

The Doctrine of the Church

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[0:00] As mentioned previously, we had originally planned for Clay to preach from Daniel 5 this morning, but he's homesick.! So, we're going to put our study of Daniel on hold to consider a bit the doctrine of the church.

This form of study is known as ecclesiology, comes from the Greek word for church, ecclesia, that we see often in the text, this is the Greek word, and it simply means gathering.

I find that most Christians today have a very weak ecclesiology, and I would suggest to you that we all need a much more robust ecclesiology.

We've seen that challenge just over this past year. What is the church? Can you do online church?

This is not just a study for those people who lead churches, but for anyone who is a part of one.

I have determined across time, just in ministering here, that there's four extremely important questions that we want to answer for you during your time with Christ Family Church.

[1:13] And there's big and expansive answers to all of these questions, but those questions are, who is God? What is the Bible? What is the gospel? And what is the church?

We find ourselves at a particularly crucial juncture to have a robust ecclesiology, ecclesiology, to be able to answer the question, what is the church with great clarity, because our church is growing and we are running out of space.

A lot of things can just be assumed when nothing has to change, but if things need to change, how should they change? What will inform our decision-making in the coming months, years, Lord willing, decades?

Beloved, the Bible is sufficient for the task at hand, and it should always be the labor of our church to bring ourselves into conformity with it.

It has the answers for us. So today I'm going to run you around the New Testament as an ecclesiological primer.

[2:24] I think that's the biggest word I'll use this morning.

Ecclesiological primer. Just a starting point, right? This is just meant to keep or to get us thinking in the right direction.

We're going to need to have many, many more Bible conversations about the church. In fact, I'm purposing, we'll see if time will allow, but this fall to do an ecclesiology class, to really spend some time really, really digging into the doctrine of the church.

So, we'll both begin and end with Matthew chapter 28, verse 18 through 20, but I am going to take you all over the scripture. If you just want to camp here, that would be fine.

I'll move fairly quickly because I have a lot of references this morning. But I'm going to make five observations about the church from the New Testament this morning. Number one, the church arises from the gospel.

The church arises from the gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ preached results in churches. Matthew 28, verse 18 through 20.

[3:33] Jesus came and said to them, to the apostles, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. Right? If you have been a Christian very long, you are likely familiar with this, the Great Commission. Right?

Used most readily in mission kind of context. But I just would ask you to take a look at the text and see if you can see the church in this text. When you look at Matthew chapter 28, verse 18 through 20, is there an ecclesiological lesson to be learned from this text?

And of course, because I'm presenting it to you in this way, the answer is that yes, there is absolutely an ecclesiological lesson to be learned here. Many years after becoming a pastor, did I realize that this was teaching us something about what we're to be as a church.

First, we're meant to be under the lordship of Christ. He says in verse 18 that all authority has been given to him. Heaven and earth, all of the authority has been given to Jesus Christ.

[4:57] And after giving us this grand task, he says, and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

But in the middle, we're meant to be doing things. We're supposed to be going about making disciples, faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

We're to be baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that I've commanded. And beloved, this happens in the life of a church.

Discipleship accompanied by discipline is how we grow people in holiness. Welcome them into the fellowship of the church is baptism. And we're meant to be teaching one another all of the ways of Jesus.

So this text says a lot about the activity of the church. So let me point out some other texts to you. The church arises from the gospel.

[5:58] Note that Jesus builds the church. In Matthew chapter 16 and verse 18, after Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ, he says to Peter, I tell you, you are Peter.

And on this rock, the truth that Jesus is the Christ, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Jesus Christ builds churches. We ought to care deeply about the church and be about the work of building churches because this is the work of Christ in the world.

Secondly, Jesus purchased the church with his blood. In Acts chapter 20 and verse 28, Paul is saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders.

It's the last time he'll see them. And he says to them, pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

[7:05] So if the gospel is precious to us, if we in fact understand the redemption that we have in Christ, what his blood purchased on our behalf, we will care about the church.

Third, Jesus identifies with the church. In Acts chapter 9 and verse 4, it's recorded that when Saul is traveling, later going by the name Paul, he falls to the ground and hears a voice saying to him, and this is Jesus Christ speaking, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

Here's Saul going to persecute the church, those who were professing faith in Jesus Christ. He's going on a mission to go and arrest them. And Jesus says, why are you persecuting me?

Beloved, the church is a precious thing in the sight of God. Fourth, the church is the body of Christ. It is his extension here on earth. We are meant to be the point of activity for Christ's work in the world.

[8:25] He had an earthly ministry. He now has a heavenly ministry going about this work. He purchased it with his blood. He's building the church. How does he do that? He does that by the means of his church.

Paul writes 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 27. Now you are the body of Christ. Fifth, the church is the dwelling place of the spirit.

1 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 16 and 17. Paul says, Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you?

If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy and you are that temple. The dwelling place of God in the Old Testament was in a tabernacle and then in a temple. Paul references that here in verse 17 of 1 Corinthians 3. But he says, Now it is God's people. The church, not a building, but the people.

[9:33] The church is not property. The church is not programs. The church is a people. We are the dwelling place of the spirit of God on earth.

Six, The church is the chief instrument for glorifying God. Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 3 in verse 10. So that through the church, The manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places.

This is the vehicle by which God is making himself known in the world. A people that he has redeemed for his praise.

Seventh, these are all sub points by the way. The seventh sub point for the first point. Sorry if I messed up your outline. The church is the means of bringing the gospel to the nations.

Again, this is the way. God is being honored. God is being glorified. If we are God's people, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, If we find the gospel precious, then we will find the church precious.

[10:50] You cannot be a Christian on your own and reject that God is saving a people. He has saved you, certainly, as an individual. But he died for a people.

The church takes the gospel to the nations. Romans chapter 10, beginning in verse 14. Remember a letter written to a church. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news. The church is the vehicle for this. The sending of people to every peoples that they might hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The church is the mission sending agency. Proper proclamation of the gospel makes it audible. This is absolutely necessary.

[11:53] Proper living in a church makes the gospel visible. Also necessary. John 13, verse 35.

Jesus says, by this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. So the church arises from the gospel, right?

And hear me just again. The point I'm trying to make to you is this. That if you love the gospel of Jesus Christ, if you have been saved by this good news of Jesus' person, sacrificial work on your behalf, then you should love the church.

It's the very thing that he loves. It's the very thing that he laid his down life for. It's the very thing he's using now to take that gospel message forward. Second, the church is visible and invisible.

This is less a Bible observation and more of a logical conclusion. But if Jesus Christ died for a people, those are people we will both be able to see and people that we won't be able to see.

[13:07] In the pastoral prayer earlier, I prayed for people that have met before us, right? We have a family that is spread across the globe right now, right? People that we will never know this side of glory that are part of the church.

Wayne Grudem, his systematic theology, says the church is the community of all true believers for all time. So we have a family that even expands beyond those people who are currently in the world redeemed to those who have been previously redeemed.

That's why we encourage you to read old books. And those who will be redeemed, praise be to God. The church is visible and it is invisible. Third, the church is local, it is regional, and it is universal.

I'll take those in opposite order. Its universality relates to its visibility and its invisibility. Jesus, or excuse me, Paul says in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 25, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Universal. All church. For all time. Those who have are will be saved. Jesus' sacrificial work saved the church.

[14:34] Right? Universal. What we also see in the scripture, some evidences of the church being referred to regionally. So this Greek word, ekklesia, being used in that way.

Here's an example of a church in a city. First Thessalonians chapter 1 and verse 1. Paul writes, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians. And God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace to you and peace. Now, I only know that this is a city reference because there were, church history holds, churches meeting in that city.

But here Paul is addressing a letter to the church in that city. Churches were actually, also actually regional. Acts chapter 9 and verse 31. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.

The church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

[15:42] And also the church is local. And local is the form most often mentioned in scripture. And in fact, the word for church, we find translated in our Bibles, ecclesia means gathering.

And it was used broadly in Greek culture to speak of gatherings of any kind. So it makes sense that they would be local. A people who can actually see one another. Can be in the same locale at the same time.

Again, another example, Paul, 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 19. He writes, the churches of Asia send you greetings.

Achilla and Prissa together with the church in their house send you heartily greetings in the Lord. So you see both the churches of Asia. So he's not referring to the church broadly in the regional sense.

But there are churches in this region. And then he mentions a specific one, Achilla and Prissa, together with the church in their house. Send you hearty greetings in the Lord.

[16:47] So this brings us to this idea of local church. It's the thing that we're going to have to think about most because we're going to be most involved with the local church.

I think all of us would love to have something to say to the church universal or even the church regional. I'd love to say some things to the church regional, but that's not the platform I'm given. But here, how do we properly orient? How do we properly think? What does the Bible say for us? So this is very important.

What is the local church? And I have a definition. I think it's going to appear on the screen for you. I think Alex is going to put it up there for you. Hey, you're right.

This is a working definition. It's some semblance of mine versus, I'm sure, some other people's. So if you find something similar to this, don't call me a plagiarist.

[17:45] But here's my definition, working definition. And we'll break this down and look at it in some more particulars here in a moment. So here it is, though. The local church is a community of believers that gathers regularly around the personal work of Jesus Christ, that rightly preaches the gospel, and that rightly administers the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

I think this is the simplest and most historically consistent definition that, at least I, my finite mind, can come up with.

There's a lot of other things you could say, but I think if we're going to say, yes, that's a church, no, that's not a church, I think this is the simplest definition that we can possibly work with. Let me labor to show you why.

I'm very thankful that in 2 Timothy chapter 4, when Paul tells Timothy that he should preach the word and be ready in season and out of season, that he doesn't say that you should have perfectly polished notes in season and out of season.

So this is this morning that I wrote this up for you. So first, the phrase, a community of believers. Now, what I mean by a community is that we are living life together.

[19:01] All of the one-anothers of the Bible, which are dramatic lists of those one-anothers, all of the things that we're meant to be doing together as Christians can be done. That's what I mean by the word community.

Possibly a word that we're going to have to stop using because it gets overused and wrongly used so often. But this is what I mean, a people who are living in life together. And they're not just any people.

It's not a social club. It's not a car club or an ultimate Frisbee club. It's a community of something specific, a community of believers, right?

We've come together because we are united by the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church is, from God's perspective, made up of believers, people who have been redeemed, called his people. And therefore, the local church should also be made up of believers. I hope you hear me say that. And you go, of course, that's a good thing if you're doing that. There are many churches out there that don't act in this way.

[20:02] I'm not concerned really at all. Just want you to sign up so they can convince you to be there, so that you'll give, so that hopefully you'll hear the gospel. It's quite a mess out there in those ways.

But this should be people that are made up of people who have professed faith in Jesus Christ. There's a lot of examples in the scripture of the inside and the outside of the church, marking off who is the church and who isn't the church.

And, beloved, this is good for us, right? To be marked inside the church, right? To help us with our assurance. We've got people who are helping us walk faithfully with the Lord, who are helping us to examine our lives, who are exposing our blind spots.

We need one another to do this. And it's good for the world. We need to be saying to others, oh, there's only one way to be reconciled to God, and that is through the personal work of Jesus Christ. You must repent and believe, right? You can't just claim to be a member of a church. You have to come through the sacrificial work of Jesus to become a member of the church, right?

[21:08] This is important that the gospel is clear in the way we conduct ourselves as church. I'll give you an example of the inside and the outside. Acts chapter 5, we see a record of the early church beginning in verse 12.

Now, many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's portico, right? So they, there's a people, there's a recognized people, right?

As Luke records this, they were together in Solomon's portico. And then he goes on to say, none of the rest dare join them, but the people held them in high esteem, right?

There's a group, an identifiable group that's together that are being held in high esteem. And there's another identifiable group that doesn't dare to join them and be counted amongst their number. Another wonderful example of this is the author of Hebrews writes in Hebrews 13 and verse 17, the first part of it. Again, there's a clear outside and a clear inside here, right?

[22:22] The author of Hebrews writes to a little church and says, you, you church, know who your leaders are. You know them. He doesn't say obey leaders.

He says, obey your leaders and submit to them. They've been given a task of keeping watch over your souls. And they're going to give an account for those people to whom they're caring for.

So there's a clear inside and an outside. Praise be to God. I have a responsibility in our community broadly to be a proclaimer of the good news of Jesus Christ.

I'd look for every opportunity to bring about redemptive good in the place that we are. But I will not give an account for every single person that lives in a radius of this building.

I'm so glad of that. There's not enough time in my day for it. But I will give an account for those of you who are members of our fellowship.

[23:18] There's a clear inside and a clear outside. It's good for us and it's good for the community around us. So it's a community of believers, right?

That's why we go through some process to both establish if you're in the faith and to regularly work with you to make sure that you are in the faith. That you continue in the faith for the good of your soul.

So there's a community of believers and it's a community of believers that gathers regularly around the person and work of Jesus Christ. We see the New Testament example of the regular gathering of the church on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week.

This was the normative thing that was going on. These people saw each other. They could get together, right? They could touch each other. It was actually possible to do that. You cannot do this

online.

Not possible. Absolutely impossible to do such a thing. I think we all ought to recognize the fragile and shallow nature of online relationships.

[24:20] They're not real. They have some essence of relationship, but they're not really what we need. And the church especially, called out of a world that is hostile toward it, need to be together that we might help each other progress in holiness.

And we don't just gather for frivolous reasons. We don't gather for just any old reason, right? This is not a self-help club, right? It's not a social gathering.

I'm glad we can be social. I'm glad we love each other and we like to spend time together. But we're gathering around the person and the work of Jesus Christ. What he has done, is doing, and has promised to do.

You'll hear me say that when we take the Lord's Supper. Like, that's what we are gathering around. This is the purpose for our gathering together. Let me give you a text. Hebrews chapter 10, beginning in verse 23 and following.

Author of Hebrews says, Already in this day, right, there's hostility towards the church and people had stopped gathering.

[25:45] They were neglecting to meet together with the church, right? And he is connecting these ideas that for us to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, without being tossed around, we are going to need to be together.

And we're going to need to consider. We're going to have to be actively thinking about and acting on, stirring one another up to love and good works. Why? Because the day is drawing near.

The day of our Lord's return is drawing near. And we have a work to do, following him faithfully, until that day comes. So, how do we do that, right?

How do we gather around the person and work of Jesus Christ? What might those activities look like? There is much to be said about this. But in the definition, I think in simplest terms, this group that gathers together regularly around the personal work of Jesus Christ rightly preaches the gospel.

Now, when you see the word preach here, I don't want you to just think of what I and others do from this stage. I want you to think proclaim. The church. All of us.

[26:51] Every member proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ. And this happens in a lot of different ways. It's all vocal. I'm not saying in action. But you're going to be saying the gospel to one another.

We need to be doing this work. It is the work we've been given to do. We need to be reminding one another and telling the world that we have a creator God.

He made it. It's his. And therefore, he has the right. It is proper for him to order it, to set it up the way in which it should function.

All of the creation has the responsibility to bow to him in adoration as the creator. But if you know the gospel storyline, we know that Adam and Eve, the very first creation, rejected that good rule. Did what they wanted to. Wanted to become like God. And so they fell from grace. Brought a curse on the world. And the narrative of the Bible is all about this curse working out, but God bringing about redemption through it.

[28:05] I hope you know how very rich the Old Testament is as it's constantly pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ, constantly saying, these things will not ultimately save your soul.

This kind of work, this law keeping will not ultimately save your soul. But you need to be looking for something that will. Christ himself, God incarnate.

He came and lived the life we couldn't live. Kept the law perfectly. Died the death that we deserve. Took all the wrath of God in himself on the cross.

So that by grace alone, through faith alone, in the personal work of Jesus Christ alone, we can have the redemption of our souls.

We can be saved from the bondage of sin. We can be restored to relationship in Christ to God. All of that created order that was disrupted by the fall, by the original sin of Adam and Eve, and has been disrupted all along the way.

[29:06] But everybody's sin is set right in Jesus. And not only that will be fully and finally set right in Jesus. Jesus will return and he will judge the earth.

He will separate his church from the rest of the peoples of the earth and there will be a new heaven and a new earth where those who are in Christ will praise him forever and ever and ever.

That gospel message. The church must preach. A church, a local church, must rightly preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are a lot of perversions of the gospel out there. Things that are called gospel, prosperity gospel, that aren't gospel at all. They're bad news.

Very, very bad news. And not good news. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2, verse 14 and following, But thanks be to God who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession.

[30:13] And through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

To one a fragrance from death to death. To the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not like so many, peddlers of God's word.

But as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God in the sight of God, we speak in Christ. So the church, the local church, rightly understood, is meant to be preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And rightly administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Now I'm going to have to expound upon this part of the definition at a later time. But before we just glance over it, I want you to know that baptism is the sign that the church rightly uses to welcome a new Christian into the fellowship of the church.

And the Lord's Supper is the sign that the church rightly uses to affirm an individual still belongs in the fellowship of the church. It's the way we exercise membership and discipline.

[31:28] What I've just stated is oversimplistic. But for our consideration today, I think that that'll suffice. It is important that we rightly administer these two ordinances of the church.

I want you to know that baptism and the Lord's Supper are a more important part of the gathering of God's people than many people have believed. It means something about the way we order ourselves as a church.

The way we will need to order ourselves in the future of our church. Now when you take this definition, I want you to know that we could do a church versus not church categorizing with the first part of the definition.

A group of people is not church if they don't gather regularly. They're not physically together ever. They're not church. And hear me say this with a great deal of love, with care, with humility.

There's no such thing as a multi-site church. You cannot say one church, five locations. Nope.

[32:37] You can't ecclesia. You're not doing it. You're not doing the very thing that the word says you're doing. Not possible. Something, something well intended. Something the Lord may even be using in spite of its structure.

But, not church. Not church. The church must gather regularly and it must rightly preach the gospel. This message. Grace alone through faith alone.

And the personal work of Jesus Christ alone. If a group of people who claim to be Christ followers are gathering together and they're not preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not church.

Something. Self-help seminar.

Something. Concert. Something. Not church. We can take the last half of our definition and make a division between normative and abnormative.

This rightly administers the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. So, you may have a group of people who gather regularly and preach the gospel who just aren't getting these ordinances quite right.

[33:37] I'm very thankful that we have a lot of churches that are just abnormative churches and haven't quite sorted that out and figured that. And I hope by grace that they will.

I think our church has gone through that process. I don't know that I would have said that we were church normative at the beginning. Probably more church abnormative. And I hope we are following

ourselves in the category of church normative now.

These things matter immensely. We must think carefully and clearly about what the church is as we order the church. Because, fifth and last, and briefly, the church has a mission.

The church has a mission. Beloved, the church gives to us many benefits. I am so grateful for the church. The more I mature in Christ, right?

The more I'm growing up in Him. I'm not outgrowing my need of the church. I'm recognizing more and more and more how much I need it. I need each and every one of you, right?

[34:43] I have blind spots. I need to be told when I err. I need to be brought to repentance and continued faith. I need to be taught. I learn from you guys.

Watching the way that the Spirit of God applies to the Word of God in your life. We need one another. But it's not about us.

The church is not ultimately about you. It's not about your feelings. It's not about your life and the success or failure of it.

Ultimately, it's not about you. All the things we do together as a church ought to be expressions of the way that we're loving one another. We're helping each other. We're meeting needs. We're progressing in holiness.

But all of that is about the glory of God in the world. We are meant to be a church because there's too little praise of our great God in the world in which we live.

[35:40] There are not enough people proclaiming the excellencies of God in our community to the very ends of the earth. Because our God is worthy of all the praise.

He is great. We ought to be driven by that. Look at our God. He is a God who is merciful and gracious. Look at the way that he has loved us in Christ.

We have a mission. We have a place to go. A thing to accomplish. There's some old language. So I hope that you'll give me a little time to use the language with you.

Two ways that the reformers talked about the church. They talked about the church victorious. I'll start with that one. The task has been accomplished. Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth. It's been given to him. He's going to be with us at the very end of the age. He's going to build this church. The gates of hell will not prevail against that advance of the church. Victorious. But also, the church is to be militant.

[36:43] I'm not talking about BDUs and guns. I'm not talking about any of that. We are to go forward in love, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, recognizing that we are not on the defense.

We are on the offense. Taking this news to the world around us. We have a mission. And it ought to be driving everything we do as a church.

Again, Matthew 28, verse 18 and following. Jesus came and said to them. He's saying this to us this morning. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go, therefore. Because I have all the authority. Go. And make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. Let's pray together.