

Name:

This I Believe

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE APOSTLE'S CREED

Week 8: I believe in the holy catholic church; the communion on saints

Day One

At this point the Apostles' Creed turns its attention from the nature of God and the gospel to the people who are created as a result of the gospel—the church. After Jesus ascended to the Father, the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit, an event that's described in Acts 2. The day of Pentecost was the birth of the church, a community that was brought into existence by the life-giving Spirit of Christ.

In week 7 you read the end of Peter's first sermon (see w. 32-38). The response to his message resulted in the baptism of over three thousand people and the beginning of the church (see v. 41).

READ ACTS 2:42-47

What characteristics defined the church? List them here.

What words described the experiences of the church? List them here.

READ EPHESIANS 4:4-7

In this passage, what distinct roles do the three persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) play in forming the church?

Ephesians focuses our attention on what we have in common: one church and one God.

What specific things do Christians share in common that unite us?

Who's a part of your gospel-centered community (communion of the saints)? Record the names of the people in your small group or other close friends in your church.

Whom do you know who isn't connected to a church or attends church but isn't connected to a small group or another meaningful form of gospel-centered community? Commit to invite them to join you or encourage them to connect with a local church in their area.

While it may seem popular to believe you can be a Christian without being committed to a local church, that idea is absolutely foreign to biblical Christianity, today and throughout church history. Equally unfounded is the attempt to say you can belong to the universal church (the meaning of *catholic* in the creed) but not to a local church.

READ HEBREWS 10:24–25

According to these verses, what's one major purpose of meeting regularly?

Record the regular schedule of times you meet with your church: small group, Bible study, discipleship group, or other ministry activities.

Prayer

Father, I thank You that You've established Your church on the foundation of Your perfect power and authority. You've called to Yourself a people who can find joy and hope in worshiping You. Lord, make me restless until I find my rest in You. Help me see the church as holy because that's what You've made it. Help me see the church as one because You're one. Help me see the church as a beautiful communion You've called me to participate in and join. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Day Two

Humans are relational creatures. We're made for community. Before sin entered the world, the first thing in all creation that God deemed "not good" was "that the man should be alone" (see Gen. 2:18). After all, we're created in the image of a triune God: Father, Son, and Spirit (see 1:26-27). God enjoys community within Himself.

Relationships are a simple concept, but particular dynamics can be unique, so Scripture uses various metaphors to describe the sacred communal relationship known as the church. Read the following Scriptures, identify the image used in each, and summarize a way it's helpful in understanding the church.

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READ EPHESIANS 2:19-22

Image describing the church:

How it helps you understand the church:

READ EPHESIANS 5:22-32

Image describing the church:

How it helps you understand the church:

One defining characteristic of a marriage relationship is that a husband and a wife are one flesh, one person. This echoes God's blessing on Adam and Eve (see Gen. 2:24). Similarly, the church is united with Christ by the Holy Spirit and is made one (see 1 Cor. 6:17).

READ COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

Image describing the church:

How it helps you understand the church:

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-26

Image describing the church:

How it helps you understand the church:

This passage beautifully describes the diverse members of the body of Christ and the diverse spiritual gifts that make up one body. Be sure to reread verses 22-26. There's no gift that God doesn't honor.

How do you use your gifts, skills and experiences to serve the church?

Prayer

To You, Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit are due all honor, glory, and worship. I thank You, Father, for transferring me from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of Your Son, who reigns as Head over His body, the church. Your church desires to be one as You are one. Shape Your church into the likeness of Christ. Your church, the communion of saints in which You've placed us, is holy and set apart, not because of its merit but because You've called Your people into fellowship. By your mercy allow my local church to extend the gospel to its neighbors and the nations for the sake of Christ's kingdom. I pray in the name of my Lord Jesus. Amen.

Day Three

Three key words in this week's section of the Apostles' Creed should be reemphasized for clarity: catholic, saints, and communion.

When the Apostles' Creed says "the holy catholic church," it's referring to the body of Christ that all Christians everywhere over all time belong to. The word catholic is translated from a Greek word, *katholikos*, that means "according to the whole, or universal." In saying the church is catholic, we're affirming that all Christians everywhere are included in God's people, the communion of the saints.

Therefore, the term catholic isn't a reference to a specific denomination or to what we now know as the Roman Catholic Church. All Spirit-indwelt, gospel-believing, Jesus-exalting Christians are part of the holy catholic church.

Second, when the Apostles' Creed says "saints," it's another reference to all believers. This isn't a reference to a position or status in a church reserved for a few exceptional individuals. All 60 times the New Testament uses the term, it indicates all Christians. The Greek word *hagios* literally means "holy ones." In Christ we've been made holy. The saints gather and commune as the church.

Finally, when the Apostles' Creed says "communion," it's referring to the communal gathering of the saints-Christians-as the church.

Essentially, the phrase "the holy catholic church, the communion of saints" is purposefully redundant, emphasizing that all believers are included in the body of Christ.

READ 1 PETER 2:4-10

List the words used in this passage to describe the value, identity, and purpose of the church-the communion of all saints.

Value:

Identity:

Purpose:

Because we've been made in the image of God, we're more valuable than the rest of the created order. God desires to commune with us as His people. The tangible presence of God is most often revealed in the communion of the saints. It is God's good design that we belong to a local church, not that we simply go to one. There's an important difference. God has invited you into something greater—new relationships, new community, and new life as His church.

Prayer

1. SYMMETRY

Thank God for your church and for creating you for meaningful relationships.

2. CLARITY

Ask God to draw you closer to Him as you draw closer to His people.

3. COMMUNITY

Pray for people in your small group by name, including any specific requests. Take a minute to connect with at least one person in your small group (who you normally don't hang out with) to ask how you can pray for him or her.

4. COUNSEL

Seek out your small group leader and openly share about your life, asking that person to pray for you.

NOTES FROM THE LESSON

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What passage are we in?

Who is the church?

1. A Chosen _____
2. A Royal _____
3. A Holy _____
4. A People that _____ to _____

What is the purpose of the church?

To proclaim the _____ of Jesus

What am I supposed to do if I'm a part of the church?

1. Tell people _____
2. Live a life that _____
3. Be a part of _____