

Article 7¹

The Church

7. We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

7. We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances to be observed by the church during the present age. They are, however, not to be regarded as means of salvation.
8. We believe that the true Church is composed of all such persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are united together in the body of Christ of which He is the head.
9. We believe that only those who are thus members of the true church shall be eligible for membership in the local church.
10. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Head of the Church, and that every local church has the right under Christ to decide and govern its own affairs.

- I. Introduction

- II. Combination of Four Articles (7-10) into One Article (7)
 - A. This follows the biblical narrative, the unfolding plan of God's redemption.
 - B. It follows theologically and logically in that the truth about the application of the work of Christ by the Holy Spirit creates a new person, a new humanity, a new community, the church.
 - C. It combines the various statements regarding the church included in articles 7-10 into one article.
 - D. The order is changed, as the church is first defined, and only then are the ordinances introduced.
 - E. Christ is the Head of this body, the church, but the statement on local autonomy (cf. article 10) is placed in the preamble.
 - F. This is a Trinitarian statement.

¹ Adapted from "EFCA Statement of Faith: Article 7," by Greg Strand, Director of Biblical Theology and Credentialing. <http://www.efca.org/files/document/office-of-the-president/sof-proposed-revision-article-7.pdf>.

Questions for Discussion

- Who makes up the “true church”? What does it mean to be “justified by God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone”? Is it important to emphasize the “alone”? Do you think the Reformers had it right when they stated that justification is the doctrine by which the church stands or falls?

Justification is prominent in the New Testament, and was rediscovered during the Reformation to become a central teaching of the reformers. It defines those who belong in the true church—those who are justified by God’s grace.

- Regarding the true church, what is the ministry of the Holy Spirit? What is the ministry of Christ? As Head, why is it more accurate to refer to this as a Christocracy rather than a democracy?
- Why is it important for the “true church” to be “manifest in local churches”? Is there such a thing as a churchless Christian?
- Because we are a believers’ church movement, “membership should be composed only of believers.” Upon first reading, why do you think it should read “membership must be composed”? Upon further reflection, why is it appropriate to use “should”? Does the “true church” find an exact parallel in the “local church”? Does the “local church” consist of both wheat and tares?

We do not have infallible knowledge of who is actually a member of the true church. We can only make a judgment on the basis of a credible profession of faith, hence the term “believers.” The word “should” reflects this.

- What are the two ordinances the Lord Jesus mandated? Please note these are mandated by the Lord Jesus! What does an ordinance mean? How is it they “visibly and tangibly express the gospel”?

Because the Lord mandated them, we should practice them.

The ordinances are not only seen, they are also experience physically—we “eat and drink” and we are “washed,” hence, the inclusion of the term “tangibly.”

- Though the ordinances are clearly “not the means of salvation,” could they be a means of spiritual growth or sanctification? If so, how? What is the important connection between “genuine faith” and the fact that the “ordinances confirm and nourish the believer”?

The ordinances themselves do not regenerate or justify. They have no saving power.

When believers participate in them by faith, God can use them as means by which the faith of believers is strengthened—like other means such as biblical preaching, reading the Bible, worship with God’s people.

The ordinances provide spiritual strength to the believer when engaged in “in faith.”

- Often the ordinances have been relegated to the place of unimportance or indifference in the life of the local church. What do the terms “mandated” and “celebrated” have to say to this trend?

III. Article 7 – The Church

True Church

- A. We believe the true church (Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:4-6; 5:25; Hebrews 12:28) comprises all who have been justified by God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone (Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 44:22; John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 3:20-28; 4:3; 5:1, 21; 8:1, 30, 33-34; 10:4, 9; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 3:9; Titus 3:7; Hebrews 10:14).

Matthew 16:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.²

1 Corinthians 12:28 (ESV)

²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

Ephesians 4:4-6 (ESV)

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

² All Scripture taken from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Hebrews 12:28 (ESV)

²⁸ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,

Psalms 103:12 (ESV)

¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

Isaiah 44:22 (ESV)

²² I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.

John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Acts 16:31 (ESV)

³¹ And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Romans 3:20-28 (ESV)

²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. ²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Romans 4:3 (ESV)

³ For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”

Romans 5:1 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:21 (ESV)

²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 8:1, 30, 33-34 (ESV)

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. . . . ³⁰ And those

whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. . . . ³³Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Romans 10:4, 9 (ESV)

⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. . . . ⁹because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Galatians 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Philippians 3:9 (ESV)

⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

Titus 3:7 (ESV)

⁷so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Hebrews 10:14 (ESV)

¹⁴For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Headship of Christ

B. We believe all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27), of which He is the Head (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Colossians 1:18; 2:19).

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (ESV)

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²²On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Ephesians 1:22-23 (ESV)

²²And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 4:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Colossians 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

Colossians 2:19 (ESV)

¹⁹and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

Local Church

C. We believe the true church is manifest in local churches (Acts 9:31; 20:28-30; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 16:19; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; Philemon 1-2), whose membership should be composed only of believers (Matthew 18:15-20; Acts 2:41, 47; 14:23; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 9; 11:20; 12:13; 14:40; 16:1-2; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 5:9; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 10:25).

Acts 9:31 (ESV)

³¹ So 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.

Acts 20:28-30 (ESV)

²⁸ 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. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Romans 16:5 (ESV)

⁵ Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia.

1 Corinthians 1:2 (ESV)

² To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

1 Corinthians 16:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.

2 Corinthians 1:1 (ESV)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:

1 Thessalonians 1:1 (ESV)

¹ Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

Philemon 1-2 (ESV)

¹ Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ² and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

Matthew 18:15-20 (ESV)

¹⁵ "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he

listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Acts 2:41 (ESV)

⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 2:47 (ESV)

⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 14:23 (ESV)

²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Acts 20:7 (ESV)

⁷ On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

1 Corinthians 1:2, 9 (ESV)

² To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: . . . ⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 11:20 (ESV)

²⁰ When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat.

1 Corinthians 12:13 (ESV)

¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 14:40 (ESV)

⁴⁰ But all things should be done decently and in order.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

1 Timothy 3:1-13 (ESV)

¹The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ²Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. ⁸Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹²Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 5:9 (ESV)

⁹Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband,

Titus 1:5-9 (ESV)

⁵This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— ⁶if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Hebrews 10:25 (ESV)

²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Ordinances

D. We believe the Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism (Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12) and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26), which visibly and tangibly express the gospel.

Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Romans 6:3-4 (ESV)

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Colossians 2:12 (ESV)

¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Matthew 26:26-29 (ESV)

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Mark 14:22-25 (ESV)

²² And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴ And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Luke 22:15-20 (ESV)

¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (ESV)

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

- E. We believe that though baptism and the Lord’s Supper are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer (John 6:55-56; Acts 2:38; 8:39; 16:34; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:29-30; Colossians 2:12).

John 6:55-56 (ESV)

⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

Acts 2:38 (ESV)

³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:39 (ESV)

³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

Acts 16:34 (ESV)

³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

1 Corinthians 10:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

1 Corinthians 11:29-30 (ESV)

²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

Colossians 2:12 (ESV)

¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Summarizing connection to the gospel: *“God’s gospel is now embodied in the new community called the church.”*

- IV. Specific ways the Article on the doctrine of the Church has been strengthened, or new issues addressed.
- Justified by God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone
 - True church is manifest in local churches
 - The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s Supper
 - Ordinances visibly and tangibly express the gospel
 - Not the means of salvation but a God-ordained means of spiritual growth (sanctification)
 - Celebrated
 - When genuine faith confirm and strengthen the believer
- V. Importance of reaffirming the biblical/doctrinal truths of the Church today (which also carries with it denials)
- Justification – this affirms the biblical teaching, over against the teaching of the Roman Catholic understanding, and the New Perspective on Paul (covenantal nomism, i.e. one enters into the covenant by grace, but one remains by works)
 - Faith alone in Christ alone – solas of the Scripture, rediscovered during the Reformation, and essential to reaffirm today
 - True church is manifest in local churches – this is contrary to the notion of lone ranger Christian, or the churchless Christian
 - Not the means of salvation – over against those who claim they are – Roman Catholics, Lutheran, and other demonization’s of groups that claim salvific efficacy of the ordinances
 - Celebrated in genuine faith – this is a celebration as the church body participates, and it is for those who have been justified, those who have true saving faith, i.e. genuine faith, and those alone come to celebrate, faith is not created by the participation in the ordinances