

The marks of the true Church

Faith and Fidelity:

Ensuring that we do not stray from **The Way**

Need to Understand ...

- The nature of the true Church
- The inseparable foundation signs/marks of the true Church:
 - The faithful preaching of the Gospel (that we may HEAR truth)
 - The faithful administration of the sacraments (EXPERIENCE truth)
 - Baptism
 - Lord's Supper
 - The faithful exercise of discipline (DO truth)
- The keys of the Kingdom (KEEP on track)
 - Positive sanctions (commonly called nurture: Preaching & Sacraments)
 - Corrective sanctions (sometimes seen as negative: Discipline)

Doctrine of the Church

- Heidelberg Catechism - LD21 (Q54-56)
- Westminster Confession - §21,25-30

What is the Church?

- The identity of the Church was established in the Old Testament
 - Originally the children of Israel, the Hebrew people
 - The Assembly
 - The Congregation
 - The Covenant Community
 - Converts to the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
 - Covenanted to the Lord
 - In the power of the Holy Spirit

What is the Church?

- Continued in the New Covenant Church
 - Opened to Gentiles at Pentecost
 - Covenanted to the Lord in Jesus Christ
 - The work of the Holy Spirit dwelling with God's people (our comforter)

What is the **true** Church?

- The Church is God's Covenant Community
 - One single community of **all** believers
 - Old Testament
 - New Testament
 - Not time-bound
 - Past, present, and future
 - Eternal
 - Sealed in Christ who is the Head

What is the Church?

- The identity of the Church was established through the Old Testament
 - Referred to as the children of Israel
 - The Assembly
 - The Congregation
 - The Covenant Community
 - Converts to the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
 - Covenanted to the Lord
 - Circumcision as the Covenant sign and seal
 - In the power of the Holy Spirit

What is the Church?

- Continued in the New Covenant Church
 - Opened to Gentiles at Pentecost
 - Covenanted to the Lord in Jesus Christ
 - The work of the Holy Spirit dwelling with God's people (our comforter)

What is the **true** Church?

HC LD21, A54:

The Son of God has out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathered, defended, and preserved for himself, by his Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a church chosen to everlasting life. I forever shall remain a living member of it.

What is the **true** Church?

Gen 17:9

And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.”

The Church is to be obedient

- **Exodus 24:7**

*7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “**All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.**”*

Covenant commitment

- **2 Kings 23:1-3**

*1 Then the king [Josiah] sent, and all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem were gathered to him. 2 And the king went up to the house of the Lord, and with him all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the prophets, all the people, both small and great. **And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord.** 3 And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant.*

The Congregation

- Psalm 1:5 *“the congregation of the righteous”*
- Psalm 22:22 *“in the midst of the congregation I will praise you”*
- Psalm 35:18 *“I will thank you in the great congregation”*
- Psalm 107:32 *“extol him in the congregation of the people”*
- Acts 7:38 *“This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers.”*

The Covenant God - with His people

Central to this **covenant relationship** is God's promise, "***I will be your God, and you shall be my people***" (Ex. 6.7, Jer. 31.33, Ez. 37.27, 2 Cor. 6.16, Heb. 8.10, Rev. 21.3). This promise is often linked to the concept of God dwelling among his people, as in Leviticus 26.11–12: "***I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.***"

Attributes of a church

- **Visible church:**

- All who meet in the assembly of the Lord
- Those who we see worshiping the Lord in a set place
- Includes the elect of Christ as well as those not elected
- Includes the wheat and the tares

Attributes of the **true** Church

- **Invisible Church:**

- Include **only** those who are elect in Christ
- Have a right understanding of the Law and the Gospel
- Those who have a new heart within them
- Those who profess Christ with their lips and seal their profession with deeds/works of gratitude
 - Many have sealed their faith also with their lives

Attributes of the true church

- **Old Testament**

- Circumcised in the flesh (external sign)
- Circumcised in the heart (internal seal of faith)
- Holy unto the Lord
- Lived the faith

- **New Testament**

- Received the covenant sign of baptism (external sign)
- Having hearts renewed by the Holy Spirit (internal seal of faith)
- Profess salvation in the merits of Christ only
- Keep the faith holy unto the Lord
- Living the faith

The Three Marks of the true Church

Faithful preaching of the true gospel

Correct and proper use of the sacraments

Exercise of obedience: discipline

First Mark: Faithful Preaching

- Romans 10:17 *“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”*
- 2 Tim 2:15 *“Do your best to **present yourself to God** as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, **rightly handling the word of truth.**”*
- 2 John 1:9-10 *“ 9 Everyone who goes ahead and does not remain true to what the Christ has taught does not have God. **Those who remain true to his teaching have both the Father and the Son.** 10 If someone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, don't welcome him into your home.”*

“Preaching is the work of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ to the glory of the Father.”

Hughes Oliphant Old

What is Preaching?

- Preaching is: teaching, explaining, and application of the Word of God
- Faithful preaching asserts God's Covenant:
 - An act of **covenant judgment** because it informs those who are still in the misery of their sin of the judgment that awaits them.
 - An act of **covenant mercy** because it leads the faithful to contriteness of heart, sorrow for every offense against the Lord, and to the joy of confident forgiveness.

Psalm 51

15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Second Mark: Sacraments

- The Sacraments **confirm the Word.**
- The **promises** of the covenant are proclaimed in the gospel and then **sealed to those who receive the sacraments.**
- The Sacraments are **signs and seals of the covenant promises** declared in the gospel.

Covenant Sacraments Compared

- Old Testament
 - Circumcision
 - Passover
 - Sacrifices pointing forward to atonement in the Messiah
- New Testament
 - Baptism
 - Lord's Supper
 - Absence of Sacrifices because Christ has made atonement

The right and proper use of the Sacraments is essential to faithfulness.

Entry to the Covenant

Applies to children born into a believing household

Applies to new converts to the faith

Old Testament Signs and Seals

- **Circumcision** was a sign and a seal of the covenant of grace, made in the flesh (visible sign)
 - Symbolizes the cutting off of the old sinful nature and the dedication unto the Lord.
 - Declares the Holiness of God in that He has set His people apart from those who remain defiled by sin.
- Applied to all men, either on the 8th day following birth, or at conversion and entry to the Covenant
 - Note the **household** nature of the sign and seal of Covenant circumcision!

Circumcision and the Covenant

Gen 17:9-14

*9 And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. 10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 **You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.***

Breaking the Covenant

Gen 17:9-14

*12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, 13 **both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised.** So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. 14 **Any uncircumcised male** who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; **he has broken my covenant.**”*

Outward pointing Inward

Deuteronomy 30:6

“And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”

Romans 2:29

“But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.”

Baptism and the Covenant

- Baptism is to be administered:
 - To all born into the household of faith
 - To all converts to the household of faith
- Baptism is a Covenant sign and seal
 - It signifies that we have been buried with Christ and that we have been resurrected in Christ
 - We are members of His family – He is the head!

Baptism of Converts and Households

Acts 2:38-39

38 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. 39 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.”

Baptism of Converts and Households

Acts 16:14-15

*14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. **15 And after she was baptized, and her household as well,** she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.*

See also Acts 16:33 – Phillipian jailer and his family were baptised!

Baptism of Households

Acts 10:1-2, 47-48

*1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, 2 **a devout man who feared God with all his household**, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.*

*47 “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” 48 **And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.** Then they asked him to remain for some days.*

Covenant Households

1 Corinthians 1:16 demonstrates that household baptisms were the norm, not the exception:

16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)

These texts show that Baptism is Covenantal: We remain a household of faith, with Christ the head of the house, including the children as its members.

Discipline: Keeping the Faith

Remembering the greatness of the Lord:

He delivers His people out of the bondage of sin,
and into the light of His countenance.

Remembering the Covenant

Psalm 78:1-4

- 1 *Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth!*
- 2 *I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old,*
- 3 ***things that we have heard and known,
that our fathers have told us.***
- 4 ***We will not hide them from their children,
but tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.***

Old Testament Signs and Seals

- The **Passover celebration** is a covenant ceremony
 - The blood of the lamb on the doorposts in Egypt so that the Lord would spare/save those inside
 - And of how the Lord delivered His people from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the promised land
 - Communion with the Lord – our deliverer
- The **sprinkling with blood** symbolized the blood of the lamb that alone can wash away (atone for) sin.

The Passover Seder

Exodus 12:2-6

2 *“This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. 3 **Tell all the congregation of Israel** that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. 4 And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, 6 and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when **the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel** shall kill their lambs at twilight.*

The Passover Seder

Exodus 12:12-14

*12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. 13 **The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are.** And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.*

*14 **“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.***

Sprinkling with blood

- **Exodus 24:7-8**

7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.”

*8 And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “**Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.**”*

New Covenant Communion

The Lord's Supper

Institution of the Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

*23 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, 24 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." 25 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." 26 **For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.***

Significance of the Lord's Supper

- Two aspects
 - Covenant Judgment
 - Covenant Blessings
- More than a mere memorial!
- Every participation is a sign and a seal of faith
 - The signs are attached to the reality they represent
 - Christ is really and truly present, given and received in the signs

Lord's Supper – Covenant Judgment

1 Corinthians 11:27-30

27 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. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

Lord's Supper – Covenant Blessings

1 Corinthians 11:31-32

31 But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Preserving the Household

Discipline includes ALL action taken to protect, preserve, strengthen, and lead into holiness, the household of the elect.

Making disciples involves nurture and correction.

Third Mark: Discipline

- Discipline is the process of making disciples
 - A disciple is a follower of Jesus
 - A disciple is one who has been schooled/taught in the ways of the Lord
 - A disciple is one who follows what he has been taught
- Because of sin we need to be taught and re-instructed over and over
 - We must learn discipline
 - We often need correction to get us back on track

Nature of Discipline

Heb 12:3-7

*3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? **“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”** 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*


Nature of Discipline

Heb 12:8-11

*8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all **discipline** seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it **yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.***

Summary

- The Church is God's Covenant Community
 - His sacred assembly
 - True believers are in perfect communion inside the pale of the true Church
- The marks of the true Church are
 - Pure proclamation of the Gospel and the Word
 - Pure practice of the Sacraments
 - Soul-refreshing practice of Godly discipline



May you and your children know the comfort
of grace unlimited. May you know the God
who keeps His Covenant to thousands of
generations yet unborn.

May keep yourselves within the true Church
always.

