

Articles of the Christian Faith & Practice

Abstract: These articles of Christian faith and practice are concise expressions of biblical teaching concerning the nature of God, the authority of Scripture, the formation of the Church, and the life of Christian discipleship. This work was first written on the mission field in service of a diverse group of Christians from around the world. Some years later it then underwent structural revision. This work aims to clarify biblical doctrines for the sake of unified Christian ministry and fellowship so that Christians of different backgrounds can learn to live in harmony. This work does not attempt to resolve every theological question because doing so compromises the foundation of grace necessary to maintain unity within questionable matters. Therefore, striving to maintain unity in revealed truth, I present these articles as a focused guide to help Christians work through the questions of faith and practice.

Articles of Christian Faith

These articles express what we believe about the divine self-revelation pertaining to the nature, person, and work of God, and the authority of Scripture. They are the foundation of the Christian faith upon which we all must stand. And they intentionally and carefully reflect the historic Christian faith across two millennia. Adherence to this faith is *necessary* for providing the requisite theological cohesion for meaningful Christian unity.

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

The the nature and being of God is the most sacred truth of the Christian Church upon which the whole of our faith and practice stands. This truth is revealed through divine self-revelation in Scripture, confirmed by apostolic witness, and faithfully preserved in the historic confessions of the Church.

We affirm both the unity of God and the real distinctions of the three persons, guarding the Church's confession from error while preserving the mystery of the divine being. We affirm both that Yahweh is one and the full, eternal co-participation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the one divine life. We affirm that the Father sends the Son for our salvation, and through the Son sends the Holy Spirit to give new life to his people.

We believe that the doctrine of God is essential the basis for unity in the Christian faith and that departure from these doctrines necessarily results in full division for the preservation of unity for the remaining faithful.

Yahweh is One: there is no other

The Father is almighty and unbegotten, who eternally begets the Son and from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds. He is the maker of heaven and earth, who sends the Son for our redemption and, through him, sends the Spirit, that he might adopt a people as his children and bring them into his eternal life.

The Son is eternally begotten of the Father, who condescended to take on flesh and ascended to glory; the personal Word of God made incarnate to declare the radiance of God's glory and provide the atoning sacrifice for sin, that he might redeem the lost, become their high priest, and be the firstborn among many brethren.

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, who dwells with his people. He is the Lord and giver of life, who sustains all creation and applies the redeeming work of the Son, giving new birth to God's children, sanctifying them and empowering them with gifts to walk in holiness and bear witness to Christ.

Therefore, we confess one God — Yahweh — one in essence and eternally co-existing as three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, coequal and coeternal, distinct in person and yet undivided in being.

Bible References: Numbers 6:24-27; Deuteronomy 4:39; 6:4; Psalm 139:7; Isaiah 9:6; 48:16; 63:10; Matthew 28:19; Mark 12:29; John 1:1-3, 5-6, 14, 20; 3:16-17; 14:26; 16:7-8, 13-15; 17:3, 5; Acts 1:8; Romans 8:11; 15:18-19; 1st Corinthians 2:10-11; 8:6; 12:4-7; 2nd Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 1:3-5; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 1:3; 9:14; 1st John 2:1.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD

The Word of God is the living and enduring self-revelation of God, through whom all things were made and by whom the Church is brought into the true knowledge of Christ. After ascending to the right hand of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Word made flesh, exercises his Lordship in the Church through the Holy Scriptures by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures uniquely and sufficiently communicates the authoritative teaching of Christ, preserving the apostolic faith once for all delivered to the saints and establishing the Church in the truth that accords with godliness.

The Church receives, preserves, proclaims, teaches, and lives under the Lord's authority as expressed through Scripture across all her generations. The Holy Spirit illumines believers to understand the Scriptures within the communion of the Church, forming the mind of Christ in his people and cultivating unity in the truth. Where differences of interpretation arise, Christians are called to walk in humility, love, and patience, seeking edification rather than division, honoring conscience in disputable matters, and pursuing maturity in the unity of the faith, so that love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith may abound among the people of God.

We believe that the authority of Scripture is necessary for full unity in the Christian faith, but acknowledge that partial and selective unity can be maintained in love when those departures do not deny the primacy of Scripture's authority for Christian life. However, where the authority of Scripture is rejected, full division is necessary to preserve the unity of the remaining faithful.

The Creative Power of the Word of God

All creation was made, ordered, and is sustained by the Word of God.

All Christians are born again through the living and enduring Word of God.

And all Christians are washed through the Word of God.

Bible References: Genesis 1:1, 26; Psalm 33:6; John 1:1–3; Ephesians 5:26; Colossians 1:15–17; 1 Peter 1:23–24

The Inspiration of Scripture

Holy men of old spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit so that through their unique personalities the living and infallible Scriptures were given.

All Scripture conveys the living voice of Christ through the Holy Spirit so that the Lord Jesus Christ exercises his Lordship in the Church through the authority of Scripture as the Holy Spirit illumines the word to his people.

Christians understand the truth of Scripture through the anointing of the Spirit, by hearing the voice of Christ in the Scriptures, and within the communion of the Church, which receives, preserves, proclaims, and lives under the authority of the apostolic teaching.

Bible References: John 6:63; 10:27; Ephesians 4:11–16; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; Hebrews 1:1; 4:12; 1 John 2:20–21; 4:6; 2 Peter 1:21; Jude 1:3

The Authority of Scripture

The Holy Scriptures are the highest expression of the Lord's authority in the Church for all her faith and practice because through the Holy Spirit the living voice of Christ is given to his people in the prophetic and apostolic writings.

The Holy Scriptures uniquely and sufficiently communicate the apostolic gospel, preserving the good news once for all delivered to the saints and establishing the Church in the truth that accords with godliness. The Scriptures are useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that God's people may be complete and equipped for every good work.

And the Holy Scriptures are given by God for the salvation, sanctification, and equipping of his people. God works through Scripture to form the Church in truth, cleanse her, instruct her in righteousness, and bring her to maturity in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of his Son.

Because Scripture is inspired by God, it is the Church's final and decisive norm for doctrine, faith, and practice. No tradition, council, teacher, or spiritual experience may overturn or bind the conscience contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

Yet the Holy Scriptures are not received in isolation from the Church, but within the communion of the saints across time. The Holy Spirit has faithfully guided the Church to recognize, preserve, proclaim, and defend the apostolic witness. The creeds, confessions, and teachings of faithful believers serve the Church as witnesses to the truth of the gospel, helping guard against private interpretation, novelty, and error.

The Church, although never standing above the Scriptures, ministers as the servant and witness to the Word of God. The Holy Spirit faithfully guides the Church across generations to recognize, preserve, proclaim, and defend the apostolic faith. The creeds, councils, confessions, and teachers of the Church, though continually tested according to the Scriptures, serve as faithful witnesses who help guard the people of God from novelty, distortion, and private judgment detached from the communion of the saints so that the Church may remain rooted in the truth once delivered to the saints, holding fast to what is good and seeking the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Yet believers, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, understand the truth of Scripture by the same Spirit who faithfully guides the Church across generations. The Holy Spirit individually dwells within each believer, forming in them the mind of Christ in holiness and love, making each believer responsible to attend carefully to the Holy Scriptures with prayer and humility, seeking to know Christ and faithfully keeping his word. Believers neither receive the Holy Scriptures in isolation, nor are their consciences bound absolutely to human authority, but to the Word of God itself. So, as members of one body, believers read the Scriptures together with the Church across time, learning in humility, testing all things according to the apostolic witness, reaching unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son.

The great and high goal of Christian instruction from the Holy Scriptures is the formation of a holy people who share in the life of Christ, living out his truth with love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

Bible References: John 14:23; 17:17; Acts 2:42; Romans 1:16; 10:17; Ephesians 4:13; 5:26; 1 Timothy 1:5; 4:5; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; Hebrews 4:12; 1 John 2:3–6; 4:7–12; 5:2; 2 John 9; Jude 3.

Articles of Christian Practice

These articles of Christian practice express the formation, order, mission, purpose, and life of the Christian Church. They are necessary for full unity in fellowship and mission, but do not result in full division so long as their departures do not lead to the practice of sin. Only in such cases is full division necessary.

There is one, holy, universal, and apostolic Church, comprised of all who belong to Jesus Christ in every time and place, from across all branches of the Christian faith; people born again by the Holy Spirit through the Word, and joined together in one body under Christ as their head. Through faith enacted in baptism by grace, believers are incorporated into the household of God — the Church — which is visibly expressed in local assemblies of believers, who are ordered by spiritually qualified servants, whose task is to steward the Word of God, guard the gospel, equip the saints, and lead the preservation of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The Church was sent into the world by the Lord Jesus to proclaim the good news of reconciliation, make disciples of all nations, to practice love, justice, and mercy, and to live in hopeful anticipation of the resurrection until the time of the renewal of all things.

FORMATION OF THE CHURCH

These articles express how the Church comes into being.

The New Birth and Discipleship

Although the Church is a community, it is individually composed of all believers. So the Church is formed by the saving work of God, who calls people to himself through the good news of Jesus Christ. Those who believe the word of Christ and respond in faith are forgiven of their sins, justified by grace, redeemed by Jesus' blood, reconciled to God, and adopted as children of the Father, being added to the Church and receiving eternal life.

The proclamation of the gospel is vital because faith comes from hearing the message of Christ. With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses unto salvation. Those who receive the Son are given the right to become children of God and overcome the world through faith.

The believer's ordinary first response to the good news of Jesus Christ is baptism, in which they call upon the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for salvation, entrusting themselves to God and confessing their union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. In baptism, the believer receives the Holy Spirit in the name of Christ, and God graciously marks them out as a disciple within the new covenant community, visibly proclaiming participation in Christ's saving work.

Through the Holy Spirit, God grants new life to those who believe, causing them to be born again through the living and enduring word of God. By this new birth they become new creations, freed from the dominion of sin, and brought into the household of God to walk in newness of life as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Bible References: **Matthew** 28:19–20; **John** 1:12–13; 3:3–8, 16; **Acts** 2:38–41; 10:47–48; 19:4–5; 22:16; **Romans** 3:21–26; 5:1; 6:3–5; 10:9–17; **1 Corinthians** 12:13; **2 Corinthians** 5:17; **Galatians** 3:27–28; 4:4–7; **Ephesians** 1:7; 2:4–10; **Colossians** 1:13–14; 2:11–13; **Titus** 3:5; **Hebrews** 10:22; **James** 1:18; **1 Peter** 1:23; 3:21; **1 John** 5:1–4.

The Formed Community – The Household of God

Those who are born again through faith in Christ and baptized into his name receive the Holy Spirit and are joined together as members of one body. Christ himself is the head of the Church, and all believers are members of one another through the Holy Spirit.

So, the Church is composed of all God's children who are born from above. They are visibly expressed in local assemblies from across all the branches of the Christian faith. These assemblies gather together in unity of faith, love, and fellowship. Each individual member is uniquely gifted by God for the strengthening of the whole body, and all share together in the grace of life in Christ.

Therefore, the one, holy, universal, and apostolic Church is like a tree with many branches. No one branch defines the whole tree, but all branches share in the whole life of the tree. The institutions of the Church are the various branches of the Church. Christian unity is, therefore, not based on the institutions of the Church, but upon Christ, who is the root that sustains the Church. Only the Father can prune the vine. So we accept all branches who remain rooted in Christ. We are one because we are all in Christ. We are holy because we are all set apart to him. We are universal because we come from every tongue, tribe, and nation on earth. And we are apostolic because we all share in the faith that was once delivered for all.

Bible References: **Psalms** 133:1; **Acts** 2:42–47; **Romans** 12:4–5; **1 Corinthians** 12:12–27; **Ephesians** 2:19–22; 4:1–6, 11–16; **Colossians** 1:18

ORDER OF THE CHURCH

These articles express how Christ governs his Church.

Christ the Head of the Church

Christ is the head of the Church and exercises his Lordship through the Word of God by the Holy Spirit. He appoints spiritually qualified servants to build up his body, protect the flock, and equip the saints for the work of ministry. Church leadership exists, therefore, not for domination, but for faithful stewardship, humble service, and the maturity of the whole body in love.

Those who serve the Church must do so in submission to Christ, in obedience to Scripture, and in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, recognizing that all authority in the Church belongs ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Elders – Shepherds of the Church

Elders are men appointed by the Holy Spirit to shepherd and oversee the Church of God through the ministry of the Word, through prayer, and through spiritual care. As under-shepherds of Christ, elders serve the flock willingly and humbly, not exercising authority for personal gain, but as examples to the Church in character, love, and faithfulness.

Scripture teaches that elders serve together in pluralities, expressing the unity of the Spirit through mutual submission, shared responsibility, and common devotion to the will of God. No single elder possesses unilateral authority, but each elder participates in the shared calling to shepherd the flock entrusted to them by Christ. This requirement for pluralities can be established at the congregational or regional level. Scripture gives sufficient basis for pluralities at both levels.

Through the ministry of the Word, elders guard the Church from false teaching and nourish believers toward maturity in Christ. Through prayer, elders seek the wisdom and direction of God for the care of the Church. Through personal example, elders demonstrate the character of Christ and the life of holiness to which all believers are called.

Elders watch over the souls of the Church as those who will give account to God. They labor to cultivate love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith, preserving the Church in sound doctrine and godly living.

Qualifications

These qualities should prove to be the prevailing pattern of the life of the men who serve as elders, while still allowing for their own individual growth and maturity in these matters through repentance, prayer, and faithful obedience to Christ.

Elders must demonstrate:

- faithfulness in marriage, being devoted to one wife, or being the faithful widower, in whose marriage the Church had confidence
- faithful leadership of their children and household in the Lord
- humility and willingness to serve
- emotional self-control and freedom from quick temper
- gentleness, not harshness or bullying

- freedom from addiction or excess, including drunkenness
- freedom from greed or the love of money
- integrity and consistency of life
- hospitality toward others
- love of what is good
- uprightness, holiness, and self-discipline
- doctrinal faithfulness to the apostolic teaching
- the ability to teach sound doctrine
- the ability to encourage believers in truth
- the ability to refute teachings that contradict the gospel
- willingness to submit to proven elders who lead well
- transformation as a new creation in Christ
- character marked by love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith

Appointment

Elders are appointed by God and recognized through prayer, fasting, discernment, the laying on of hands by faithful leaders, and the confirmation of the local church they serve. There should be unity in agreement between the local body and existing leadership about God's appointment of any individual to the eldership that governs the church.

Accountability

Elders are accountable to Christ, to Scripture, and to one another. Accusations against elders must be established by reliable testimony. Elders who persist in public sin are to be corrected openly so that the Church may remain in reverence before God and the integrity of the gospel may be preserved. And elders who have lost the confidence of church leadership and body must be removed from office so that their repentance and restoration can be diligently pursued.

Elders have a special responsibility to guard each other from corruption and compromise, with all humility and vigilance, recognizing the responsibility entrusted to them for the care of Christ's flock, and proving themselves faithful in its care.

Scripture References: Acts 14:23; 20:28–31; James 5:14; **1 Timothy** 3:1–7; 4:14–16; 5:17–20; Titus 1:5–9; Hebrews 13:17; **1 Peter** 5:1–5.

Deacons & Deaconesses – Servants of the Church

Christ appoints servants within his Church to embody his love through practical care, wise stewardship, and faithful service. Deacons and deaconesses assist the Church by attending to material, relational, and administrative needs so that the ministry of the Word and prayer may flourish and the whole body may be strengthened in unity.

Through their service, the diaconate reflects the humility of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve. Their ministry expresses the compassion of God toward the poor, the weak, the suffering, and all who are in need. By their faithfulness, they help preserve peace within the Church and enable the body to devote itself to worship, discipleship, and mission.

Qualifications

Those who serve well as deacons and deaconesses demonstrate the transforming work of Christ through humility, faithfulness, and love, strengthening the unity of the Church and contributing to the care of the body.

Deacons and deaconesses must demonstrate:

- honorable character worthy of respect
- fullness of the Holy Spirit and wisdom
- faithfulness to biblical truth
- sincerity and honesty in speech
- freedom from malicious gossip
- consistency between belief and conduct
- self-control and moderation, not given to excess in wine
- freedom from greed or dishonest gain
- faithfulness in monogamous marriage relationships
- honorable leadership and care within their households
- reliability in responsibility
- proven faithfulness in service
- willingness to serve according to the grace given by Christ

Appointment

Deacons and deaconesses are recognized by the Church as those whom God has prepared for service. Their ministry is confirmed through prayer and the laying on of hands, expressing the Church's trust in the grace God has given them.

As needs arise within the body, the Church may appoint faithful servants to assist in ministries of mercy, administration, hospitality, care for the vulnerable, and other works of practical love that support the life of the Church.

Correction and Removal from Service

Those who serve must do so in good conscience and sincerity of faith. If a servant falls into serious error or conduct contrary to the gospel, the Church seeks restoration through loving correction according to the teaching of Christ. Persistent refusal to repent may result in removal from service for the protection and peace of the body.

Restoration is always pursued with gentleness, humility, and the aim of reconciliation.

Scripture References: Matthew 20:25–28; Acts 6:1–6; Romans 12:6–8; 16:1–2; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Galatians 6:1–2; 1 Timothy 3:8–13; 1 Peter 4:10–11.

Teachers – The Ministry of the Word

Christ appoints teachers within the Church as stewards of the Word of God, entrusted to faithfully preserve, explain, and apply the apostolic teaching so that the body of Christ may be nourished, established in truth, and built up in love. Through the ministry of teaching, the Church grows in the unity of the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.

Teachers are recognized by their faithfulness to Scripture, their ability to rightly handle the word of truth, and the grace given to them by Christ to instruct and strengthen the people of God. Their ministry serves the Church by helping believers grow in spiritual maturity, doctrinal stability, and Christlike character.

Teachers labor in the Word so that the Church may be formed in love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith, holding firmly to the sound pattern of apostolic doctrine and guarding the Church from confusion, distortion, or error.

Qualifications

Teaching responsibility within the whole gathered assembly is entrusted to men who are recognized by the Church as faithful stewards of the Word. Mature and faithful women likewise instruct other women and children in the faith, contributing to the maturity of the whole body.

The qualifications for teachers include:

- faithfulness to the apostolic message preserved in Scripture
- ability to clearly communicate sound doctrine
- commitment to nourish the Church with the word of God
- diligence in study, preparation, and growth in understanding
- ability to distinguish between truth and error
- ability to instruct in holiness and godliness
- willingness to patiently encourage, rebuke, and correct when necessary
- gentleness in correcting those who are in error
- commitment to preserve the sound pattern of teaching handed down through the apostles
- desire to build up the unity of the Church in faith and knowledge of Christ
- character consistent with sincere faith, a good conscience, and love from a pure heart
- willingness to serve the Church according to the grace given by God

Accountability of Teachers

Because teachers influence the understanding of the Church, they are subject to stricter judgment and must exercise humility and care in their ministry. When a teacher falls into error, correction should be pursued according to the teaching of Christ, beginning privately and, when necessary, involving the wider Church.

The aim of correction is restoration, clarity in the truth, and the protection of the Church from harmful teaching. Persistent refusal to receive correction may result in removal from teaching responsibility for the health and peace of the body.

Teachers remain accountable to Scripture, to Christ, and to the Church, serving as stewards of a trust given by God.

Bible References: **Leviticus** 10:10-11; **Ezra** 7:10; **Nehemiah** 8:3-12; **Ezekiel** 44:23; **Malachi** 2:7; **Matthew** 9:38; 18:15-20; 22:1-14; 24:45-51; **John** 8:31; 21:15-17; **Acts** 2:42; 11:18; 13:48; **Romans** 10:14-15; 12:7; **1st Corinthians** 12:28; 14:6, 29; **Ephesians** 4:11; **Colossians** 1:21-23; 3:16; **1st Timothy** 1:5; 2:12; 4:6-16; 5:17; **2nd Timothy** 1:13; 2:2, 15, 24-25; 4:1-5; **Titus** 1:9; 2:3; **James** 3:1; **1st Peter** 4:10-11

Evangelists – The Ministry of the Gospel

Evangelists serve in the ministry of the gospel for the building up of the body of Christ (**Eph 4:11**). Scripture shows them being involved in appointing elders (**Ti 1:5-9**), opposing false doctrine (**1 Tim 1:3-4; 6:2-10; Ti 1:10-16**), leading prayer (**1 Tim 2:1-4**), setting new churches in order (**1 Tim 2:8-3:16; 5:1-2; 5:17-25; 6:1-2**), navigating spiritual warfare and challenges (**1 Tim 4:1-10; 6:11-16**), fulfilling the teaching ministry (**1 Tim 4:11-16; 2 Tim 1:13, 4:1-5**), supervising the charitable ministry of the church (**1 Tim 5:3-16**), giving spiritual counsel (**1 Tim 6:17-19**), and being responsible for church discipline (**2 Tim 4:2; Ti 3:10-11**). Therefore, we interpret evangelists as missionaries who establish new church communities and fulfill their ministry until they are fully formed.

Bible References: **Ephesians** 4:11; **1 Timothy** 1:3-4; 2:1-4; 2:8-3:16; 4:1-16; 5:1-25; 6:1-19; **2 Timothy** 1:13; 4:1-5; **Titus** 1:5-9, 10-16; 3:10-11.

Church Discipline and Restoration

Christ calls his Church to walk in holiness, love, and truth. Because believers are members of one body, they share responsibility for one another's spiritual well-being. When sin, error, or division arises, the Church seeks restoration through humility, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation, so that the unity of the Spirit may be preserved in the bond of peace.

Correction within the Church is an expression of love and faithfulness, not condemnation. The goal of discipline is the restoration of those who have fallen into sin, the protection of the Church from harm, and the honor of Christ's name. Those who are spiritual should gently restore those caught in sin, bearing one another's burdens and seeking the good of the whole body.

When serious sin or doctrinal error and controversy threatens the peace or integrity of the Church, correction should proceed according to the teaching of Christ. Matters are first addressed privately, then with witnesses when necessary, and finally brought before the Church if repentance is refused. Persistent refusal to turn from sin may result in removal from positions of responsibility or, in severe cases, from the fellowship of the assembly, for the protection of the body and the call to repentance.

Those entrusted with leadership are held more strictly to the same standard that all believers are called to because their lives influence so many. Leaders therefore correct one another in humility and transparency, guarding the Church from harm and preserving trust within the body.

Discipline is always to be carried out with patience, prayer, and love, seeking repentance and restoration so that fellowship may be renewed and Christ may be honored in the life of the Church.

Scripture References: **Matthew** 18:15–20; **Luke** 17:3–4; **John** 13:34–35; **Romans** 12:16–18; 14:19; 15:1–2; **1 Corinthians** 5:1–13; **2 Corinthians** 2:5–8; **Galatians** 6:1–2; **Ephesians** 4:1–6, 25–32; **Colossians** 3:12–15; **1 Timothy** 5:19–20; **2 Timothy** 2:24–26; **Titus** 3:10–11; **Hebrews** 12:14–15; **James** 5:19–20

PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

The Church exists to glorify God — not merely as an aspiration of individual believers, but as a corporate act of the whole body united to Christ by the Holy Spirit. The Church was not assembled by human agreement but called into being by God, and her first purpose is to render to him the worship, honor, and praise that belong to him alone. As a royal priesthood and holy nation, the Church is constituted to declare the excellencies of the one who called her out of darkness into his marvelous light. This worship is not confined to the gathering, but encompasses the whole life of the community as it is offered to God in truth and love.

The Church also exists as a display of the manifold wisdom of God. The apostle Paul teaches that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose realized in Christ Jesus (Eph 3:10–11). The existence of a people drawn from every tongue, tribe, and nation — reconciled to God and to one another through the cross — is itself a proclamation of divine wisdom that no earthly power anticipated and no human institution could produce. The Church therefore exists not only for the sake of her own members, but as a visible demonstration to the whole created order of what God has accomplished in Christ.

The Church further exists as a sign and foretaste of the coming kingdom of God. She inhabits this present age as a community of heavenly sojourners — citizens of another kingdom, living within earthly societies without belonging to them fully, seeking the welfare of the places they inhabit while remaining oriented toward the age to come. The Church's communal life anticipates the renewal of all things: the reconciliation she embodies now is a real, though partial, expression of the restored creation that God has promised. Because Christ is recapitulating and renewing all things rather than annihilating them, the Church's present life of love, justice, mercy, and holiness is not rendered futile by the coming age but is taken up into it. No faithful act within the life of the Church is ultimately insignificant.

Finally, the Church exists as the ordinary context in which disciples are formed into the likeness of Christ. Moral and spiritual formation does not occur in isolation, but through the shared pursuit of truth, mutual correction, encouragement, and love within the body. God has appointed the practices of the Church — the gathering, the Lord's Supper, the Word, prayer, and fellowship — as the ordinary means by which Christ forms his people. The Church grows toward the fullness of Christ as each member, gifted by the Spirit, contributes to the maturity of the whole body in love.

God calls the Church to love him with the whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love one another as Christ has loved us. Through this love, lived in worship, displayed before the watching world, oriented toward the coming kingdom, and formed through the common life of the body, the Church participates in the life of Christ and fulfills the purpose for which she was called into being, so that God may be glorified in his people.

Scripture References: Matthew 22:37–40; John 13:34–35; 17:20–23; Romans 12:9–16; 13:8–10; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27; 13:1–13; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:13–14; 6:2; Ephesians 1:3–14; 1:22–23; 3:8–12; 4:1–6; 4:11–16; Philippians 2:1–5; Colossians 3:12–15; 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Peter 2:9–12; Revelation 5:9–10; 1 John 3:11–18; 4:7–12

MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The Church is sent into the world by Jesus Christ to bear witness to the kingdom of God through the proclamation of the gospel and the making of disciples.

Having received reconciliation with God through Christ, the Church is entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation, calling all people everywhere to repentance, faith, and new life in him.

The Church's mission is not only what she does outward, but what she displays inward. The reconciled and loving community of the Church is itself the primary witness to the truth of the gospel. Jesus prayed that his people would be made completely one, so that the world may know that the Father sent the Son and has loved the Church even as he loved the Son (John 17:23). When the Church lives in reconciled love across differences of background, culture, and experience, she demonstrates the reconciling power of the cross in a manner that proclamation alone cannot achieve. Conversely, when the Church's divisions are treated carelessly or pursued for lesser reasons, her witness is obscured precisely at the point where it should be clearest. The unity of the Church is therefore not merely an internal good but a missionary imperative, inseparable from the proclamation of the gospel and the making of disciples.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church proclaims that Jesus Christ is Lord, inviting all people to receive forgiveness of sins and be incorporated into the life of Christ through faith, baptism, and discipleship.

The Church fulfills her mission as believers bear witness to Christ in word and deed, loving their neighbors, serving the needy, and teaching disciples to obey all that Christ has commanded. As disciples are formed and communities established in the life of Christ, the Church is strengthened and multiplied throughout the world.

Scripture References: Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46–49; John 17:20–23; 20:21; Acts 1:8; 2:38–41; 13:47–49; Romans 1:16; 10:14–17; 2 Corinthians 5:17–21; Ephesians 2:14–18; 3:6; Colossians 1:28; 1 Peter 2:9–12; 3:15

LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The life of the Church is the shared participation of believers in the life of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Having been reconciled to God through the gospel, believers are formed together into a people who live in faith, hope, and love as members of one body.

Christ forms his people through the ordinary practices of the Church, not merely as religious activities, but as the means by which he nourishes, corrects, and shapes his people into his likeness. These practices are not invented by the Church but given by Christ to his body, and they hold together as a single formative movement: Christ gathers his people into his presence, feeds them at his table, speaks to them through his Word, receives their prayers in dependence, forms them through teaching, binds them together in love, and sends them into the world as witnesses. Each practice contributes to this movement, and none can be neglected without impoverishing the whole. Through these ordinary means, across the whole of the Church's life together, the Spirit gradually forms a holy people who share in the life of Christ and reflect his character to the world. The goal of this entire formation is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.

Christ forms his people through the ordinary practices of the Church, by which believers are nourished in grace, established in truth, and strengthened in love. Through these practices, the Church grows toward maturity in Christ and learns to walk in holiness, unity, and faithful witness.

Gathering in the Presence of Christ

Believers assemble together in the name of Jesus Christ as members of one body, recognizing his presence among his people through the Holy Spirit. The gathered Church lives in fellowship with God and with one another, devoting themselves to unity, encouragement, and mutual care.

Scripture References: Matthew 18:20; John 4:23–24; Acts 2:42–47; 20:7; Romans 12:4–5; 1 Corinthians 11:18; 12:12–27; Ephesians 2:19–22; Hebrews 10:24–25; 12:22–24

Communion in the Life of Christ

In the Lord's Supper, the Church participates in the body and blood of Christ, remembering his death and proclaiming his resurrection. Through this shared meal, believers express their union with Christ and their unity with one another as members of one body.

Scripture References: Matthew 26:26–29; Luke 22:19–20; John 6:53–57; Acts 2:42, 46; 1 Corinthians 10:16–17; 11:23–26; Hebrews 9:14; 13:10–16

Formation through the Word of God

Christ nourishes his people through the Holy Scriptures, which are read, taught, and received within the communion of the Church. Through the Word, believers grow in the knowledge of Christ, are corrected in truth, and are equipped for faithful obedience.

Scripture References: Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Psalm 1:1–3; 19:7–11; Matthew 4:4; John 8:31–32; Acts 2:42; 17:11; Ephesians 4:11–16; Colossians 3:16; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; Hebrews 4:12; James 1:21–25

Prayer and Dependence upon God

The Church lives in continual dependence upon God through prayer, thanksgiving, confession, and intercession. Through prayer, believers entrust themselves to the mercy of God, seek his kingdom, and grow in humility and faith.

Scripture References: **Matthew** 6:5–13; **Luke** 11:1–13; **Acts** 1:14; 2:42; **Romans** 8:26–27; 12:12; **Ephesians** 6:18; **Philippians** 4:6–7; **Colossians** 4:2; **1 Thessalonians** 5:16–18; **1 Timothy** 2:1–4; **James** 5:13–18; **1 John** 1:9

Repentance and Confession

Because the Church is a community of those still being sanctified, repentance and confession are ordinary and necessary practices of her common life, not reserved only for crisis or discipline. The Church that gathers week by week also confesses week by week — not in despair over persistent failure, but in the confident humility of those who trust the faithfulness of God to forgive and cleanse. When believers confess their sins to one another and pray for one another, healing and restoration are worked among the body. The practice of confession keeps the community honest before God and one another, guards the heart against the slow corruption of unacknowledged sin, and continually reorients the life of the Church toward the mercy and grace from which she lives.

Scripture References: **Psalms** 32:1–5; 51:1–17; **Matthew** 5:23–24; **James** 5:16; **1 John** 1:8–10

Fellowship and Mutual Edification

As members of one body, believers bear one another's burdens, encourage one another in truth, and build one another up in love. Each member contributes according to the grace given to them, so that the whole body may grow toward maturity in Christ.

Scripture References: **John** 13:34–35; **Acts** 2:44–47; **Romans** 12:9–13; 14:19; 15:1–7; **1 Corinthians** 12:4–7; **Galatians** 6:2; **Ephesians** 4:1–6, 15–16; **Philippians** 2:1–5; **Colossians** 3:12–16; **Hebrews** 3:12–13; 10:24–25; **1 Peter** 4:8–11

A Holy and Loving Life

The life of the Church is marked by repentance, forgiveness, humility, patience, generosity, hospitality, and perseverance. Through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, believers increasingly reflect the character of Christ in their relationships and conduct.

Scripture References: **Matthew** 5:3–16; **John** 15:1–12; **Romans** 6:1–14; 12:1–2; 13:8–14; **1 Corinthians** 13:1–13; **Galatians** 5:13–26; **Ephesians** 4:17–32; 5:1–21; **Philippians** 2:12–16; **Colossians** 3:1–17; **Titus** 2:11–14; **Hebrews** 12:14; **1 Peter** 1:13–16; **1 John** 2:3–6; 3:16–18

Suffering and the Cross

The life of the Church in this present age is a cruciform life — that is, a life shaped by the pattern of the cross. Because the Church follows a crucified Lord who promised that the servant is not above the master, suffering for righteousness is not an aberration from normal Christian life but a constitutive feature of it. The cross is not only the means of the Church's salvation; it is the pattern of

her discipleship. Believers are called to participate in the sufferings of Christ, being conformed to him through faithful obedience in a world that remains, until his return, resistant to his kingdom.

Suffering received in faith, however, is not meaningless. God works through the trials of his people to produce perseverance, to humble pride, to purify disordered loves, and to deepen conformity to the character of Christ. The suffering that results from obedience to Christ becomes, through the work of the Holy Spirit, an instrument of sanctification rather than merely a burden to be endured. And because the resurrection of Christ has broken the power of death as the ultimate threat, Christians are freed to endure loss, rejection, and persecution without despair — not denying the reality of pain, but reframing it within the certain hope of redemption. Present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed.

The Church therefore does not pursue suffering, nor does she seek to escape it at the cost of faithfulness. She bears it with patience, entrusting herself to the one who judges justly, and in doing so bears visible witness to the resurrection hope that sustains her. A community that endures suffering without returning evil for evil, that maintains love toward those who oppose it, and that holds its convictions under pressure, proclaims by its very life that Christ is risen and that his kingdom is real.

Scripture References: **Matthew** 5:10–12; **Luke** 9:23–24; **John** 15:18–20; **Romans** 5:3–5; 8:17–18; 8:28–29; **2 Corinthians** 4:16–18; **Philippians** 1:29; 3:10; **Colossians** 1:24; **Hebrews** 12:3–11; **1 Peter** 2:19–24; 4:12–14; **Revelation** 12:11

A Sent People

Having been formed by the Word and Spirit, believers are sent into the world to live as witnesses of Christ's kingdom, practicing love, justice, mercy, and holiness in their daily lives.

Scripture References: **Matthew** 5:13–16; 28:18–20; **Luke** 10:1–9; **John** 17:18; 20:21; **Acts** 1:8; **Romans** 12:9–21; **2 Corinthians** 5:17–21; **Galatians** 5:22–23; **Philippians** 2:14–16; **Colossians** 4:5–6; **1 Peter** 2:9–12; 3:15–16