

1. Marks of the Church

- a. (True) Preaching of the Word
- b. (Proper) Exercise of Church Discipline
- c. (Right) Administration of the Sacraments

2. True Preaching of the Word

- a. A church that faithfully ministers to its people by preaching the true Word of God is the most central element of worship and church life.
- b. Romans 10:14-17: *"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" **So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ**".*
- c. Matthew 4:17: *"From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand".*
- d. Matthew 28:19: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."*
- e. Pastor/Preacher
  - i. diligent in his preparation and care of the Word
  - ii. preaching not infallible because pastors are not infallible
  - iii. a line is crossed when the preaching is no longer in agreement with the Bible

3. Proper Exercise of Church Discipline

- a. A church should follow the biblical commands to care for, and guard the purity of the body via church discipline.
- b. Discipline is spiritual, not physical.
- c. Discipline can include verbal and written censure (formal statement of disapproval)
- d. Forms of censure:
  - i. Admonition: a warning to an individual
  - ii. Suspension: suspension from receiving communion for members, suspension from office for church officers
  - iii. Excommunication: officially excluding one from participating in the local church
  - iv. Deposition: removing an officer from office
- e. Matthew 18:15-16: *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, **between you and him alone**. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, **take one or two others along** with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses".*
- f. Titus 3:10: *"As for a person who stirs up division, after **warning him** once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him..."*
- g. Matthew 18:17: *"If he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church**. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, **let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector**".*

- h. Romans 16:17: *"I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; **avoid them**".*
- i. Discipline has three goals:
  - i. To move the sinner to repentance
  - ii. To preserve the glory of God
  - iii. To maintain the purity of the church
- j. Matthew 5:14-16: *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, **so that they may see your good works** and give glory to your Father who is in heaven".*
- k. 1 Corinthians 5:6-7: *"Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? **Cleanse out the old leaven** that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed".*

#### 4. Right Administration of the Sacraments

- a. A church should be obedient to Christ's command to administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper in a way that is outlined in Scripture.
- b. What is a sacrament?
  - i. A holy ordinance instituted by God, in which physical, tangible signs communicate, represent, seal, and apply the grace of God.
  - ii. The nature of the sacraments is not the physical act itself.
  - iii. The nature of the sacraments is not the purity of the one administering it nor receiving it.
  - iv. The nature of the sacraments is the spiritual work of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the recipient.
  - v. Holy sacraments are not primarily works of men; they are primarily works of God.
- c. **The Lord's Supper** - the receiving of bread and wine/juice according to the command of Christ, whereby his death is symbolized and remembered, and the recipients are, by faith, partakers of all the benefits for their spiritual nourishment.
  - i. Also known as Holy Communion.
  - ii. The New Testament replacement for the Passover meal.
  - iii. Two elements:
    - 1. Bread: the breaking of the bread represents the breaking of Christ's body.
    - 2. Wine: the wine/juice represents the shedding of Christ's blood.
  - iv. Proper recipients: those who can examine themselves regarding their faith and those who can determine whether they are currently in any unrepentant sin.
  - v. 1 Corinthians 11: *"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me'. In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself".*

1. Practical implication: the following people are *excluded* from the Lord's Supper when it is provided at church:
  - a. Believers who are unrepentant
  - b. Non-believers
  - c. Children not yet old enough to understand self-examination
- vi. There is a way of looking at the Lord's Supper over a continuum of time:
  1. It looks **backwards to the past** upon Christ's death on the cross.
  2. It looks to **the present** when we celebrate having communion with each other and more so having communion with God because of the resurrected Christ.
  3. And it looks **forward to the future** in the marriage supper of the lamb and eternal life.
- d. **Baptism** - the washing with water, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
  - i. The New Testament replacement of circumcision, just as the Lord's Supper is the New Testament replacement for the Passover meal.
  - ii. Two necessary elements: water and the 'Trinitarian formula'.
  - iii. Mode: the New Testament does not explicitly specify a mode, and the Bible's word for "baptize" (Greek = *baptizo*) is a generic word that denotes a cleansing or washing. It does not necessarily mean, "immersion". Reformed churches maintain liberty regarding the mode and allow for immersion, pouring, and sprinkling as acceptable and valid practices.
  - iv. Proper recipients:
    1. Adults who profess faith and join the visible church
    2. Children of members of the visible church.
  - v. Founded on the following considerations:
    1. **The Old Testament covenant sign.** In the OT era, the infant children of believing Jews were recipients of the covenant sign of circumcision, applied to male children. Infants were covenant members by virtue of their parents' participation in the covenant, and they received the covenant benefits.
    2. **The New Testament covenant sign.** Given the continuity of the covenant, Christ instituted new covenant signs that parallel and replace the OT signs. As we already mentioned, circumcision is replaced by baptism. Since children of covenant believers in the OT received the covenant sign, it is both logical and natural that children of NT covenant believers would also receive the sign. God would not take a child from the covenant family and place him outside the covenant.
      - a. Colossians 2:11-12: *"In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead"*.
    3. **Sign of the covenant, not of salvation.** The visible sign of the covenant does not in itself save, but it does signify both outwardly and inwardly that the recipient of the sign is a member of the covenant community.
    4. **Absence of a contrary command.** In the apostolic era, the church consisted of converted Jews who would have been accustomed to giving children the covenant sign. Given that the apostolic writers went to great lengths to discard the elements of Judaism that had passed away in Christ, it would be surprising if they had failed to do so with circumcision/baptism, if in fact the new church was to exclude infants

from the covenant. In other words, there is strong logic to the notion that if the church were to no longer consider infants part of the covenant, as they had been for thousands of years, the epistles would have at least mentioned this significant shift.

5. **Household baptisms.** The book of Acts records several instances in which the father of a household professed faith and subsequently had his entire household baptized. In that era, a “household” included both children and servants. While children are not explicitly mentioned, there is strong reason to believe that these household baptisms included children who did not yet share in the faith of the head of the household, and they were treated as covenant members.

6. **Explicit promise.** In the NT in Acts 2:39 there is an explicit promise...

- a. Acts 2:38-39: *“And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **For the promise is for you and for your children** and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself”.*

vi. Summary of Baptism:

1. Visible church community can be described from a horizontal (man’s) point of view - those who attend church and profess to believe.
2. Invisible church can be described from a vertical (God’s) point of view – those whom only He knows to truly believe in Christ.
3. It is the visible church, not the invisible church, who have always been the recipients of the covenant sign. Baptism does not save our children – it does not assure us that they will be part of the invisible church. But it does mark them out as part of the visible church – God’s covenant community.
4. Likewise, when an adult converts to Christianity, they too should receive the covenant sign as part of the visible church.

5. Conclusion

- a. The preached Word of God and the administered sacraments are received in two very different ways depending on your status before the Lord:
  - i. Spiritual church (true believers): edifying and provide spiritual nourishment.
  - ii. Unbelievers: a testimony to the gospel itself.