

Harvest Christian Fellowship
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Theology @ 9
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WORD AND SACRAMENT

What are some ways to identify a genuine church?

So to get a good picture of what a genuine church looks like lets look at it's beginning.

Acts 2:40-47 *Open Bible and follow.*

List some of the characteristics of the church:

- regular attendance at apostles teaching sessions
- regular attendance at Communion services
- regular attendance at prayer meetings
- fear of God - *not a panic but a dread of not pleasing God. Its a fear that controls our attitudes, actions, motives and our thoughts toward other people.*
- shared what they had to help those in need
- joy, thankfulness and praising
- lives were being changed

Marks of a genuine church:

1. Biblical doctrine is taught
2. Proper use of sacraments (sometimes listed separately)
3. Church discipline
4. Genuine worship
5. Effective prayer

As the Reformers distanced themselves from the Roman Catholic church, they needed to determine the marks of the true church. From Scripture, they found the answer in terms of two criteria; faithful preaching of the Word of God and the right use of the sacraments. Ideally a Christian church will exhibit all the traits listed above, and possibly others, but it's the Word of God being preached and the proper use of the sacraments that are essential and vital.

1. The faithful preaching of the Word of God.

*"This means that the group in question teaches from Scripture the essentials of the Christian gospel. Denials of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the sin-bearing atonement, and justification by faith, for example, link **aberrant** contemporary groups with the **docetic** separatists, whose denials of the Incarnation and Atonement (1 John 4:1-3) caused John to say, "They were never with us (1John 2:19)" Packer, pg 204-205.*

aberrant: straying from the right or normal way.

docetic (doe-see-tic): a belief opposed as heresy in early Christianity that Christ only seemed to have a human body and to suffer and die on the cross.

1 Corinthians 1:21 *"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."*

God was pleased to ordain preaching.

When God determined that the world through its wisdom would not be able to know Him, He decreed that we would come to know Him only through a revelation of Himself.

Preaching is one way that God reveals Himself to us.

God reveals Himself generally through creation

Romans 1:20 *"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made . . ."*

God revealed Himself through The Word.

Because Jesus is the perfect declaration of God (John 1:18) Jesus is called "the Word" of God. And in John 1:14 what happens to the Word? *" . . . it became flesh and dwelt among us . . . "* To see God, look at the Word of God, Jesus Christ.

God also revealed Himself through His written Word - the Bible. Today it is through God's written Word that we come to know His Incarnate Word, Jesus.

In other words , God revealed Himself to us in Jesus, and through the Bible we learn about Jesus. Faithful preaching of the Word of God will always point us to God.

God ordained preaching in the Old Testament - He spoke through the preaching of the prophets.

In the New Testament we find Jesus preaching:

Luke 4:43-44 "...but He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent." And He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee."

Peter would later report that Jesus commanded them to preach Acts 10:42
Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that Christ had sent him to preach the gospel.

1 Corinthians 1:21- 23 *"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preached Christ*

crucified . . ."

The message preached by the church should be Jesus Christ and His cross.

One of the marks of a genuine church is that the life and work of Christ *is the MAIN message preached*. Further, since Jesus Christ, the Incarnation of God, is the main message of the Bible, all messages preached from God's Word should relate either directly or indirectly to Him.

"Do not go where it is all fine music and grand talk and beautiful architecture; those things will neither fill anybody's stomach, nor feed his soul. Go where the gospel is preached, the gospel that really feeds your soul, and go often." - Charles Spurgeon

Throughout church history, all the greatest movements of God in saving people and strengthening His church have been built upon God-anointed preaching.

Reformers: Luther, Calvin, Zwingli

First Great Awakening: Whitfield, Wesley, Edwards

Second Great Awakening: Moody, Finney, Nettleton.

In almost every case when large numbers of people have been converted in a concentrated period, it has been as a result of "the message preached." When the fire of God falls, the flash point is the pulpit.

It is the Word of God that changes hearts and lives not programs and social activities.

*"For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ, for it is the gospel that is the power of God** unto salvation to everyone who believes . . . For **in it** the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith . . . " Rom. 1:16.*

Another identifying mark of a genuine church is the right use of the sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism - how is this theology?

Christian baptism is symbolic of many things and to submit to it says that you believe what baptism stands for.

God is **Triune**.

"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 . . . " Matthew 28:19

Baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is:

- to identify yourself with each member of the Trinity
- declare your allegiance to the God of the Bible

- say you believe there is only one God who is three persons

Baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit denies several heresies:

- Tritheism - there are three different persons who together become God
- Pluralism - there are three gods
- Unitarianism - there is one God and denies the divinity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit
- Modalism - the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were never God simultaneously

Baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit confesses your belief that each member of the Trinity is involved in your salvation and that you are brought into a relationship with each.

God the Father chose you before the foundation of the world - Eph 1:3-6.

God the Son died to make us right with the Father - Rom 5:1, 9-10.

God the Holy Spirit opened your eyes, enabling you to see your need to be reconciled to God and to believe in the work of Christ - John 16:8, 1 Cor 2:12, Titus 3:5.

The Lord's Supper - How is this theology?

1 Corinthians 11: 24-26 " . . . and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, Take, eat, this is my body broken for you, do this in remembrance of me. In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."

The bread symbolizes the human body of Jesus and the drink represents His blood. Together they portray the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and the granting of eternal life.

When we observe the Lord's Supper in a public place of worship like this, we openly proclaim the death of Jesus and the cup and the bread make us focus our eyes on the Cross.

The Lord's Supper is a memorial that remembers both a person and an event. It is not just a memorial of the person and work of Jesus Christ, nor a mere remembrance from the past, but a reality in the present.

The promise of Matthew 28:20 *"Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

The promise of John 16: 13-15 - Promise of the Holy Spirit

1 Cor 11: 26 not only stresses the past and the present, but the future as well - *" you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."*

The Lord's Supper is:

- a look backward to the Cross
- a reminder of communion with Christ in the present
- an expression of expectation for His earthly return

Charles Hodge-"As the Passover was a perpetual commemoration of the deliverance out of Egypt, and a prediction of the coming and death of the Lamb of God, . . . so the Lord's supper is at once a commemoration of the death of Christ and a pledge of His coming the second time."

This ordinance reminds us that one day the invisible presence of Jesus at the table will be replaced by His physical appearance here on earth.

Forgiven - *"And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission." Hebrews 9:22*

Redeemed - *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Eph 1:7*

Justified - *"Much more then, having been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." Romans 5:9*

Peace - *"Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1*

Brought near - *"But now in Christ Jesus you who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Eph 2:13*

Cleansed - *"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanses us from all sin." 1 John 1:7*

Second coming - *". . .I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive unto Myself, that where I am you may be also." John 14:2-3"*

Material taken from:

Concise Theology - J.I. Packer

Systematic Theology - Wayne Grudem

Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church - Donald Whitney