

Marc Steele (2)

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[0:00] Let us pray. God, as we contemplate the width and depth and height of your love for us, may we ever be aware of your presence amongst us, in every way.

! It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. These things happen to them as examples for us. Let's not waste those things. This is the second series on Christian disciplines we're working through, entitled Walking with God.

The question is, what are Christian disciplines? Another way that it's often described, which can be helpful, and it's a language used by more modern, popular Bible teachers, and seems to resonate with us as we say, what are the marks of the Christian?

What are those habits and practices that are assigned to all that a person is a Christian or a group of people are a visible manifestation of Christ's church?

[1:24] But I think maybe even more importantly for us today, we need to realize what disciplines are not.

Disciplines are not a way to pull ourselves up to God by our own shoelaces. We're not unique as Christians in that we have discipline.

Other major religions of the world do as well. For example, within Islam, the five pillars of Islam are essentially Islamic disciplines.

Here's what one current imam teaches regarding these disciplines. In Islam, the guidance for attaining righteousness is given very comprehensively.

Focus on it. Attaining righteousness. Covering not only aspects of the spiritual, but also of life. These moral values will certainly promote the well-being of man in this world.

[2:35] However, the burden of attaining the level of righteousness lies on the person. The prophet Muhammad therefore said, A man shall be asked concerning three things on the day of resurrection.

Concerning his life. How he lived it. Concerning his wealth. How he acquired it. And in what way he spent it. And concerning his knowledge, what good he did with it.

I am thankful that as I stand at the day of resurrection, the only question that will be asked of me is, What have you done with Christ? If your engagement with the spiritual disciplines we cover through this series makes you think that you are somehow improving yourself, you're not acting as a Christian.

When you abstain during the great Lenten fast, you will not make yourself holier. When you give during the weekly offering, you are not purchasing righteousness for yourself.

Discipline for the believer is never about self-deprivation for the purpose of improvement. We can hold on to the wrong view of discipline.

[3:55] It is not about our efforts. Let me build a little bit of a case here. Because I think our perspective can be wrong. But if we kind of switch the talk of discipline over to the realm of child rearing, I think we understand a little better.

We birth and we raise children. We teach them how and tell them what to eat. We teach them how to do things like use the bathroom. We teach them how to dress.

We teach them how to read and do math. We teach them how to socialize. And how do we do this? We have to actually spend time with them.

We make them do some things and we take away other things. And for all those areas I mentioned, I have never had, in the six children I've raised so far, a child that just decided to do those things without discipline.

No child decides to dress themselves or feed themselves or teach themselves how to read. We all need someone on the outside to help us do those things.

[5:09] We understand that parents restrict things like sugar and screen time. That we have to make children do their homework and force siblings to sit next to each other in the back seat of the car and not pass over that invisible line that marks each child's spot.

See, we get it when it comes to child rearing. We understand that discipline is not about the child's efforts, right? It's the parents who discipline the child.

The Christian disciplines are about the source of discipline. When we look at a healthy, well-mannered, and educated child, we don't pat them on the head and say, good job, little boy. We look over at the parents and say, you've done a good job with this child. And what happens when we see a poorly disciplined child? Who gets the blame there?

Mom and dad. So why is it that we as Christians in the area of discipline try to take the glory for it and steal credit from God, the one actually responsible for it?

[6:28] Today, as we consider the discipline of the two gospel sacraments, baptism and Eucharist, we will see that the Christian walk is not about conducting certain ceremonies to be better people.

But it is about submitting to the discipline of a loving father who is actively walking with us and working in our lives. This is what separates Christianity from Islam and every other world religion. Discipline is not about working so that by some means, hopefully, we can cross the finish line and maybe earn our way into the presence of God.

Discipline for the follower of Christ is a sign that their future is already secure now. that they are now sons and daughters by grace through faith in the saving work of Christ.

We don't have to earn grace because it was already freely given to us. For this reason, the author of the epistle of Hebrews writes, Have you not forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

[7:35] My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives.

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?

If you are left without discipline in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 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? For our human fathers disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them.

But our heavenly father disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 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.

[8:45] The discipline of the father is our sign that we belong to him. Certainly we kind of understand this principle, right? If, say, Eric and I are standing at coffee hour and talking, and one of my children, I won't name names, I don't want to embarrass them, comes over and pours a cup of orange juice and splashes it in somebody's face.

Out of the two men standing there, there's going to be one that will charge forth and address the issue, right? And it's not going to be Eric, right? Because Eric doesn't have ownership of my son or daughter.

My children don't belong to Eric. It's not his call to discipline them. Whose call is it? It is mine as the father. As our father disciplines us, in other words, sets a rule of life for us to live, he is claiming us as his own.

Now, it may seem odd to speak about the painful part of discipline when dealing with the topics of joyful baptism and communion. But we need to remember that for some reason, as we consider Christian discipline, we kind of chunk it off into these little pieces.

That's not how discipline works. Everything is tied together. Discipline is about the whole movement, the whole process of raising sons and daughters, the whole process of making disciples.

[10:17] No parent thinks that they're going to successfully raise a child by solely using the time-out chair, right? We also do things like reward and encourage children.

We understand these things all kind of bleed into each other. It's hard to find out where one practice starts and one ends. So we can never talk about one Christian discipline without considering another.

Because our all-powerful God is ever with us and is always working in every aspect of our lives. Last week, we considered the discipline of rightly proclaiming the Word of God in our midst. Guess what? You can't rightly say you're doing that if you're not baptizing. You can't honor the Bible and not participate in communion.

In our future week, Caleb will preach on the discipline of regular church attendance. Where is it that you come to be baptized and partake in communion? Right here. You have to be here in order to take place in these disciplines.

[11:28] Maybe I seem like I'm being too simple. Maybe this seems too basic. But we really live in a wicked age where discipline is despised. We think that we can be Christians and just be ourselves.

I mean, we've all heard the I worship God out in the fields and the meadows on Sunday morning, right? And how dare you say I'm not behaving as a Christian and doing that. Scripture tells us one of the last signs of apostasy will be disobedience.

People that cast off the yoke of discipline. Now I'm going to say something that will make some people pretty hopping mad.

And if what I'm about to say makes you angry, I respectfully and lovingly tell you you're dead wrong on this. Here it is.

A person that has not been baptized and does not take part in the table of the Lord is not a Christian in the true sense of the word.

[12:43] A group that does not baptize and does not celebrate communion in the manner dictated by our Lord is not a church, no matter what the sign over the door says.

Amen. I do not stand alone in that understanding of what Scripture teaches. One of the earliest Reformed confessions, the Belgic Confession, says this.

We believe that we ought to discern diligently and very carefully by the word of God what is the true church. For all sects in the world today claim for themselves the name of the church.

We are not speaking here the company of hypocrites who are mixed amongst the good in the church and who nonetheless are not part of it even though they are physically there. But we are speaking of distinguishing the body and fellowship of the, and this is their words, not mine, the true church from all sects that call themselves the church.

In other words, what is really the church versus who are those that just call themselves the church? They continue. The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks.

[14:07] The church engages in pure preaching of the gospel. It makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them, and it practices church discipline.

For correcting faults, in short, it governs itself. this group of godly men thought it was important to make sure that they were living up to the commandments that Christ had left them.

But they're not the only ones that felt this way. Martin Luther wrote a long essay on the seven marks of the church. Again, we have that word marks being used. Maybe it's not just popular Bible teachers that use it.

Seven disciplines of the church. How do we tell that a church is a true church? I'm not going to read all seven marks, but here are the first three. First, this Christian holy people is to be known by this, that it has God's word.

Exactly what we talked about last week. Second, God's people, or the Christian holy people, is known by the Holy Sacrament of Baptism when it is rightly taught and believed and used according to Christ's ordinance.

[15:20] or how Christ ordered it. Third, God's people, or Christian holy church, is known by the Holy Sacrament of the Altar when it is rightly administered according to Christ's institution and is believed and received.

Luther thought this matter was very important. You might say, well, Anglicans don't come from the Belgic confessional tradition and we're not Lutherans, so what does it matter to us?

Well, in our confession, which is a little more concise, we have a whole article determined to this. Article 29 of the 39 articles of religion defines what a church is.

The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure word of God is preached, our mark, our discipline from last week. and the sacraments be rightly administered according to Christ's order.

In all those things, they're required to do the aforementioned things. Now, in 2019, my word that might sound very harsh, they might sound like the salty words of an out-of-time conservative or the aged personal opinion of a dead reformer.

[16:46] Scripture is very clear. You can't gather and call yourself church unless you do those things, those practices that Christ commanded the church to carry out.

The true church has always understood that the sacraments are a basic part of what it means to be part of the church. I think it's Acts 2.42, one of the first things we see when the Gospels proclaim is what takes place.

Many were baptized, right? And then they devoted themselves to what? The reading of Scripture, right? And the breaking of bread. Now, one word of warning.

Some of you heard my earlier statement and thought that I was saying baptism and communion are necessary for salvation. That is not at all what I am saying. The thief who hung on the cross dies without being baptized, having faith in Christ with full pardon from his sins and assurance of his eternal destiny in heaven.

However, if the thief had been removed from that cross and survived, my full expectation is that he would have followed his Lord in obedience, been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and regularly participated with the local body of believers and gathered in communion.

[18:21] What is the charge left of the church in the Great Commission? is it what some people say to just worship God wherever we choose out in that field and meadow?

I worship the nature, I see him everywhere around, etc., etc., etc. Or was it to secure the barest profession of faith possible without any true and formal commitment?

No, our Lord commanded, he did not suggest, he commanded that his church go into all the world making disciples, not in name only, but in practice, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that he commanded them, not just the parts they liked or felt comfortable with.

The sacraments are God's practical way of making us disciples, of setting us apart from the world around us and binding us to Christ. In our catechism, we read, a sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

God gives us a sign as a means whereby we receive that grace and as a tangible assurance that we do, in fact, receive it. These sacraments of Eucharist and baptism are a visible sign that shows we are part of the body of Christ.

[19:55] God uses them to separate us and sustain us, his chosen people. And he has done this in a visible way throughout salvation history as we saw in our Old Testament reading today.

And we saw Scripture was quite clear that Christ was present in and working through those visible signs. one example that we read in 1 Corinthians 10, I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea.

And all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. For they all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink.

Importantly, he writes, for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them and that rock was Christ.

Every member of the congregation of Israel was in a very real sense baptized as they crossed the departed Red Sea. It became part of their pilgrim identity.

[21:11] And as these strangers in a strange land were fed by heavenly manna on a daily basis until that point that they passed over from the time of wandering into the land of promise, so it is with us, brothers and sisters.

We are identified with Christ in our baptism and we are fed through the Holy Sacrament of Communion until that day he comes again. Jesus binds us unto himself in baptism and feeds us at the Eucharistic altar on a regular basis.

And in this we rejoice because we understand that we don't have to gut it out to work out our own salvation to hopefully maybe earn a place in his presence as we gather and are baptized, right?

No person has ever baptized himself. We understand that we are expressing our full reliance upon Christ who is infinitely able to carry us through this dark age, our wilderness, even the valley of the shadow of death.

And, because Christ is in our presence, we take the sacraments very seriously. The cup that is blessed is a participation in the blood of Christ.

[22:41] The bread that is broken joins us into one body. And, because we serve a jealous God, he calls us to participate in his table exclusively.

You cannot drink of both the cup of Christ and the cup of this world. for, Paul warns us, 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 the bread and drink of the cup. for anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.

I'm going to read that last line again because it matters. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.

When the Israelites turned from the heavenly manna to seek the meat they craved they faced judgment. They were not feeding upon Christ their salvation.

[24:00] An abandonment of the table or a failure to baptize is a declaration that we have turned from Christ and we don't need him.

Participating in either without repenting of sin is an act of blasphemy against the person of Jesus since we are claiming to be part of his body while continuing in works of evil.

So on a practical level what does that mean for us here at Trinity? Let's have a family talk together. This is a hypothetical situation I'm going to give you.

Should we face persecution or experience a lack of support monetary or otherwise? In other words, if Jim Fuller comes to me and tells me we've got about \$50 in the bank accounts and we got to start closing some programs down, we can shut down the coffee table, we can shut down VBS, we can shut down Sunday school, all these things are hypothetical, but those things we can shut down without shutting down the church because these things are not marks of the true church.

I wouldn't be happy about it, but it's not an end of the road type thing. We can cut all those programs and rightly say we are still a faithful church.

[25:38] church, but the two marks of preaching the word and observing the sacraments are a non-negotiable issue.

As Christians, it is your sworn duty to support these works. As long as these are being conducted, Christ is actively feeding his sheep.

And if you regularly abandon the preaching of the word and the table, you can expect a visit from Caleb or I to find out why you are not here.

We don't do this because we're angry. We do it because we love you and don't want you wandering in the wilderness cut off from the strength you need for the journey. And if you are participating in unrepentant sin, including, but not limited to sexual sin, theft, gossip, and slander, Caleb and I will block you from partaking of the body and blood of Christ.

We are not trying to punish you. We don't think we're better than you. Matter of fact, speaking for Caleb and myself, I think we're both pretty acutely aware that we are miserable, wretched sinners ourselves.

[27:12] That is why we call you to join us in the prayer of general confession every time we observe communion before it's observed. prayer. If you are blocked from the communion table, our call to you is repentance of restoration.

The reason we will not let you participate is because partaking would mean you would drink judgment and death upon yourself. At the Corinthians communion service, some were drinking in an unworthy manner and were even dying.

Eating from the Lord's table in an unworthy manner is just like the Israelites out in the wilderness chasing after that quail instead of the heavenly manna given to them.

It is inviting plague upon yourself and your household and as much as it is in our power, Kelb and I won't let that happen on our watch. But our call for you is to repent and to turn to Jesus.

Walk on the path of life in the power of the Holy Spirit. I leave you with the words of Paul. Whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty considering the body and blood of the Lord.

[28:35] Let a person then examine himself and so eat the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.

this is why so many of you are weak and ill and some have even died. But if we judged ourselves truly we would not be judged.

But when we are judged by the Lord we are disciplined so that we too may not be also condemned to the world.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.