

Jeff Applegate  
Houston Christian University  
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Dr. Chris Sneller

### **Doctrine of Ecclesiology**

Ecclesiology is the study of things pertaining to the church. In this essay, I will address the essentials of what the church is, the essential beliefs of the church, and the essential acts of the church. I will also address some of the non-essential practices that both unite a community of believers and tragically divide the community of believers from the saving work for all mankind.

### **The Church Is**

The Christian church is one church, embodying a worldwide community of believers united in the common faith in the persons of the triune God.<sup>i</sup> Through the power of the atoning work of Jesus and individual faith in the person, life and redemptive work of Jesus, the Christian church is holy and distinct from the world.<sup>ii</sup> Jesus is head of the church having all rule and authority.<sup>iii</sup> Scripture declares that the church should be governed by Elders from among the members.<sup>iv</sup>

### **The Church Believes**

The church shares in the in the essentials of the Christian faith. There is one God represented in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>v</sup> God created of all that is.<sup>vi</sup> God enjoys perfect fellowship and perfect righteousness with Himself, and God created man in His image.<sup>vii</sup> Man chose to disobey the commands of God becoming unrighteous with God breaking the relationship with Him. In the fullness of God's character in love, He established a plan of redemption for mankind through His divine grace.<sup>viii</sup> The church believes in God's redemption plan to offer Himself in the person of Jesus, Son of God<sup>ix</sup>, in fulfillment of the Scriptures<sup>x</sup> to be conceived by the Spirit, born of a virgin,<sup>xi</sup> to be fully human<sup>xii</sup> and fully divine<sup>xiii</sup> and to live a life without sin.<sup>xiv</sup> The church believes that Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross provided atonement for the sins of mankind for those who believe.<sup>xv</sup> The church believes Jesus was resurrected from death and ascended in bodily form to be joined with God the Father in heaven.<sup>xvi</sup> The church believes that the Spirit of God resides in those who believe<sup>xvii</sup> in Jesus and Jesus acts as our Priest to intercede between God and man.<sup>xviii</sup> The church believes that Jesus will return to restore His kingdom on earth.<sup>xix</sup> The church believes the Scripture is the Word of God revealing Himself and His plan to redeem and restore mankind to fellowship with Himself.<sup>xx</sup>

### **The Church Acts**

The church acts in the communities where they live and work to fulfill the commands of Jesus to share the gospel, make disciples and equip the saints.<sup>xxi</sup> The church shares the gospel through teaching and instructing from the Scriptures the life of Jesus as modeled by the apostles.<sup>xxii</sup> The church makes disciples of Jesus through the teaching of the Scriptures.<sup>xxiii</sup> The church relies on the power of the Spirit and submits their requests to God through prayer.<sup>xxiv</sup> The church is commanded to love one another and grow in fellowship and community to strengthen, and build up one another.<sup>xxv</sup> Jesus instituted two celebrations that all believers are to observe; water baptism<sup>xxvi</sup> and communion<sup>xxvii</sup> which flow from a healthy community committed to prayer and worship of the Lord Jesus. I believe baptism is best when practiced following a credible profession of faith as a testimony and witness to the spiritual change that has occurred.<sup>xxviii</sup> The church equips the saints through the teaching of Scripture that provides instruction for living a life right with God and men.<sup>xxix</sup> The church corrects and disciplines it's body according to the instructions of Jesus.<sup>xxx</sup>

### **Church Diversity**

The church includes all mankind from all continents, every race, and all cultures and traditions.<sup>xxxi</sup> Individuals created in the image of God are endowed with unique personalities and personal preferences that share in the essential faith of the Christian church but practice their faith in a variety of ways.<sup>xxxii</sup> These practices do not separate them from the unified community of the Christian church but are non-essential practices that express personal preferences and traditions through the organization of church denominations or individual church practices. Examples include church organization and governance, the method of baptism, frequency of communion, style of worship and beliefs in non-essential elements of the faith such as eschatology, election, and spiritual gifts. Unfortunately, these non-essentials have divided the church and often divert or confuse the essential faith of the Christian church. It is my prayer that we may join St. Augustine of Hippo in his hope that that in the essentials, the church will practice unity, in the non-essentials the church will accept liberty, and in all things the church will practice love for one another.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> The Father, Son and Spirit are essential to the Christian faith. 1 Cor. 8:6, Matt. 28:19, Jn. 15:26; All three persons of God are present at the baptism of Jesus. Matt. 3:16-17.

<sup>ii</sup> The church is not of this world but has been chosen out of this world as citizens of heaven. 1 Pet. 2:9-12, Phil 3:20-21, Jn:15:18-19, Col. 1:13.

<sup>iii</sup> Jesus is the firstborn from the dead and is the head of the body, the church. Col.1:18, Eph. 1:22, Eph. 5:23; Jesus is fully divine, and He is the head over all rule and authority. Col. 2:10.

<sup>iv</sup> The Apostle Paul give clear instructions on how the church is to be governed and gives instructions and qualifications for Elders. Acts 14:23, 1 Tim. 5:17, 1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4.

<sup>v</sup> The scriptures declare that there is one God and no other besides Him. Deut. 4:35, Deut. 6:4, Ps. 83:18, Ps 86:10, Isa. 43:10, Isa. 44:6, Eph. 4:6. The three persons were present at creation. Gen. 1:1-2, Jn. 1:1-3. The Apostle Paul speaks of the three persons of God working together in his blessing to the Corinthians bestowing the grace of Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Spirit. 2 Cor. 13:14; All persons of the Trinity are present at the baptism of Jesus. Mark 1:9-11; We are commanded to make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. 1 Peter 1:2. The Triune God is described to be operating in a variety of gifts but the same Spirit, a variety of ministries but the same Lord, and a variety of effects but the same God. 1 Cor. 12:4-6.

<sup>vi</sup> Scriptures open with God creating the stars and moons, the heavens and the earth, and all that covers and populates the earth. Gen. 1:1-2:25, Jn. 1:1-3.

<sup>vii</sup> The triune God says, "Let us make man in Our own image, according to Our likeness." Gen. 1:26-27.

<sup>viii</sup> Love is the foundation on which we receive the grace of Christ and experience the fullness of God. Eph. 3:17-21, Jn. 1:16; His redemption plan started before the foundation of the world. Eph. 1:4; In the fullness of time, God sent His Son to redeem those under the law. Gal. 4:4-5, Jn. 3:16, Heb. 9:15; Jesus proclaims the purpose for which He came", the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel." Mk. 1:15; It is by grace that you have been saved. Eph. 2:8-9.

<sup>ix</sup> God sent His Son so that all will be saved. Jn. 3:16.

<sup>x</sup> The mystery of Christ has been revealed to all nations according to the Scriptures and God's command. Rom. 16:25-26.

<sup>xi</sup> Jesus was born of the Spirit to a virgin. Luke 1:35.

<sup>xii</sup> Jesus was of human flesh and experienced the fullness of humanity. Jn. 1:14, 1Jn. 4:2: He experienced physical and emotional pain. Heb. 4:15, Jn. 11:33-35, Jn. 19:28, Mt. 4:2, Mt. 26:38, 1 Pet 2:24.

<sup>xiii</sup> Jesus was God. Heb. 1:3, 1 Tim. 2:5, Jn. 1:14, Jn. 10:30, Col. 1:15-16, Col. 2:9.

<sup>xiv</sup> Declared innocent by Pilate. Jn. 18:38; Jesus was tempted, but without sin. Heb. 4:15, 1 Jn. 3:5, 2 Cor. 5:21.

<sup>xv</sup> He was crucified, died and buried. Matt. 27:35, 50, 60. Blood is established as atonement for our sins. Lev. 17:11; His death satisfied God's requirement for justice for those that believe. Isa. 53:5, 1 Pet. 2:24, 1 Pet. 3:18, Mt. 26:28, 1 Jn. 2:2, Rom. 5:6-11; All who believe are saved. Rom. 1:16, Rom. 10:9, Rom. 10:13, Jn. 3:16, Jn. 5:24.

<sup>xvi</sup> The tomb is empty, and Jesus has risen and conquered death. Mk. 16:6, Matt. 28:6. After appearing to many, Jesus ascended to heaven. Mk. 16:19. Jesus is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us today. Rom. 8:34.

<sup>xvii</sup> Our bodies are temples which the Spirit resides in believers. 1 Cor.3:16, Jn. 14:16, Jn. 20:22, Acts 1:8.

<sup>xviii</sup> Jesus is our High Priest interceding for those who believe. and the Spirit intercedes for believers to God. Heb. 4:14, Heb. 7:26, Heb. 9:12, Rom. 8:34.8:16, Rom. 8:26-27, Jn 14:6.

<sup>xix</sup> Jesus Himself declares He will return in glory to judge all men living and those who have died. Matt. 25:31-46; He will judge the living and the dead. Acts 10:42, Rom. 2:16; He will rule in peace and His kingdom will have no end. Isa. 9:7, Luke 1:33, Rev. 11:15.

Jesus Himself declares that he will return in glory to judge all men living and those who have died before his return. Matt. 25:31-46; Jn. 5:26-29; Acts 10:42; Rom. 2:16. He will rule in peace and His kingdom will have no end. Isa. 9:7, Luke 1:33, Rev. 11:15.

<sup>xx</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God. 2 Tim. 3:16-17, 1 Thess. 2:13, Eph. 6:17, Heb. 4:12, Isa. 55:11; All of Scripture declare God's plan for the redemption of man. Gen. 3:15, Gen. 15:6, Gen. 12 – 15, Jn. 1:1–18, Matt. 28:18-20

<sup>xxi</sup> Jesus instructs the Christians to make disciples, baptize them and teach them all that he has commanded. Matt. 28:19-20, Eph 4:11-13.

<sup>xxii</sup> Jesus instructs believers to follow Him and was taught by the Apostles. Matt. 16:24, 1 Cor. 11:1, Jn. 12:26.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Matt. 28:19-20.

<sup>xxiv</sup> The church petitions God through prayer. Phil. 4:6, Jas. 5:16, 1 Tim. 2:8, Mk. 11:24, Matt. 6:9-13.

<sup>xxv</sup> The church is instructed to love one another. Jn. 13:34, 1 Pt. 4:8, Rom. 12:10, Jn. 15:12, 1 Jn. 4:7-10.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Jesus commands us to baptize believers. Matt. 28:19, Mk. 16:16, Rom. 6:4, Gal. 3:27, Acts 10:48, Acts 22:16.

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<sup>xxvii</sup> Also referred to as the Lord's Supper or Eucharist (Greek eucharistia = thanksgiving), believers who are many are one body and celebrate the sacrifice of Jesus in the breaking of the body and the shedding of blood as represented in the breaking of bread and drinking of the wine. 1 Cor. 10:16-17, Matt. 26:26, 1 Cor. 11:24. Jesus instituted communion at His last supper. Matt. 26:26-29 and Paul instructs believers. 1 Cor. 10:14-22, 11:17-34. There are several views regarding the nature of communion that have been adopted. The Roman Catholic believe the bread and body are miraculously changed into the body of Christ and the wine in the blood of Christ by the power of God. The Lutheran view Christ is truly present in in His deity and humanity with the bread and wine. The view I most align with is the Baptist view communion as a "memorial" or remembrance of Christ's sacrifice of his body and blood as Christ resides in heaven. Jesus instructs us to "do this in remembrance of me." Luke 22:19. Other Reformed Protestant churches recognize the bread and wine as not only symbols, but by Christ's spiritual presence He presents Himself and His saving benefits through grace.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Baptism by immersion visually demonstrates the spiritual cleansing from the curse of sin and death to rise with Christ as a new life. Rom. 6:3-5, Gal. 3:26-28. Believers have been cleansed from their sin by faith. Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16.

<sup>xxix</sup> Scripture is profitable for training in how to live right with God. 2 Tim. 3:16-17, Heb. 4:12, Ps. 119:11, Ps. 119:105.

<sup>xxx</sup> As shepherds of the flock, the elders are to love the sheep (congregation) and are held accountable by God for their spiritual welfare, including disciplining those who practice sin particularly unrepentant sin. Jesus establishes a four-step process of church discipline: (1) tell him his sin alone; (2) take some witnesses; (3) tell the church; and (4) treat him as an outsider. Matt. 18:15-17; Paul instructs the church to expel a member from the church due to unrepentant sin. 1 Cor. 5:13, 1 Cor. 5:11; Discipline protects the church. 1 Cor 5:6, 1 Tim. 5:20; Discipline is to be conducted with humble love and never in a spirit of self-righteousness. 2 Thess. 3:15.

<sup>xxxi</sup> The gospel is for all men. Mk. 16:15, Jn. 3:16, Eph. 2:8-9, Gal. 3:28, Rom. 1:16.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Believers are uniquely created to serve one another. Rom. 12:4-5, 1 Cor. 1:10, Eph. 4:16, 1 Cor. 12:4-11.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Walter Fenton, "In Essentials Unity," 2021, Wesleyan Covenant Association,

<https://wesleyan covenant.org/2021/06/10/7680-2/#:~:text=The%20succinct%20quote%2C%20%E2%80%9CIn%20essentials,of%20theologians%20in%20between%20them>