4:1; 5:1; Josh 23:2; 24:1f
      2. Unity a reality not because Israel/I feel it or see it, but because they/we all linked to one g/Saviour; He at work. ∴ believe it.
    - iii. *Result: Acts 2:44; 4:32.*
      1. *Sinners ∴ brokenness ∴ John 17:20-23; cf Acts 6:1; 1 Corinthians 1:10ff → no place for insisting saints in Corinth meet in different homes....*
      2. *Congregation too big → make two. Or people too far from assembly → make own assembly. Then relations with other churches....*
  - b. "Catholic"
    - i. Church is work of one Person (God in Christ), and He King over all world, cf Mt 28:18; Ephesians 1:20ff. ∴ gathers from anywhere/anytime.
      1. ≠ RCC; = universal → spatial & temporal
      2. cf Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Ps 87:3,4 (Rahab, Ruth, Uriah the Hittite); Is 19:18-25; Mt 28:19; Acts 1:8; Rev 7:9
      3. ∴ mission to all races. No discrimination in church, cf 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28.
    - ii. ≠invisible; = un-oversee-able, cf ocean
      1. Do not play 'one' and 'catholic' off against each other.
      2. Unity in diversity; diversity in unity → ocean always same, yet so different. Unity ≠ uniformity
  - c. "Apostolic", cf Ephesians 2:19f; Rev 21:14; John 16:13. Sola Scriptura!
    - i. Note: this *not* different from OT! See John 5:39; Luke 24:27,44; Acts 17:11; 26:22f. Letters of apostles have countless OT quotes/language/references, esp Hebrews, yet NT church understood them – these believers steeped in OT thinking. ∴ Ephesians 2:20: prophets and apostles on one level. Never contrast OT with NT; one Bible, one church, one faith!
    - ii. ∴ believers all believe same thing. ∴ confessions → repeat after God what God has revealed. Function as Forms of Unity. Room for difference of insight??? Ought not to be, but recall Phil 3:15; Romans 7b.... Meanwhile: church *must* be

characterised by humility, ie, what does Lord say → search Scripture, Acts 17:11.

- d. “Holy”
  - i. Different, changed – true not just of individuals but of churches, cf 1 Cor 1:2; 3:17 (you is pl); 1 Peter 1:2 (though scattered, vs 1); 2:9. Cf Ex 19:6; Lev 11:44f.
  - ii. *Antithesis* → *dare to be different!* *To be church is to image God – something unbelievers not do, cf Galatians 5:19ff; 22ff* → *esp that your struggle real! Not perfect, but obviously repentant!*
- 3. Where this leave us?
  - a. Here something so exciting: God is busy on Planet Earth, also in this land, Christ rules for purpose: gather church!
    - i. Like anything else He does, surpasses my understanding. Wrap my head fully around what church is?? Can’t!
      - 1. This much clear: He busy far beyond what my eye can see, ie, far beyond ‘my’ church.
        - a. What this looks like? I can only *begin* to describe, and can do nothing better than borrow words of fathers, cf Art 27, *Belgic Confession*; 2<sup>nd</sup> Helvetic Confession, Art 17
        - b. Means in practical terms: dare to look further than ‘my own’ church.
      - ii. I part of it... Privilege!
        - 1. All benefits of redemption are mine because I belong to this church! I part of ocean of believers, washed in Jesus’ blood, sanctified by His Spirit.... Exciting and encouraging! Especially in age of shrinking Christianity in North America....
- 4. Now **obligations** follow.... Lord created people to be responsible, cf Genesis 1:26ff – unlike other creatures. ∴ to work along with God in His program of redemption.
  - a. Note: this point strongly contrary to NA culture = individualism & isolationism → let me do my own thing.
  - b. How? At heart of being church is God’s claim in covenant, cf Gen 17:7 – to which one needs to *respond*. Ie, *believe* → this our responsibility, cf John 3:15f,18,36; Acts 16:30f.
    - i. Implication: Crucial term: “believe” & “believers”.<sup>1</sup> Fundamental to what is church is not: presence of office bearers (contra Rome), or even presence of Bible, but presence of *faith*. For it God’s work, and we linked to Him by faith.
      - 1. ∴ obviously “**Christian** believers”, ie, sola Christus
      - 2. ‘true’ believers ≠ perfect, cf Romans 7:18,22f.
      - 3. Term stands over against false, ie, pretend. Cf ‘false’ see Galatians 2:4 (brothers); 2 Cor 11:13 (apostles); 2 Peter 2:1 (teachers); Acts 13:6 (prophets); Mt 24:24 (Christ) → counterfeit. So fruits, cf Mt 7:15ff
      - 4. Term not a self-commendation (pride), but expresses real appreciation for *marvel* of faith in light of *power* of perversion. Ie, *God at work*
  - c. Faith not come through injection, or eating cabbage, or sleeping. Rather, Lord uses WORD to work/strengthen faith, cf Romans 10:14,17

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Trimp, *Kerk in Aanbouw*, 48ff

- i. ∴ preachers, cf Acts 9:15 → Acts 14:2f, 9, 21; 16:13; etc. Cf 2 Timothy 4:2, etc. ∴ salvation available only in church = gathering of believers → where Word proclaimed.
    - ii. ∴ duty to be present where Word proclaimed, cf Hebrews 10:25, cf custom of Acts 2:42 (active participle)
    - iii. This the pattern of OT, cf Lev 23:3, cf 10:10f
  - d. More: I need faith fed for struggles of daily life, lest I starve. ∴ can't afford to ignore preaching/church – too much at stake.... See Is 58:13f: what hear on Sabbath (vs 13) is stuff of vs 14.
    - i. Irrespective of circumstances – cf persecution....
    - ii. No individualism! Cf what church is → community, gathering.
  - e. So: all are responsible to join it.
    - i. Join ≠ sign membership register. = regular attendance; more: **submit** to its authority, ie, accept preaching, don't challenge it. Ibid office bearers → more another time.
      - 1. Why? For this where salvation available.... NOTE: "no salvation outside of it" ≠ who is saved, ie, goes to heaven; = where salvation available. Cf bike in bakery.... Salvation a commodity; not a condition.
    - ii. You never isolated individual. This church is one body – 1 Corinthians 12:27. ∴ each to make point of being communion of saints, cf 1 Corinthians 12:12ff: all need each other. → contribute!
  - f. Never withdraw!
    - i. Want to be where God at work; away from Him is to lose way, cf John 10:12
    - ii. 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment: not go own way → cf penalty....
      - 1. This caught in Art 28, *Belgic Confession*.
- 5. This true not just on local level
  - a. Yes, I as individual/family head need to join church of Lord (=ocean) as it appears off my shores (=local town).
  - b. But my local church needs to give concrete expression to fact that Lord gathers *one, catholic, apostolic, holy* church. How? Acknowledge He working elsewhere. How? Federate!
    - i. Biblical?? Cf towns of OT Israel: they not isolated, but part of tribe, nation ∴ help each other, cf Judges 5:13ff. Cf Prov 11:14; 15:22. Eg of Christ pursued by saints, cf Phil 2:3ff. See also 1 Cor 14:36 → Jerusalem an example for Corinth
    - ii. More, see Acts 11:22 → interest in other church! ∴ Acts 11:29; cf Romans 15:25f; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:9f.
    - iii. Accepting each other: attestations → Romans 16:1f; Acts 18:27; greetings → Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 John 13
  - c. ∴ churches understood over centuries that need each other, ie, federate. ∴ also meet together to help each other, ie, classes, Synods → ever increasing circles. This gives concrete expression at local level that Christ gathers catholic church in unity of faith.
    - i. ∴ internationally: sister churches. Also ICRC.
    - ii. Don't be afraid to see Christ's work elsewhere. More: recognize that He may work for years in one 'church', then move to another church. Dynamics! Never perfectly tidy. His church gathering work can happen along different

channel/riverbed. Christ dynamic; He can move from one federation to another....

6. Irreconcilable? To human mind Yes...: how can I ever keep up to Christ?! True. But delightful fact is: Triune God busy, and I included, involved! Privilege!! Praise! So walk in step with Christ as best as can in broken life – in partnership with brethren around you.