

# LESSON 8

## GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT AND OUR SANCTIFICATION

1. What do you believe concerning the *the Holy Spirit*?

First, He is together with the Father and the Son,  
true and eternal God.

Second, He is also given to me  
to make me by true faith  
share in Christ and all his benefits,  
to comfort me,  
and to remain with me forever (Q.&A.53).

2. How do the *Forms for Baptism* sum up the work of the Holy Spirit?

- They teach that the Holy Spirit dwells in us and makes us living members of Christ, *imparting to us what we have in christ*, namely, the cleansing from our sins and the daily renewal of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without blemish among the assembly of God's elect in life eternal.

3. What do you believe concerning *the holy, catholic church* of Christ?

I believe that the Son of God,  
out of the whole human race,  
from the beginning of the world to its end,  
gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself,  
by his Spirit and Word,  
in the unity of true faith,  
a church chosen to everlasting life.  
And I believe that I am  
and forever shall remain  
a living member of it (Q.&A.54).

4. Why do we confess that I believe a holy, catholic church?

- We have the sure knowledge and firm confidence about what the church is only from the Word of God. Many people have *opinions and experiences* concerning the church (as they do about politics), but these cannot rule our faith. Only the Bible tells us what the church is and should be.

5. Is the christian church "invisible" for us?

- Not in the important sense that each local church of Christ (e.g. the seven churches in Rev.1-3) is visible in its gatherings around the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments.
- It is of course true that we cannot oversee the whole catholic, christian church of all ages. Also, we cannot see the inner work of God in electing and regenerating sinners into saints. Calvin and other reformers spoke of the invisible character of the church when they viewed the church *in the eyes of God*. While we men can never oversee the church as God can, the

fruit of that work should become visible in the local churches (*you shall know them by their fruit*, Jesus said).

- Some believe an invisible church of all the elect. Such a church would be composed of elect members of all 'denominations'. That one is a member of that invisible church is then more important than membership in a local church. However, the Bible teaches us to leave the secret things to God and to focus our minds on keeping to what God has revealed for us, also for the church (cf Deut.29:29). Realistically that means we must join the faithful body of Christ in our locality, bending the neck under Christ's yoke, and keeping the unity of the church. For such a concept of an invisible church often depends on unbiblical philosophy or trying to start with the secret things of God, i.e. his election. Scripture may sometimes use this idea (cf Hebrews 12:22-24), yet it is not the usual definition, which is 'church' (Greek = ecclesia) which means "an assembly" on earth visible to man. Thus the concept of an invisible church, which undermines the importance of being a living member of the local, faithful church of Christ, should be rejected.

6. What is our calling with regards to the church?

- It is our calling to join the faithful and catholic church of our Lord Jesus Christ and so to preserve its unity, for which Christ prayed (from art.28,B.C.).

7. What are the marks of a christian?

- A christian believes in Jesus Christ, the only Saviour; flees from sin, loves God and her/his neighbour, pursues righteousness and peace, crucifies the old nature, and prays for strength to live a new life, knowing full well that we never reach perfection in this life. By such marks others see the work of Christ and are attracted to the faithful church where the Word of Christ rules (from art. 29,B.C.).

8. What are the marks of the true or faithful church?

- In short, that the Word of God governs all things, and anything contrary to it is rejected, while Jesus Christ is acknowledged as the only head of the church. Some specific and important marks are:
  - the pure preaching of the gospel;
  - the pure administration of the sacraments which Christ instituted;
  - the proper exercise of church discipline (from art.29, B.C.).

9. Which distinction does Art.29, BC make with regard to the church?

- It distinguishes between the true church (= obedient, lawful church) and the false church (= disobedient, unlawful church). This was necessary in the Great Reformation to show that the Church of Rome, which threatened and persecuted the true church, was false. The multiplicity of groups which call themselves churches makes this need to distinguish between churches which are faithful from those that are false all the more pressing today.

10. What is a false church?

- It is a disobedient church which bases itself more on men than on Jesus Christ. It ascribes more authority to itself than to the Word of God and will not submit to the yoke of Christ. When faithful members rebuke it for its

errors, the false church persecutes such members instead of listening to them (from art.29,B.C.).

11. What does Art. 28,B.C. say about members who stay in a false church?

- It says that they "act contrary to the ordinance of God." Therefore our confession does not condemn them to judgment, but it does point out the seriousness of remaining within a false church. It also calls them to separate from the false church and to join the true church.

12. How must the unity of christian churches be sought?

- This must be done in the unity of true faith and not at the cost of the truth of God's Word, as for example, happens in the World Council of Churches. Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers (John 17); the apostles and elders convened in Jerusalem to preserve this unity (Acts 15); and the apostle Paul constantly urges the believers to be one (cf. his letters and especially passages such as Eph.4). So there is an urgent call to be one and to show this unity with all true believers. Reformed churches have therefore also been busy on an international scale to fulfil this calling. The International Conference of Reformed Churches is a direct result of this calling.

13. What do you understand by ***the communion of saints***?

First,  
that believers, all and everyone,  
as members of Christ  
have communion with Him  
and share in all his treasures and gifts.

Second,  
that everyone is duty-bound  
to use his gifts  
readily and cheerfully  
for the benefit and well-being  
of the other members (Q.&A.55).

14. Which benefits did God bestow on his church?

- The forgiveness of sins,
- the resurrection of the body,
- and the life everlasting.

15. What do we confess about the dying of believers?

- In Q.&A.57, HC we confess that their soul is immediately taken up to Christ our head (overagainst the Roman Catholic idea of first going to purgatory), and that their body will be raised at Christ's coming (cf. 1 Corinthians 15). What happens to the believer runs parallel to what happened to Christ. While on the cross He promised the penitent thief that he would be with Him (in their souls) in paradise (= in heaven with God) that very day (Luke 23:43), while the body of Christ would be taken from the cross and buried on that day.

**EXERCISES**

1. *What do we say about the charismatics' claim that we need the baptism with the Holy Spirit in addition to the baptism with water? Do we have all we need in one baptism, or is another baptism needed?*

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2. *What are the significance of the adjectives "holy" and "catholic" in relation to the church?*

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3. *Read and study articles 27-29, BC, with the commentary given in EIC, Lessons 16,17,18. Complete the exercises in these lessons.*

4. *What does the phrase that "there is no salvation outside of the church" mean in art. 28, B.C.?*

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5. *What are the marks of christians, according to art.29,B.C.?*

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6. *What are the marks of the true and false churches?*

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7. Give biblical proof that a believer at death is immediately carried up to Christ?

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8. Memorise Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 54.

**REFERENCE MATERIAL**

- Lord's Days 20-22, Heidelberg Catechism
- Articles 27-29, Belgic Confession.
- Some books on the doctrine of the church:
  - C Trimp, *The Church: as we confess it in articles 27-29 of the Belgic Confession*, The Reformed Guardian, No. 2 (new series).
  - G van Rongen, THE CHURCH; its unity in confession and history, Inheritance Publications, 1998