

# *I Will Build My Church*

## The Purpose and Characteristics of Christ's Church 10 The Pure Administration of the Sacraments- Part 2

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March 22, 2020

### **Matthew 28:18b-20**

**18 ... All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.**

**19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,**

**20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

To the Glory of God

Now we are right in the middle of a new Sermon Series to begin this new year by defining just what a real, biblical Church looks like, so we can actually be a Church like that, so that we may bring Honor and Glory to the Lord Christ.

And so far, we carefully examined how the Nicene Creed defined the Church (One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic), and we have also begun to look at how the Belgic Confession of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century defines a true Church. In "Article 29" of the Belgic Confession, the early Leaders of the Protestant Reformation sought to define what a true Church looks like, and these Reformers taught that there were three main "marks" of a true Church:

1. The pure Preaching of the biblical Gospel.
2. The pure Administration of the Sacraments as Christ instituted them.
3. The pure Practice of "Church Discipline" for correcting faults.

.. and last time, we began to look at #2, and I want to finish that this morning.

### **2. A True Church Purely Administers the Sacraments as Christ Instituted Them**

Now last time, we looked in depth at the Lord's Supper and this morning I want to look closely at Baptism.

Now the failure to be obedient in the matter of Baptism, to take Baptism seriously, is at the root of some of many of the problems in people's lives and in the Church, in general, because it allows the Church to fill up with people who are unfaithful and disobedient to the Commands of the Lord and of His Word and that's very serious.

When Jesus said:

**"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you..."**

... He was giving a Command to the Apostles and to the Church at large, saying:

“Go out there, evangelize, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

This makes Baptism to be a Sacrament, or an “Ordinance”, of the Lord. And what is meant by the word “Ordinance” is that the Lord Jesus *commanded* Baptism, He expects it and ordained it in a way that would make Baptism the normal, ongoing practice of the Christian Church.

Now the phrase in verse 19 that has to do with “making disciples” is the main verb of this entire Passage. So what Jesus is saying is:

“Having gone (into all the earth), make disciples of all nations.”

And there are two defining participles in this passage:

1. Baptizing them
2. Teaching them

And the Christian Church is commanded to do *both* of these two things for *all* disciples through the end of this age. So, “making disciples of all nations” *includes* “baptizing them”. So, as far as Baptism is concerned, it is very clear that all genuine believers are *commanded* by the Lord of the Church:

1. To Baptize
2. To *be* Baptized

... as part of fulfilling this Great Commission.

And the time frame in this Passage is defined by the Promise of Christ's Divine Supernatural Help in **Matthew 28:18&20:**

- **All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth**
- **Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**

So, the Promise of Divine Help based on Jesus' Authority is for as long as "this Age" lasts. So therefore, the Command that Jesus promises to help us with is also for as long as this Age lasts. So, based upon this, we can conclude that:

Baptism is a Command and Sacrament of the Lord Jesus to be performed in making disciples until Christ returns at the end of the Age.

John Calvin taught:

"But the fanatics, such as Schuencfeldius, absurdly pervert this testimony, while they seek to take away from sacraments all their power and effect. For Peter did not mean here to teach that Christ's institution is vain and inefficacious, but only to exclude hypocrites from the hope of salvation, who, as far as they can, deprave and corrupt baptism. Moreover, when we speak of sacraments, two things are to be considered, the sign and the thing itself. In baptism the sign is water, but the thing is the washing of the soul by the blood of Christ and the mortifying of the flesh. The institution of Christ includes these two things. Now that the sign appears often inefficacious and fruitless, this happens through the abuse of men, which does not take away the nature of the sacrament. Let us then learn not to tear away the thing signified from the sign. We must at the same time beware of another evil, such as prevails among the Papists; for as they distinguish not as they ought between the thing and the sign, they stop at the outward element, and on that fix their hope of salvation. Therefore the sight of the water takes away their thoughts from the blood of Christ and the power of the Spirit. They do not regard Christ as the only author of all the blessings therein offered to us; they transfer the glory of his death to the water, they tie the secret power of the Spirit to the visible sign.

What then ought we to do? Not to separate what has been joined together by

the Lord. We ought to acknowledge in baptism a spiritual washing, we ought to embrace therein the testimony of the remission of sin and the pledge of our renovation, and yet so as to leave to Christ his own honor, and also to the Holy Spirit; so that no part of our salvation should be transferred to the sign. Doubtless when Peter, having mentioned baptism, immediately made this exception, that it is not the putting off of the filth of the flesh, he sufficiently shewed that baptism to some is only the outward act, and that the outward sign of itself avails nothing.”<sup>1</sup>

The Church then, is commissioned by the Lord Christ to do the work of baptizing. And since this is so crystal clear, it is amazing to witness these massive evangelistic crusades, these massive crowds of people, these huge crowds of people all supposedly coming to Christ for Salvation, and yet, you seldom, if ever, see a Baptism. And with the rise of the modern Christian Media outlets, Baptism is rarely even discussed, much less practiced.

Yet, when we examine the Biblical Record, on the day of Pentecost, when the Christian Church began, after Peter’s first Sermon, three thousand people believed the Gospel and three thousand people were baptized.

### **The Acts 2:40&41**

**And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.**

When the Holy Spirit spoke in **The Acts 2:38a** through the Apostle Peter:

### **Repent, and each of you be baptized...**

... He gave a Command to the individual who repents and believes to be Baptized. So, the Church is commanded “to Baptize”, and the individual believer is commanded “to be Baptized”. There is absolutely no lack of clarity or confusion about this anywhere in the Bible.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin; Commentary on 1Peter 3:21

And yet, in the modern Church, there is presently the largest *unbaptized* population of professing Christians in the history of Christianity. And for most of them, this really isn't something they're too concerned about. This reality, people who claim to be saved and yet failing to obey the Lord about Baptism is symptomatic of the independence and unfaithfulness of modern professing Christians who function autonomously like *consumers*, rather than under Church Theology and Authority.

In every case where The Great Commission is recorded in the Scriptures, there's an emphasis on Baptism. But, in spite of this, there is widespread noncompliance with what is a very simple Command.

But, at the same time, there is a rather strange paradox going on in that while genuine believers are not being baptized, we also see a very large population of baptized unregenerate people in the modern Church.

So, if there's anything that needs some clear teaching, I think we need to be taught about Baptism. And people in the Church who have a disregard for Baptism, or who have not been Baptized, fall into one of five categories:

1. They are Ignorant
2. They are Prideful
3. They are Indifferent
4. They are Defiant
5. They are Unregenerate

Let's examine these together.

## **1. Unbaptized People in the Church are Ignorant**

These people may very well be truly saved, but they attend a Church where the Bible is not taught at all, or is taught very poorly and haphazardly. As a Result, these truly saved people have never been taught about Baptism at all, or they haven't been taught correctly about Baptism, and know nothing about Baptism being a Commandment of the Lord Jesus.

Some of these would include those who have been taught that if they were "Baptized" or if they were "immersed" or "christened" as a

baby, that's sufficient. So as they grew and heard the Gospel, repented and trusted in Christ alone for salvation, based on the wrong of incomplete teaching that they received as a child, they think that they are in obedience when they are actually living in ongoing *disobedience*.

## **2. Unbaptized People in the Church are Prideful**

There are some people who have truly been born again, but, due to several reasons, they have allowed an extended period of time to lapse since their conversion and now they are ashamed to admit that they have never been obedient to the Lord 's Command to be Baptized, and so they remain unbaptized due to their pride.

Many of these people have truly known Christ for a long time, they are involved with the local Church, they have developed a reputation as being Christian people, but they have never been Baptized. And the fear of being embarrassed about this keeps them disobedient because they're not willing to humble themselves and admit they've been disobedient and go ahead and be baptized.

This second reason may also be due to the Church not doing enough to verify that its members have been obedient about this issue.

## **3. Unbaptized People in the Church are Indifferent**

There are plenty of people in our modern culture who simply can't be bothered with any requirement, any demand, or any expectation, even from the Lord. They never can seem to find a spot in their Daytimer for obedience about Baptism. To them, getting wet and going through all of that is simply not a priority.

These people know it's commanded in the Bible, but obedience about many aspects of Christianity isn't the main thing with them. They have other priorities.

Again, the Leaders of the Church have an obligation here to assure that all of its members are "baptized believers", and should work hard to expect compliance with this issue, or to begin the process of Church Discipline. Indifference to Commands of the Lord is not a Christian Attribute and should be confessed as "sin" and turned from.

## **4. Unbaptized People in the Church are Defiant**

This is a step above Indifferent. It is theoretically possible for these people to be genuinely born again, but these people are rebels and they are blatantly refusing to obey the clear Command of the Owner and Creator of the Universe about Baptism, and should be *immediately* placed under Church Discipline.

In most cases, those who are blatantly rebelling against being Baptized are sinning in many different ways on an ongoing basis, and it would only elevate their outward hypocrisy if they were to give a testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ and celebrate His wonderful Redemption on their behalf by being Baptized. So, these people are going to need to be examined and shepherded along several different lines before they should be Baptized.

## **5. Unbaptized People in the Church are not Regenerate**

People who are not truly converted have no desire to make a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ because they really don't want to be identified with Him in a public way. They may well enjoy being physically in the Church, or they may feel comfortable hanging on the edges and on the fringes of true Faith, but they are not about to take a public stand with Christ.

And the issue of unsaved people being in the Church and remaining in the Church, and fully participating in the blessings and virtue and Grace of the Church, is a very serious issue that has to be addressed on an ongoing basis. God's Biblical Plan is that the Church for which Christ died should be a collection of called out and chosen genuinely redeemed individuals who are earnestly and faithfully seeking to be found faithful and obedient to what The Lord of the Church has instructed, and that effort has to include Baptism.

Most of the modern mass evangelized, TV, radio, and stadium "converts" have been basically left to themselves without the benefit of Scriptural guidance and with little or no accountability for being obedient about Baptism and a whole host of other things. And this strikes to the conscience of every believer about whether or not they understand Church Authority. Baptism is, therefore, critical and important. And it must be understood, and it must be practiced.

Baptism is not a minor matter, and, thus, it commands our attention. Baptism is a Biblical issue and one that should re-emerge as a *primary* Ministry of the Christian Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Now there are two more Issues that I want to address before we leave the subject of the Sacraments:

1. Infant Baptism
2. Foot washing

## **Infant Baptism**

Now there is much to say about Infant Baptism, and I have written another "White Paper" on this subject that is available on the Church Website. But let me say that what has happened as a result of Infant Baptism being carried out by many is that there is now much confusion as to the identity of the Christian Church. And that confusion stems from the failure to distinguish between the visible *local* Church, including unbelievers, and the invisible *universal* Church which consists only of believers.

In fact, those who espouse Paedo-baptism (Infant Baptism) are left to explain just who is a Member. Are babies who are baptized Members of the Church or not? If so, precisely how is Church Discipline exercised on people who are too young and immature to know "Right" from "Wrong"? And precisely how does the Holy Spirit engage in ongoing Sanctification on babies? Further confusion lies in the failure to differentiate clearly between what it means to be a "little member of the Covenant" as a baptized baby, and what it means to be a true believing child of God.

We must acknowledge that the Scriptures teach that the one true Church is made up of only believers. The Church in the Bible is fully regenerate. Unbelievers may physically attend the Church services, but they are *not* members of the Body of Jesus Christ. And that fact is fundamentally distinct from the Israel of the Old Testament.

All other human beings who may physically attend the Church services, apart from genuine believers, whether baptized or not baptized, whether confirmed or not confirmed, do *not* belong to the redeemed Church. They are, at best, "tares" that will one day be



burned. They are, at best, fruitless “branches” that will be cut off and burned.

This confusion is compounded because in our day you have legions of people, both Catholics and Protestants, who have been baptized as babies, who range anywhere from the hypocritically religious, to the apostate religious, to the unconcerned and indifferent, to the outright godless, Christ-rejecting and blasphemous.

And the question that Infant Baptism forces on us is, *are these people in the Church or out of the Church?* And if they're *not* a part of the true Church, precisely *when* did they get out of it because they were baptized in the Church as infants.

## **Keeping Up with Rome**

The Truth is that Infant Baptism is simply a holdover from the absolutist State/Church system in Europe that began with Rome, and which sadly crept over into some Reformed circles. During the Reformation, it was important that Rome had more numbers so they could influence the Government in their direction. So, they baptized as many children as they could. And as the Protestants saw their side losing ground *politically*, some of them, regretfully, adopted the same unbiblical technique.

So Infant Baptism stood as evidence of an *incomplete* Reformation which sentenced that new redeemed community (The Reformers) in Europe to the terrible death that it died, the death of which we can see even today.

The Truth is that unless you have a fully regenerate Church, you have chaos. But as the Reformers saw the power that was concentrated in the absolute “church system” through the “national sovereign church of Rome”, they desired to dilute that control and attempted to counter Rome.

So while it is true that Luther started out with the good intention of “freedom of the conscience” many of the Reformers started imposing *everything* on the people, and they *forced* Infant Baptism back in, which allowed them to have a power base from which to fight against not only each other (the Lutheran fought the Reformed), but also the Roman States as well.

We have to be clear that "State Christendom", in every form, Catholic, Protestant, Lutheran or Reformed, totally misunderstands and brings great confusion to the concept of the New Testament Church. And it's very sad to think that Luther abandoned his original lofty idealism where he contended for a Christianity of freedom and renouncing force and living by the Word and the Spirit, and "backed up" into a State/Church perspective.

But, as he failed in this, Luther nevertheless said this, which is perhaps the truest expression of his heart about this issue:

"I say that God wants no compulsory service. I say it a hundred thousand times, God wants no compulsory service. No one can or ought to be compelled to believe for the soul of man is an eternal thing above all that is temporal. Therefore only by an eternal Word must it be governed and grasped"

"It is simply insulting to govern in God's Presence with human law and long custom. Neither the Pope, nor a Bishop, nor any other Man has the right to decree a single syllable concerning a Christian man apart from his consent. All that comes to pass otherwise comes to pass in the spirit of tyranny."

Sadly, however, Luther eventually allowed and promoted what he hated, which only serves to teach us that good men can fail horribly. So, in looking back at the Reformation with 20-20 hindsight, there is no greater tragedy than that the true Church was crushed and hidden underneath the massive weight of the State/Church *system*.

We must remember that there is no such thing as a "Doctrine of the Remnant" taught anywhere in the New Testament. The infinitely superior New Covenant proclaims a saved Church with regenerate members. But with the obscuring of Reformation light, the Church became secularized, and the very thing that Constantine had brought in and which the early teachings of the Reformation sought to remove were eventually allowed back in, and then formalized.

And, today, modern Protestant Europe is just as dark and cold as old Catholic Europe ever was. Any concept that promotes a State/Church model will *a/ways* be at odds with Biblical Christianity and the one will war against the other.

The true Church over which Christ is Head is not of this world, and does not incorporate the unconverted. Infant Baptism served the State/Church system well for a time, but it horribly confuses the manifestation of the one true Church.

## **Infant Baptism is Not Consistent with Reformational Soteriology**

As we all struggle in our day to “get the Gospel right”, and we wade through all the hype and emotionalism and the myriad of opinions and the designer relationships that typifies the modern Church. which have much more to do with human psychology than Biblical Christianity, the clarity of the Gospel becomes paramount. If it is true (and it is) that no one is saved unless and until they hear and believe the Gospel, then knowing and preaching and proclaiming and obeying that Gospel consumes the efforts of Ministry for a true Church.

And as one spends hours studying so that he can be certain that what he believes and teaches about Salvation is indeed what Scripture says, it becomes increasing difficult to understand what contribution that Infant Baptism brings to that effort other than complete confusion.

There is no faith in the child there is no comprehension of the Gospel, and there is no repentance in the child, so precisely what is it and what do we have as a result? Some who espouse this unbiblical practice will say, “*You have a “peremptory election act”, or a “peremptory salvation act” in the child.*” Which are just words without meaning, sheer nonsense. And you can find all sorts of strange comments that people make as they engage in *spiritual gymnastics* struggling to put this “square peg” (Infant Baptism) into a “round hole” (Biblical Soteriology), but you simply cannot “get there from here”.

So, while they all agree that Infant Baptism doesn’t actually “save” the child, they still affirm that it puts the infant in some “place” where they are somehow more fortunate than the unbaptized and more likely to be blessed by God. But when you really analyze those statements, it’s no different a place than *any* child would have, baptized or unbaptized, who is blessed to live in a godly environment which is the *only* point of **1 Corinthians 7**.

So Infant Baptism is a needless thing to do, because:

- ✓ It ministers no saving Grace to the child

- ✓ It guarantees no future Salvation to the child

But, on the other hand, Infant Baptism is not “neutral” because it perpetuates a terrible and confusion misconception in the mind of the parents that, against all Biblical or Historical evidence, this child is “somewhat saved” or “kinda- sorta saved” or “almost saved but not quite” because of some unexplained event that supposedly occurred at their Baptism.

Luther finally had to teach that the infant who is baptized has something called “unconscious faith”, because Luther knew good and well that Salvation was by faith alone, yet this great man that God absolutely used to begin the Reformation nevertheless tried to make the Truth about Salvation fit in with Infant Baptism.

But the reality is that children are children, and they do not understand, therefore they *cannot* believe. So, what is the purpose of convoluting the purity and the clarity of The Doctrine of Justification by Grace through Faith alone to the one who comes and repents of sin and embraces Jesus Christ with this unbiblical act which admittedly:

- Has no saving efficacy
- Delivers no redeeming Grace
- Infers no Faith
- Is not symbolic of any Union with Christ

So, what is left with Infant Baptism? Only to confound the person about what it actually means, and to confound the Church with an unregenerate membership, and to confound the lost world about who truly represents the Lord.

Why not simply defer the Sign until the reality of Saving Faith is made evident? Nothing is lost. It certainly doesn’t change Election, and it doesn’t change anything about the child. But by engaging in something that the Bible doesn’t teach, the child’s and the Church’s and the lost world’s understanding of true Salvation becomes complicated and clouded.

By Baptizing only those who are mentally able to make a cognizant difference between that which is holy and that which is profane would break no Law of God, it would hinder no one’s Faith, yet the confusion in the Church would be greatly reduced while the Church

itself would be instantly purged. Christ would be greatly honored if there weren't millions of people outside of genuine Salvation running around with a false Security and bearing an untrue Symbol of an unreal condition. So, this is a way in which we could actually finish the Reformation in our day.

Infant Baptism embodies dead, lifeless ritualism, confuses Salvation, and produces a Church with both saved and lost members. Believers Baptism affirms a Salvation by Faith alone, upholds the Glory of the Cross and the Resurrection, and preserves the true identity of the Redeemed Church. We must remember that the cry that ignited the Reformation and a glorious return to Scripture was not, "*Tradition, Tradition, Tradition*", it was not, "*The Fathers, The Fathers, The Fathers*", but it was, "*Scripture, Scripture, Scripture!*"

## Foot Washing

Now, like Marriage, this is an issue that I personally struggle with. And here's why:

### John 13:1-17

**1** Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon, to betray Him, *Jesus*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "**What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.**" Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "**If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.**" Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." Jesus said to him, "**He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.**" For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "**Not all of you are clean.**" So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments

and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, "**Do you know what I have done to you? "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for *so* I am. "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor *is* one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.**

So, for many decades of my Christian walk, I participated in foot washing. Why? Because my Teacher and Lord, Jesus Christ, did, and He said:

**"If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor *is* one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.**

... so, to me, Jesus was setting forth a literal example that we should obey. And, if we did obey, we would be blessed, just like Jesus said.

Now all during the years, many people came to me and told me that I was wrong. But, when I asked them *why* I was wrong, the best they had to offer me was, "*Jesus was merely giving us an example of Humility, not a literal example.*" And my response was always, "*Look, I'm all about Humility, but if Jesus wanted us to be humble, all He had to do was to tell us to be humble. He didn't need this example to teach Humility. Also, the Epistles do teach Humility, so this had to be more than that.*" A few others would tell me that there was no extra-biblical records that recorded any foot washing.

But my problem was that these detractors never gave me Scripture to back up my honest and sincere effort to obey the clear meaning of Scripture. They gave me an *interpretation* of Scripture, that to me, was not as valid as the clear meaning of Scripture itself. And they gave me History, but no Scripture. So, I considered myself to be more in line with the concept of "Sola Scriptura" than they were. And so, I continued the practice.

But then I ran into a problem that I simply could not overcome. **The Book of the Acts of the Apostles**, which is basically the diary of the Church during its first 30 years of operation, did not record a single

instance of foot washing. The Apostle Paul commissioned a Gentile medical doctor, Luke, to write about the struggles and victories of the early Church. And that Book records several instances of believers Baptism by immersion, and it records several times of Communion (the Lord's Supper), but no foot washing. And that was enough for me. So, I ceased the practice of foot washing based on the fact that the Bible does NOT record a single instance of foot washing after Jesus did it on the last night of His earthly Life.

It also was troubling me that by continually practicing foot washing, I was making it the third Sacrament which I knew was wrong. So, here is my position as of this moment about foot washing:

Whatever Freedom I might have to personally engage in foot washing, I have no Biblical Authority to *impose* this practice on anyone else as a Sacrament.

Also, in his commentary on the *Gospel of John*, RC Sproul has noted:

“... the majority of the Church during the first 300 years of existence did not regarded foot washing as a Sacrament because the central Significance of foot washing is the same as the central Significance of Baptism... Jesus’ washing of His disciples’ feet illustrated the cleansing from Sin that He alone provides. But we already have water Baptism to signify and seal that- and so, foot washing was considered redundant.”<sup>2</sup>

Now, over the years, several people have expressed concern that the Pastor of this Church has changed positions on some important subjects over the years. For example, I used to believe and teach that genuine believers could lose their Salvation. I no longer believe or teach that. I used to believe and teach that lost people were saved because of what they did for themselves. I now believe and teach that Salvation is wholly of the Lord. I used to believe and teach that the Gifts of the Spirit illustrated in **1 Corinthians 12&14** were still viable today. I no longer believe or teach that.

But the reason I have changed is *not* because I am flexible on Doctrine, or that I haven't thought things through very well, or that I am trying to fit in with somebody else's Theology. No, the reason I have

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<sup>2</sup> RC Sproul; *The Gospel of John Commentary*; pg 185

changed my position on several Issues over the years is that I have become convinced by Scripture. The Pastor of the Covenant of Peace Church is spending an enormous amount of time reading and studying and researching and agonizing over the Word of God. And I am spending an enormous amount of time on my face crying out to God for Mercy and Illumination. And, I have come to realize that, I was wrong about some Issues. And when I become convinced by Scripture that I have believed wrongly or taught wrongly about an Issue, I immediately repent. I have repented from this pulpit, and I have repented on the radio. I have even gone to people and I have stood before entire congregations to repent of positions I have taken over the years. I don't know how to be more honest than that.

Now maybe that troubles you. But I see it as a good thing. I see it as a sincere and honest effort to grow in Grace and the Knowledge of God. And I see it as the best way I can approach the Bible and on leading this Church. And, I also see it as being perfectly in line with the Reformers, who also taught another Latin phrase:

### *Semper Reformanda, Always Reforming*

Now many people today use this phrase. But in his book, *“Reformed and Always Reforming”*, Mike Horton explains the origins of this oft-repeated phrase.

“The saying first appeared in 1674 in a devotional book by Jodocus van Lodenstein. As a key figure in the Dutch Second Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*), van Lodenstein wanted to see the members of the Dutch church, which had seen its doctrine become Reformed during the Reformation, continue to pursue reformation in their lives and practices. His concern was personal piety, not doctrinal progressivism. Yet that isn't quite true. Because it is very important to understand the *entirety* of what the Reformers meant by using that phrase. The entire Latin statement is:

*Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbi Dei*

... and it means:



The Church is Reformed, and always in need of being Reformed  
according to the Word of God”<sup>3</sup>

Now I would like you to notice a few things about this:

First, the phrase begins by addressing the Church that is already Reformed. Given van Lodenstein’s context in the Netherlands, we are right to capitalize the word “Reformed”. So, this statement was actually not generally about all the various churches of the Reformation (though it has application for those churches, too). Rather, van Lodenstein was specifically addressing the Dutch Church that had identified as “Confessionally Reformed”, specifically in subscription to the “Three Forms of Unity”<sup>4</sup>.

In other words, far from encouraging “Doctrinal *Innovation*”, the original phrase presumes “Doctrinal *Stability*”. So, whatever *Semper Reformanda* means, it *CANNOT* mean:

Figure out your Theological Standards on the fly.

Second, the Latin verb *reformanda* is passive, which, as Horton points out, does NOT mean that the Church is “always reforming”, but rather that the Church is “always *being* reformed.” And the difference is consequential. The former sounds like change for the sake of change, while the latter suggests adhering to the proper Standard. The passive construction also suggests that there is an external agent operating upon the Church to bring about the necessary Reform.

Which leads to the most important point: the Christian Church is “always being reformed” *according to the Word of God*. There is *nothing* “Reformed” or “Reformational” about changing the Church’s Theology and Ethics to get on “the right side of history”, or to stay current with the insights of the Social Sciences, or even to prove that we “love the least of these”. The motto of the Reformation was NOT “Forward!” ,but “Backward!”, as in, “Back to the Source!” (*ad fontes*).

As Horton puts it, the Reformers:

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Horton; *Always Reformed; Essays in Honor of W. Robert Godfrey*; pgs 116-134

<sup>4</sup> The Belgic Confession; the Canons of Dort; and the Heidelberg Catechism

“... wanted to recover something that had been lost, not to follow the winds of a rising modernity”<sup>5</sup>

Horton went on to say:

“If the church can never stand still, it is because it always needs re-orientation according to the Word that is over us”<sup>6</sup>

So, *Semper Reformanda* is NOT about constant fluctuations, but about Firm Foundations. It is about a radical adherence to the Holy Scriptures, no matter the cost to ourselves, our traditions, or our own fallible sense of cultural relevance.

If some people, who lay claim to be saved, want to change the Church's Sexual Ethics, so be it. But don't you dare drape yourself with the mantle of the Reformers when you do it. The only Reformation worth promoting and praying for is the one that gets us *deeper* into our Bibles, NOT farther away.

So, yes, we are to “stand our ground”, “hold fast”, and “guard the good deposit”. And yet we are to be open to Change, whenever we become convinced that we have drifted from the Truth of Scripture, or that we have failed to grow up in it as we should. And *that* is why the Pastor of this Church changes positions.

So, I pray that we can all agree that the Scriptures declare that there are two Sacraments:

1. The Lord's Supper (Communion)
2. Baptism

... and a true Church will be purely administering both of these Sacraments on a regular basis in the very same manner as Christ instituted them in the first place.

Amen. Let's pray.

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Horton; *Always Reformed; Essays in Honor of W. Robert Godfrey*; pg 123

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 125

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.