

Westminster Confession of Faith 25.4

Particular Churches . . . are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.

Belgic Confession Article 29

The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults . . . As for the false church, it assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God; it does not want to subject itself to the yoke of Christ; it does not administer the sacraments as Christ commanded in his Word; it rather adds to them or subtracts from them as it pleases; it bases itself on men, more than on Jesus Christ; it persecutes those who live holy lives according to the Word of God and who rebuke it for its faults, greed, and idolatry. These two churches are easy to recognize and thus to distinguish from each other.

I. The Church Is Not Built by the Wisdom of Man (v 1).

A. Exposition of the Text (1 Cor 1:17, 1:20b-21)

B. Doctrines from the Text

- 1) The Word of God is to be plainly taught (Neh 8:8)
- 2) The true wisdom of God differs from the so-called wisdom of man (1 Cor 1:27-29)
- 3) Many will come with teachings tailored to itching ears.

C. Answering Objections to the Text

- 1) But how are you going to attract people? (Rom 3:10; Jn 6:44a, 10:3b).
- 2) But how are you going to keep people?

D. Uses from the Text

- 1) Christians are to speak plainly the truths of the Law and the Gospel to one another.
- 2) We find no authority intrinsic to ourselves.

II. The Church Proclaims Christ Alone (v 2).

A. Exposition of the Text (1 Cor 13:2; Acts 20:27 Lk 24:26-27)

B. Doctrines from the Text

- 1) The primacy of the cross is the definitive mark of the Church.
- 2) The centrality of the cross in true, Christian worship (Gal 3:1b)
- 3) The constancy of the cross in the Christian life. (1 Pt 2:21)
- 4) By this mark, we may know what is and is not a true church (Gal 1:8)

C. Answering an Objection to the Text: Why then would we have instruction for our lives? Why is the Law preached and not just Gospel?

- 1) Is Christ not also the Lawgiver as well as the Law-keeper? (Isa 33:22)
- 2) The Law is a delight in light of the Gospel (*Heidelberg Cat.* 86)

D. Uses from the Text

- 1) The call of the Gospel (Isa 53:4-6)
- 2) Christians are commanded to be in faithful churches, where the word of God, and particularly the cross of Christ, is preached (1 Cor 10:21-22)
- 3) We are to be in prayer for the establishment and flourishing of true churches, as well as the destruction of false churches (*Shorter Catechism* 102).
- 4) Continue to go back to the Gospel.

III. Our Faith Is in God, Not Man (vv 3-5).

A. Exposition of the Text

B. Doctrines from the Text

- 1) Preaching is not polemics, but rather the proclamation of the Word of God.
- 2) Grace is to be preferred over gifts.
- 3) A simple part of the Christian experience is that the Lord uses the foolishness of preaching to convict, correct and comfort us (Song of Songs 3:3-4a)

C. Uses from the Text

- 1) We are to trust God to build the Church (1 Cor 3:5-7)
- 2) When you come to the worship of God, come to meet with and hear from the Lord.
- 3) Hold on to the substance of faithful preaching, not the style (1 Thes 5:20-21)
- 4) Have faith in the Almighty God alone (Psa 20:7)
- 5) Rejoice in seeing the work of the Lord.