

Revelation 2:8-11

A. Abbreviations are useful tools to helping us communicate in a more efficient fashion.

1. USA is a very common abbreviation.
2. OPC stands for Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
 - a. There is a somewhat old, insulting alternate abbreviation that someone came up with for our denomination (OPC = only perfect church).
 - 1) Part of the insult is that they think we are proud to say such a thing! No one in the OPC has ever said that.
 - 2) The fact that we have a permanent Committee on Ecumenicity & Interchurch Relations (CEIR) denies any notion that we think we are the only church.
 - b. If someone uses this insulting abbreviation, show that such a claim contrary to all Reformed, Presbyterian doctrinal standards. Show them WCF 25, sec 5 which says: “The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture & error”
 - 1) That includes this church.
 - 2) That includes even the churches that the members of the Westminster Assembly pastored.

Sec 4. “This catholic [universal] church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible.”

A. This brief sentence is speaking about the visible church. We could rephrase the sentence as such, “The visible church has been sometimes more, sometimes less visible.”

B. Sec 4 goes on to define how some churches can be more or less visible: “...And particular churches, which are members thereof, 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.”

1. Think about some of the darkest times in the history of redemption. → **1 Ki 19:13-18**
 - a. He didn't think in these terms; however, Elijah who was in hiding in a cave thought he was the only member of God's people on earth (aka “visible church”). God told him there were 7,000 more.
 - b. In **Ex 32**, after the golden calf idolatry God said to Moses, **“let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them & that I may destroy them; & I will make of you a great nation.”** If Moses had not intervened in prayer as a type or prefigurement of Christ, God would have left the visible church to a membership of 1 person.
2. In sec 4, let's look more closely at those qualities that show a church to be more visible or evident as belong to Christ. These qualities are also known as the marks of the true church:
 - a. “doctrine of the gospel is taught & embraced”
 - b. “ordinances administered”
 - 1) An ordinance of God refers to that which Christ has commanded.
 - 2) This primarily includes the sacraments of the baptism & Lord's Supper.
 - 3) Jesus also commanded church discipline in **Mat 18**. This is another true mark of the visible church.
 - c. “public worship performed more or less purely in them”

3. The Belgic Confession, Article 29 says that “The marks of a true church [are]—pure preaching of the gospel, pure administration of the sacraments, and church discipline.” The Belgic Confession continues: “As for the false Church, it ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit itself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does it administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from, as it thinks proper; it relies more upon men than upon Christ;...”
4. It is not mentioned in the WCF here, yet Scripture says that true love as a fruit of the Holy Spirit is something that make the true church more visible or evident to all: **Jn 13:34-35**:
“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

sec 5. “The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan.”

- A. The reason “The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error” is because no one has 100% infallible interpretations of all of Scripture (i.e. Why did Nehemiah refuse to enter the temple when he was told some evil men sought to take his life? See **Neh 6:10-14**.)
 1. For texts like this, many interpretations exist. Not all are right; some are in error.
 2. WCF, sec 7: “All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, & observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, & opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.”
- B. This language “synagogues of Satan” comes from **Rev 2:8-11**. Turn there.
 1. The Jews who persecuted the church in Smyrna were no longer considered Jews by God. In **v8**, the glorious resurrected Jesus Christ said that he knew, **“the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”**
 2. In a similar fashion, there are some who claim to be of Christ— children of God— yet are not. They are better described as a synagogue of Satan.

C. What should you do if you are in a church or denomination, connected group of churches, that has “so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan”?

1. **Rev 18:4** says, **“Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins & receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, & God has remembered her iniquities”**
2. The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes by G.I. Williamson, p249
 - a. It should bother our conscience if tithes & offerings being sent from a local congregation are knowingly being used to support denominational work & persons that are wicked. I am very thankful to say I can 100% feel at peace with the OPC in this regard.
 - b. Some in good conscience felt as though they could not leave “their mother as long as she is alive.” I have heard this

sec 5 closes by saying, “Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth, to worship God according to his will.” In **Mat 16:18**, Jesus promised that He would build His church & **“the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (ESV).**