



# Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 6 – THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH  
LESSON 115 – MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH – PART 6  
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# Seven Marks of a Healthy Church

- ▶ What then are the marks of a sound church according to the Bible? We will summarize them into seven points over the next few weeks. These seven things must be present for a church to claim rightly that they are a church that is obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ▶ 1. God is worshipped in spirit and truth – Rom.12:1; Philip.3:3; John 4:5-26
- ▶ 2. Prayer is central – Acts 2:42, 1Thes.5:17
- ▶ 3. Love for Christ and the Brethren is demonstrated – 1 Pet.1:22, Jam.1:22
- ▶ 4. The Word of God is faithfully preached, taught, and heard – Acts 6:4, 13:44; Rom.10:17; 2Tim.4:2
- ▶ 5. The Ordinances of Baptism and Communion are administered – Acts 2:42; Mat.28:19
- ▶ 6. Discipline of the membership is Biblically administered – 1 Cor.5:10-13; Mat.18:15-17
- ▶ 7. Church government and leadership as instituted by the Apostles is established – Acts 14:23, 6:2-3; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9

# Three Marks of a True Church

- ▶ In these next lessons we will be taking a closer look at the 3 marks of a true church that we introduced in the first lesson:
- ▶ The Word of God is faithfully preached, taught, and heard – Acts 6:4, 13:44; Rom.10:17; 2Tim.4:2
- ▶ The Ordinances of Baptism and Communion are administered – Acts 2:42; Mat.28:19
- ▶ Discipline of the membership is Biblically administered – 1 Cor.5:10-13; Mat.18:15-17

# Fifth Mark: Ordinances

- ▶ The Fifth Mark of a Healthy Church: The Ordinances of Baptism and Communion are Administered
- ▶ Acts 2:42 – “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
- ▶ Matthew 28:19 – “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”
- ▶ A healthy, properly functioning church will observe often the ordinances that Christ initiated and left as a sign of His death and resurrection. It is absolutely necessary that a church observe faithful and rightly these two ordinances.

# The Means of Grace

- ▶ God accomplishes His stated (decreed) purposes by the use of means.
- ▶ God uses various means to bring blessing, strengthen faith, and cultivate spiritual growth in the lives of His people.
- ▶ Historically, these means have been called “the means of grace” and are the instruments through which God’s Spirit graciously grows believers in Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:17-18).
- ▶ The means of grace are any activities within the fellowship of the church that God uses to give more grace to believers.

# The Means of Grace

- ▶ The means of grace as typically listed to include the Word of God (preached, read, sung), and the Ordinances (The Lord's Supper and Baptism).
- ▶ The list, when rightly understood, may also include: prayer, worship, church discipline, giving, spiritual gifts, fellowship, and other ministries (evangelism, counseling, etc.).
- ▶ All of these are available to believers within the church. The Holy Spirit works through all of them to bring various kinds of blessing to individuals and the church corporately gathered.

# The Means of Grace

- ▶ The term “means of grace should not be confused with the term “sacraments” as used by the Roman Catholic Church.
- ▶ The RCC traditionally has believed that God’s grace comes to people only through the official ministry of the church, particularly through the priests to the church. Therefore, when it specifies the sacraments that are available to people within the church, it has in view activities that are supervised and/or performed by only the priests of the church.
- ▶ Catholics view these as “means of salvation” that make people more fit to receive justification from God. For the Protestant, the means of grace are simply means of additional blessing within the Christian life, and do not add to our fitness to receive justification from God.
- ▶ Protestants teach that God only imparts grace by these means when there is faith present in the recipient. Catholics teach that the means of grace impart grace whether there is subjective faith on the part of the minister or the recipient.

# Fifth Mark: Ordinances - Baptism

- ▶ The first is the ordinance of Baptism. In the Biblical text, the word meant to dip or immerse in water. It is necessary to be obedient to the Lord that we baptize those who profess faith in Him. Baptism, though, while having no active part in our salvation is a direct proof of our obedience to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- ▶ He said that we are to baptize those we disciple. We are to go and baptize them in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This way the new convert is obedient to our Lord's first command. And this way they give a living testimony to the change that has taken place in their lives through the grace of God.



# Fifth Mark: Ordinances - Baptism

- ▶ Baptism is a vivid sign, an outward symbol of an inner truth. When a person is baptized they are saying with their actions that they have died with Christ and been raised with Him to a new life. We are “buried” under the water and “resurrected” as we are brought up out of the water. Signifying the death of the old self and the new birth and new life of the inner man (Romans 6).
- ▶ This ordinance is to be administered by ministers of the church to those who have professed faith in Christ. It is to be performed in the Name of the Father (Who of His own free will and by His sovereign grace saved us), the Son (Who lived a perfect and sinless life and died in our place, thus giving us His righteousness while taking away our sin and its penalty and then was resurrected from the dead giving us victory over death and life everlasting in His presence), and the Holy Spirit (Who convicts us of sin and regenerates us by the Word of God preached and heard, going on then to serve as the seal of our salvation and our Helper and Comforter forever).

# The Means of Grace

- ▶ A second ordinance that must be observed in the Lord's Table, or Communion. Unlike baptism, which occurs once following conversion, the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated repeatedly throughout the Christian life.
- ▶ In the upper room before His prayer and arrest in the garden, Jesus demonstrated the fulfillment of the Passover Feast in His own crucifixion and instituted the Lord's Supper as a means of His disciples celebrating that fulfillment and remembering His death on the cross as the spotless Lamb of God.
- ▶ The observance of this ordinance is an opportunity for examination, confession, and remembrance (1 Cor. 11:27-32).
- ▶ By partaking, we are preaching the gospel to ourselves and one another (1 Cor. 11:26).

# Fifth Mark: Ordinances - Communion

- ▶ The Lord's Supper, or Communion as it is commonly known, is the fulfillment of the Passover Feast. We follow His example, in that on the night He was betrayed, He participated in the last legitimate Old Covenant Passover feast with His disciples. He took the unleavened bread and the wine and gave it to the disciples to eat in commemoration of the sacrifice He was about to make of Himself as the Lamb of God who had come to take away the sin of the world.

# Fifth Mark: Ordinances - Communion

- ▶ Both the bread and wine used in the observance of Communion are to be unleavened, not only in accordance with the Passover tradition, but because the absence of leaven in these elements directly testifies to the sinlessness of Christ. Yeast (leaven) most often represents sin in the Scriptures and for Christ to be the final Passover Lamb, who died once for all, He must be sinless.
- ▶ The preparation of the bread is completed without the addition of leaven, and the wine is naturally unleavened as the process of fermentation destroys the yeast and it is removed after the remaining debris rises to the top and is removed. (Pasteurization also kills the yeast in grape juice without producing alcohol as a by-product).

# Fifth Mark: Ordinances - Communion

- ▶ When He had taken the bread and given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” And then later in the supper he also took the cup and said, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” Paul adds that as often as we commemorate His death with this meal, we proclaim His death until He returns (1 Cor. 11:24, 25, 26).
- ▶ The bread is symbolic for us of His body, perfect and sinless, yet broken and put to death as an atoning sacrifice. The wine is a sign of His blood, shed for the remission of our sins. And as we eat and drink, we are told to remember Him and the price He paid to redeem us.

# Fifth Mark: Ordinances - Communion

- ▶ Paul also lets us know in 1 Corinthians 11 that this commemorative meal is to be used always as an occasion for self-examination. We are to use the Lord's Supper not only to remember His death, but also as a time to allow the Spirit of God to convict us of sin and prepare us for worship. This offers us the opportunity to make absolutely sure that we have all things right with God and between our brothers and sisters in Christ! It is indeed a time for reflection and a time not to be entered into lightly.
- ▶ It is also a meal that is to be celebrated often within the church. The New Testament found the young church celebrating this Supper sometimes DAILY! Can we really celebrate the Lord's death and victory over sin and the grave too often? Why relegate it to once every few weeks, months, or only at special times? It is to be observed often. The examination is to be thorough. And the results are wonderful communion with the Lord and the opportunity to bless others by proclaiming His death until He comes again.