

THREE MARKS OF A TRUE CHURCH

Matthew 16:13-20

REVIEW

- ◆ In Matthew 16, Jesus, the King of the Jews, takes His disciples to the district of Caesarea Philippi, which was the Roman capital for Judea, and asks, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”
- ◆ Under ordinary circumstances there is no salvation outside the church.
- ◆ Under ordinary circumstances the true interpretation of the Bible is not found outside the church: *solo scriptura* versus *sola scriptura*.
 - ✓ All of God’s people are a kingdom of priests, all of God’s people have the Spirit of God, and therefore all of God’s people should have access to the Bible in their language.
 - ✓ The Jewish church in Jesus’ day provided the Bible in the language of the people (Greek in some parts of the world). The Septuagint (Greek Old Testament translated from the Hebrew Old Testament) was the “NIV” of Jesus’ day.
 - ✓ In Jesus’ day, the laity had the right to read the Bible for themselves in their own language (cf. Acts 17:10-11).
 - ✓ Interpretation of Scripture is done by individuals, but these individuals must be a part of the church and under her authority.

I. WHAT MAKES A CHURCH A TRUE CHURCH?

- A. The Westminster Confession of Faith lists three marks of a true church (see also Belgic Confession Article 29):
1. The doctrine of the gospel taught and embraced
 2. Ordinances administered (Lord’s Supper, baptism, church discipline)
 3. Public worship performed more or less purely

Westminster Confession of Faith, 25:4

This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. (Rom. 11:3–4, Rev. 12:6,14) 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. (Rev. 2–3, 1 Cor. 5:6–7)

- B. In Matthew’s Gospel there is a transition from the Old Testament church to the New Testament church. After 70 A.D. Israel (after the flesh) ceased being the “church” of God.
1. Jesus was forming a “renewed Israel” – symbolized by the choice of TWELVE disciples (cf. Rev.21:12-14).
 2. Jesus calls Peter “rock” – the same term used of Father Abraham in the Old Testament (Isa.51:1-2).
 3. In Jesus’ lifetime, people were being kicked out of the synagogue for believing in Jesus (John 9; see especially verses 22,33-35; John 12:42; 16:2).
 4. Jesus is building His church on Peter’s profession of faith, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” The high priest and the Sanhedrin in Matthew 26 will put Jesus to death for claiming to be the Christ, the Son of God (26:63).
 5. Jesus promises Peter the keys of the Kingdom (Matthew 16:19). By implication, Jesus is taking the keys from the religious authorities.
 6. “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it” (Matt.21:43).
 7. In Revelation, the Jewish synagogue is referred to as a “synagogue of Satan” (Revelation 2:9; 3:9).
- C. The Jewish church ceased being a “true church” in the 1st century:
- ✓ The religious leaders of Jesus’ day had rejected the Gospel.
 - ✓ The religious leaders persecuted and put Christians to death (see the book of Acts; 1 Thess.2:14).
 - ✓ Public worship in Israel ceased in 70 A.D. (see Matthew 24:1-3).

D. The three marks of a church were the basis for the Protestant Reformation and remain the justification for Protestant Christianity.

1. Rome taught and still teaches that our own good works can be confided in as a ground of salvation (Gospel).
2. Rome taught and still teaches that the bread and cup in the Mass become the actually body and blood of Jesus Christ and is therefore to be worshipped (Worship & Ordinances).
 - The Body and the Blood of Christ together with His Soul and His Divinity and therefore the Whole Christ are truly present in the Eucharist (De fide.)
 - The Whole Christ is present under each of the two Species. (De fide.)
 - When either consecrated species is divided the Whole Christ is present in each part of the species. (De fide.)
 - After the Consecration has been completed the Body and Blood are permanently present in the Eucharist. (De fide.)
 - The Worship of Adoration (*latria*) must be given to Christ present in the Eucharist. (De fide.)

NOTE: "De fide" is Latin for "of the Faith" and indicates Roman Catholic dogma. *DE FIDE* is the highest level of Roman Catholic theological/doctrinal truth. It is an infallible, irrevocable and non-reformable statement.

What is latria?

The Second Council of Nicaea in 787 declared that God alone is to be worshiped and adored (the church's Latin term for such homage was *latria*).

"(*Latria* is) the veneration due to God alone for his supreme excellence and to show people's complete submission to him. It is essentially adoration. As absolute *latria*, it is given only to God, as the Trinity, or one of the Divine Persons, Christ as God and as the man, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the Holy Eucharist. Representations of God as images connected with the Divinity may receive *latria*, which is given not to the symbol but to the Godhead, whom it signifies." (Pocket Catholic Dictionary)

Westminster Confession of Faith 29:6 (see Q.80 of the Heidelberg Catechism)

That doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine, into the substance of Christ's body and blood (commonly called transubstantiation) by consecration of a priest, or by any other way, is repugnant, not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense, and reason; overthroweth the nature of the sacrament, and hath been, and is, the cause of manifold superstitions; yea, of gross idolatries. (Acts 3:21, 1 Cor. 11:24–26, Luke 24:6,39)

3. Idolatry is found elsewhere in Catholicism because Catholics are permitted to worship (*latria*) God via manmade images of God.

II. IT'S BECOMING INCREASINGLY COMMON FOR PROTESTANT CHURCHES NOT TO EXHIBIT THE THREE MARKS OF A CHURCH.

- A. The three marks of a church summarize the three offices of Christ: Prophet, Priest and King (see Q.23 of the *Shorter Catechism*).

Q.23 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism
What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?

Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation. (Acts 3:21–22, Heb. 12:25, 2 Cor. 13:3, Heb. 5:5–7, Heb. 7:25, Ps. 2:6, Isa. 9:6–7, Matt. 21:5, Ps. 2:8–11)

1. The doctrine of the gospel taught and embraced (**PROPHET**)
 2. Ordinances administered (Lord's Supper, baptism, church discipline) (**KING**)
 3. Public worship performed more or less purely (**PRIEST**)
- B. The three marks of a biblical church are related to what it means to be made in the image of God: knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Genesis 1:26–28; **Ephesians 4:24**; Colossians 3:10; Q.10 of the *Shorter Catechism*).
1. Knowledge corresponds to the office of prophet
 2. Holiness corresponds to the office of priest
 3. Righteousness corresponds to the office of king.
- C. If the church is deficient in the doctrine of the Gospel, ordinances and/or worship then your sanctification will also be deficient.

QUESTIONS FOR SABBATH DISCUSSION & MEDITATION:

Take what you have learned this morning and make it into a prayer. Pray that our congregation, your family, and you would reflect more the image of Jesus in knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

What makes a church a true church OR what are the three marks of the church?

Explain the transition in Matthew's Gospel moving from the Old Testament church to the New Testament church. How did the Jews fail to measure up to the "three marks"?

Why isn't it enough for a church to practice only two out of the three marks of a church? In other words, why isn't it enough for a church to simply "preach the Gospel"?

Do most people leave churches today for the right reasons? Could the same be said for the Protestant reformers?

How are the three marks of the church related to the three offices of Christ and the image of God in man?

Why will your growth and maturity in Christ be stunted if you do not belong to a church that practices the three marks?

Explain how growth in Christ-likeness is both individual and corporate.

NOTES:

The term “ordinance” has been used historically to refer to the rites of baptism and communion. However, one contemporary theologian refers to it more generally: “A practice established by Jesus Christ with the command that it is to be carried out” (Millard Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*). It is with this emphasis that John Owen wrote, “That excommunication is an express ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ in his churches is fully declared in the Scriptures.” John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*. (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1968) 2:159 (quoted in Art Azurdia, “Rediscovering the Third Mark of the Church”; *Reformation and Revival Volume 3* vnp.3.4.61).

He who would have, and is in search of, a church in which no dissension and no difference exist among preachers, no insincerity against the First Table, and no outrage, and wickedness against the Second Table, will never find his church.

Martin Luther



"Next the children will recreate the church split that led to the founding of this church."