

XV. The Apostles' Creed in Biblical Perspective

"I Believe..."

"The Holy catholic Church"

Ephesians 2:19–22

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

September 27, 2020 • Sunday Sermon

This is the Word of God. Ephesians 2:19–22 says [19] *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

The Apostles' Creed contain essentials distilled by those who had been disciples by the Apostles. The creed is the Apostolic writing of Christianity in the New Testament and how Christ is our Redeemer and the fulfillment of all the Old Covenant promises. It is laid out in a Trinitarian way, in the three paragraphs it contains. The Apostles' Creed is as follows;

I believe in God the Father Almighty, (first affirmation/1st Person of the Trinity)

maker of heaven and earth;

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, (second affirmation/2nd Person of the Trinity)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended into hades.

On the third day he rose again;

he ascended into heaven,

is seated at the right hand of the Father Almighty,

and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, (third affirmation/3rd Person of the Trinity)

the holy catholic church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body

and the life everlasting. Amen.

We began the part on the Holy Spirit in the last study. The questions I regularly get concerning the Apostles' Creed deal with two of its phrases. One is the phrase 'he descended into hell' which we have already addressed in this series. In the original language of the creed they used the word hades in place of the word hell and it refers to the intermediate state of those who have died already and those who will die before Christ's return. It has two dimensions – one of blessing, called paradise or Abraham's bosom for the saved and one of torment known as the abyss for the unsaved. This is not our final state for the body is yet to be raised, united with the spirit and the Christian will be with Him in the new heavens and the new earth. The unbeliever will also be united body and spirit in a final state of torment, cast into the lake of fire.

It is important to understand why that phrase is used, honoring the true death of Jesus in His humanity, in fulfillment of the Scriptures and also becomes comfort for us because we know he will be present with us and we'll be with Him.

The second phrase people have an issue with is the phrase 'the holy catholic church.' People tend to tell me that we are in a Bible believing Presbyterian Church that is committed to the reformed faith and don't understand why we recite a creed that has this phrase – the holy catholic church – in it. I start by saying it is not a capital C but a small c and the church has been confessing this hundreds of years before there was a Roman Catholic Church for this phrase was in the original creed. But in this study I want to go a little deeper so that you can better understand why this phrase is important in this creed. There are several passage of Scripture we could go to in understanding this phrase but I think the Ephesians passage we just read is a good place to start.

There is a new phrase in our society today. For instance, when you went to school you would here the question – did you get your homework done – but today I've heard a new phrase that is used called 'our work product.' I like this phrase. So those you work for may say to you 'did you get your work product done?' That is where we are in our study of the creed. We are at a section that is the 'work product' of the Holy Spirit sent by Jesus who was led by the Father. What did the Father do? He sent His Son so we see the Son's humiliation – born, suffered, crucified, atoning death, buried, descended into hades – and now comes exaltation for on the third day He arose. Then He ascended into heaven for His coronation. From there He gave gifts to men, and will come to judge the living and the dead. The primary gift He gives is the Holy Spirit and His work product.

What is the very first work product? It is the testimony in this world of the holy catholic church. That's not all of His work product because there will also be the communion of the saints. That holy catholic church has a message called forgiveness of sins and it has a future known as the resurrection of the dead. That holy catholic church shall never perish – life eternal. The third paragraph in the Apostles' Creed says;

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

*the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

These are essentials truths that are only true because of our Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So let's walk through this passage in Ephesians. Paul starts Ephesians 2:19 with the words 'so then' which means this applies to all that was said before this. Before this verse Paul has told us about Christ who has purchased the church with His own blood and has called His people from all the nations. He has told us of Christ's forgiveness, of us being clothes with His righteousness and His giving of the Holy Spirit. These are blessings of the risen King who so in light of all of that Paul tells us, given in the negative that we are no longer strangers and aliens. That means before we were converted we were strangers of the common wealth of God to the Kingdom of God. You were under the dominion of darkness, a part of that kingdom.

Because the Father sent the Son who sent the Spirit, we are now fellow citizens and we're members of the household of God, fellow citizens. I have a penultimate allegiance nationally which is to the United States of America, but I have an ultimate allegiance to the Kingdom of God where I eagerly wait for my Savior. That doesn't mean I'm irresponsible as a Christian

citizen. No, I'm going to be fully engaged for I'm going to do all the Bible tells me to do and what a Christian citizen is to do for the work of the Kingdom by God's grace and for His glory. As a Christian, I believe you ought to be engaged, in prayer, participating and doing all of that but I can't tell you who will get elected. I can tell you who is King the next day and who the King of the Kingdom I'm in. It is Jesus and He is still working. I may get run out of the kingdom in America but I know I have a citizenship in the Kingdom of God and it's the same King who came to die for me and all authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth. He has a perfect plan and I have a confidence in Him that I ask Him to keep perfecting in me. We don't even have a green card in this Kingdom but we have citizenship papers this Kingdom. We belong to Him. We are strangers in this world and we're pilgrims in this world making progress. This Kingdom is not yet in its fullness but it is now and it won't be in its fullness until the King returns and sets up His Kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. It is here and I am a citizen.

I'm also a member of the household of God. In this Ephesians 2 passage there are three of the metaphors of the New Testament that describe Christ's church. Christ's church as it comes to its fullness in the New Testament has multiple word pictures, multiple metaphors that describe the church. Some examples of this are 'the bride of Christ,' 'the field of God,' 'the building of God,' 'the flock of God,' etc. I have counted at least ten metaphors for the church. The reason there are so many is because the church is multi-dimensional in its impact, its influence and even has in its singular calling, multiple consequences and multiple blessings so it's multi-faceted in the word pictures that are used to describe it. Some of them are right in this Ephesians 2 text.

One, is that this church is called the household of God. Number two, it's called the temple of God. I believe with those two explicit word pictures is another one. If I went to your house today and asked you who lived in your house what would you say? You would say something like 'I live here and so does my family.' So explicitly the church is called the household of God and implicitly it's also called the family of God. Brothers and sisters in Christ are who are in the household, with God our Father. We are in the household of God as the family of God. The church of God is seen as the temple of God, as the family of God, as the household of God. All of these word pictures are seen in this Ephesians 2 passage. We are members of the family of God. In Ephesians 2:21 it says we *are joined together*, as believers who are enrolled in a holy catholic church and now in a local church, members of one another in testimony of the grace of God.

Now let's look at it a little bit closer, for this house is [20] *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone* (Ephesians 2:20). If you were going to build a house back in the first century one thing you wouldn't need to do is call a contractor. All you would need to do is get a piece of land in Israel and all the building material you would need to build that house would be on that land. It's called rocks. On that land you would find a large immovable imbedded rock hopefully on a little bit of a slant. Then you gather other rocks that you would start stacking against that imbedded rock until it was as long as you wanted it. Then you would start stacking more rocks on the other side of the imbedded rock that would be perpendicular to it. Then you realize all these rocks are leaning on the cornerstone (the imbedded rock).

So the foundation of God's church are the prophets and apostles – Old Testament and New Testament – where the Old Testament is pointing to Christ and the New Testament is explaining Christ. It all rests on the Cornerstone – the preeminence of Christ as Creator,

Redeemer and Sustainer. That's how the church is built. So when you go looking for churches or want to be a part of a church the Word of God ought to be the foundation, rightly dealt with in the power of the Spirit of God will exalt Christ to the praise of the Father.

All of this is being built together in the Lord. Ephesians 2:21–22 says [21] *in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.* What is interesting about a household is you have a family. What is interesting about the temple is preaching, teaching, a house of prayer and what made the temple so special? God was there – the Holy of Holies. Jesus is the fulfillment of the temple and in the New Testament He is making you a temple and His church is the temple of His dwelling place. The Holy Spirit is at work everywhere but in His temple is a working presence of the Holy Spirit to exalt Christ. The Holy Spirit came to bring us to utter dependence upon Jesus, where Jesus is everything. This is the picture that is given to us in this Ephesians 2 passage.

There are other texts like the one that says [18b] *I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (Matthew 16:18b). This becomes so crucial as this apostolic statement is being put together and compiled. The Apostles' Creed say I believe in the church with the church being the noun and then there are two adjectives – holy and catholic. I believe in the holy catholic church. So let's work from the noun to the adjectives.

So what about the church? In the Bible there are three words translated with one English word called the church. The number one word used for the church is *ekklēsia* – ek means out of, from and klesia means called. So the church consists of the 'called out from' ones. We are called out from sin, Satan, the power of darkness to Christ together and then to build on that together there is another word for church in the Bible known as *sunagōgē* and it sounds like synagogue. This word means the assembled ones, the congregated ones, the congregation of the Lord. Those who have been called out from to Christ together assemble together. You don't have to go look for them for they are saved personally but they don't live individually. They live together in the family of God – the congregation of the Lord for they are the called together ones in the Lord.

The Kingdom and the church are not the same. The church is at the core of the Kingdom. It's the embassy of the Kingdom and the equipping center of the Kingdom. Here is an illustration. Let's say you went out and started a business as a Christian. Would you want that business to be a part of God's Kingdom work? Yes, which means you want a business to give people work, you want a product that honors the Lord, you want to run it in a way that honors the Lord, you want the business to show the ethics of the Kingdom of God that the Sermon on the Mount refers to and this would be the culture of your business. You are extending the Kingdom but Briarwood (referring to the church) doesn't own your business. Your home is there to extend the Kingdom of God but again the church doesn't own your home.

Here is what Briarwood as a testimony of Christ's church is here to do – to equip you so that you can extend the Kingdom. The church is here to disciple you with the whole counsel of God – teaching them to observe all that I (Jesus) has commanded you (Matthew 28 – The Great Commission) – so that you can extend, enlarge the Kingdom of God. What is the church? It's the family of God. It is the place where God has put His redemptive presence to be at work, to nurture the citizens of the Kingdom through discipleship, to win them through evangelism, to equip them to worship so that they are on mission, on message and in the ministry of discipleship and evangelism and they know how to be salt and light for the Kingdom when they go out into the world. That is what a local church does as a manifestation of Christ's church. The church is

an equipping center. It is the family of God for refuge, encouragement, nurture and nourishment. That is what it exists to do and it does it by being together. Families dwell together. Husbands dwell with you wife. Don't break covenant. Dwell with understanding and honor. It is fathers and mothers who raise up their children. The church is the family of God, the household of God, the temple of God.

A third word for church in the Bible is *kirk* which is where Scotland got its word for church. The building isn't the church but yet the church is being built up as living stones. A hundred years ago the church would have been called the meeting place not the building. I kind of have this unsanctified streak in me and my wife calls it sarcasm. I try to convince her it's actually dry wit. I had a man call me one time to tell me he wanted to come visit me and asked me, 'Where is your church?' I said 'I don't know.' The man said 'How do you expect me to visit you if the pastor doesn't even know where it is?' I said 'Oh you want to know where the church I pastor meets and that's 2200 Briarwood Way. I don't know where my church is because some of it's on an airplane, a football team, a classroom, at the mall, some of it's over here and there. It's scattered and then on the Lord's Day we will gather to worship and encourage one another in the Lord.'

Then the first adjective is given in the Apostles' Creed that the church is catholic. There was no organization Roman Catholic Church when the creed was written. The word catholic is a transliteration of two Greek words – *kata* (meaning, according to) and *holos* (meaning, whole one, universal). So the word catholic means universal and when we do the Apostles' Creed in church we usually put a little footnote by the word to show it means universal. We are the church that exists as one and that's why this is so important. We don't want to be a provincial arrogant cult. Praise God for the manifestation of the universal church that met in Washington DC to pray together. Praise God when they come together to do evangelistic crusades. All the gifts, fullness and blessings of God is not in any one person or in any one church.

The fullness of God is in the body of Christ. A local church is not the body of Christ, it is a manifestation of the body of Christ. So we need one another even outside a member of a local church. Not all the gifts or graces are there. We have a measure of God's blessings and that's why we enjoy bringing in other people from other churches to preach, encourage, train and join in with them to do things together in the Lord. That's why we are joined together with other church in like precious faith, in a presbytery and a general assembly. We try to manifest it organizationally but the key is that you confess it accurately. That it is one catholic church, universal church.

What the creed is referring to is what the church Christ purchased with His own blood. It is from every tribe, every nation, from every generation. It consists of the elect of God past, present and future. It consists of all of whom God has called to Himself. This church is invisible. This church in heaven is triumphant. This church is holy and pure. It is reflected in this world with local churches which are not pure, have mixed unbelievers in them, who are here to do the work of that holy catholic church but are not equated to it, but manifested in this world and are precious. This holy apostolic church is the elect of God from every nation, every tribe from all eternity – Old Testament, New Testament, post New Testament. The elect of God normally manifest themselves by saving faith in Christ.

This church is holy which means unique, one of kind and certainly it pursues holiness. Do you know why this church exists? It exists because of God the Father, who is holy, who sent His Son to save us who is the holy One of Israel. He is the One who sent the Holy Spirit and the One who bought us and sent the Holy Spirit who brought us and resides within us. That makes

His holy church of the elect of God which makes us unique in Him. As it is working out its purposes imperfectly in this world it has a holy mission. No one else has this mission. There is one institution in this world that is headed to a new heavens and a new earth and that's the church. Marriage won't be the same but I think it will be better and I'm sure my wife just said 'Amen.' Family will be different – better. Nations, townships, businesses will be different – better. The one institution in this world is the church ordained by the Father, bought by the blood of Jesus, brought by the Spirit of God and sent to glory to the glory of God – His church.

When I was in college I struggled greatly with what I was going to do with my life and I was raised in a church where Billy Graham and his family went. My grandfather was on the Billy Graham team so I saw this itinerant ministry. When I was in seminary it seemed like every one's gifts were going to parachurch organizations but I kept looking in the Bible and it just didn't set with me. I also kept looking at the church. I knew I was called to pastor, lead, shepherd, and teach for it was that siren call to an itinerant ministry. I don't have to worry about people and their problems but I just have to worry about those who are with me, but I kept seeing what the Bible said – husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church and gave Himself for her. Elders shepherd the flock of God – the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I saw how holy and sacred that was.

I met a man named Frank Barker, a churchman. I met a man named Jim Boyce, a churchman. I met a man named Al Martin, a churchman. I met a man named Henry Krabbendam, a churchman. All these men became mentors in my life. They were all churchmen. They all shared with me that I want to love what Christ has loved and it's not going to be easy but be committed.

It is His holy catholic church. We are not a social organization, although we do social things. We are not this state. We are church with a Great Commission to build a culture in this church that reaches every culture. Whatever the ethnicity is that is in reach of the church we ought to be reaching them by building a culture. What is the culture? It is called the Great Commandment which is to love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. This is what ought to pulsate in the church – fulfilling a Great Commission with a Great Commandment culture and a great commitment to the glory of God. That is what He has called us to be and called us to do. It is Christ's church, catholic, universal, triumphant, invisible, holy and it is manifested in this world with its imperfections in local churches until Christ comes again.

Here is the takeaway. Because true Christians believe in the invisible, triumphant, holy, catholic church (singular), we intentionally commit ourselves and our families to the visible and militant. The holy catholic church is triumphant and it is enrolled with the saints of heaven perfected and the elect of God belong to it with all its purity but in this local church we are to be militant. We are in a war. Jesus has won the war but we are in the battles. Every Lord's Day is a battle. Satan does not want people to prioritize the gathering of God's people for worship and praise. Satan hates the assembling and gathering of God's people before the Lord more than anything. Our penultimate is the Great Commission but the ultimate blessing of being saved is to do what the church triumphant is doing for all eternity which is to assemble before the Lord God and give Him praise, glory and honor – praise God from whom all blessings flow. Satan will also do anything to stop us when we scatter from being on mission, on message and in ministry.

That is why it is so important for God's people to intentionally commit themselves to the Lord and to His people to be a militant church all reliant upon the grace of God, all done for the

glory of God and our desire is to extend the Kingdom of God. I want to be very careful on this and I know we're in a pandemic right now. I understand providential hindrances. I'm so grateful for the means we have when people are in vulnerable situations and their need to protect themselves. Hopefully you have seen our desire to be prudent without being fearful but I need to make this as clear as I can. I'm thankful for live streaming, zooming and all the technology God has given but those are facsimiles, they are not substitutes for the assembling of God's people in worship with the means of grace, pastoral preaching that is not just seen, heard and download (although praise God for that), being in the Word of God together with the Spirit of God at work, and encouraging on another.

Hebrews 10:24–25 says [24] *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not 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.* There is nothing like seeing someone weeping and going to them. There is nothing like seeing people rejoicing and going to them. There is nothing like seeing the preaching come person to person, eyeball to eyeball, face to face and there is nothing like speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19). I rejoice that we can do these things in moments like this present distress but I am so deeply concerned that people think hearing a lecture through technology is the same thing as gathering to hear Jesus by the Spirit speak in the gathered assembling of His people. It is not the same.

Realize that when the Apostles wanted to talk to Christians they sent a letter to reach the saints and they didn't send it to 'whom it may concern.' They sent it to the church – to the saints in Philippi at the church in Philippi (Philippians 1:1). We see in the Bible baptized believers and their households added to the church, not forsaking the assembling of themselves in gathering and then going out and then going out and scattering to the glory of God – on mission, on message and in ministry filled with the Holy Spirit and as the hymn *The Church's One Foundation* says;

*'Mid toil and tribulation,
and tumult of her war,
she waits the consummation
of peace forevermore;
till with the vision glorious
her longing eyes are blest,
and the great church victorious
shall be the church at rest.*

She (the church) rejoices in the communion of the saints. You become a part, not by coming to a local church but by coming to Christ and then being a part, joining together as members one another as the testimony of your enrollment in the holy catholic church. I believe in the holy catholic church, invisible, triumphant therefore I am committed to the visible church militant.

Sometimes people might ask you 'who is a member of your church?' You might say 'Harry Reeder is my pastor' and they may say 'Well, then I'm going to pray for you.' 'Frank Barker used to be our pastor.' 'Well, praise the Lord, amen.' Then perhaps you start naming some others who go to your church. We have people sitting in our services who were addicted to sexuality and they came just as they were to Jesus who forgave them and changed them. There are those who were the idolatry of self, expressed in the addictions of sin but they came to Jesus.

They are a part of the holy catholic church and praise God we get to nurture one another right here. Perhaps you are thinking ‘Pastor, you don’t know where I’ve been.’

I sure know where I was before I came to Christ and I don’t want to compare resumes. I’m just telling you that the same Jesus who got a hold of me can get a hold of you. Don’t go get cleaned up. Jesus loves to fish for men and you don’t clean fish then catch them, you catch them then clean them. He’ll take you right where you are and never leave you right where you are but you come to Him. You can be a member of a local church – praise the Lord – but more importantly when you are in Jesus you are a member of the triumphant, invisible, holy, catholic church with those who have been called out in Jesus Christ assembled of all ages, nations and all times and Jesus loses not one.

I’d like to give you some names of who is in that church. John Calvin is a member of my church. John Wesley, George Whitfield, St. Augustine, King David, Abel, Paul to name a few are all members of my church for it’s Christ’s church – holy, universal, in Him, by Him, and for Him. I plead with you to come if you haven’t come to Him. I would be more than happy to meet with you, but come to Jesus. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Take a few moments in silent prayer. I invite you to come to Christ and if you would like to talk with me or someone at Briarwood please call us at (205) 776-5200 and we’d love to talk and pray with you. It’s a holy catholic church because you are in Jesus and Jesus is in you by His Spirit. His blood covers you. His righteousness clothes you. Just come to Him. The great joy of being members of one another is to grow in Him together. Would you come? Father, help us to rejoice and to be able to say ‘I believe in Christ’s church’ – blood bought, Spirit brought. I believe in the holy universal catholic church and thank You for all whom You have saved that are in it and You lose not one. It is triumphant, enrolled in the assembling of the saints for heaven, Amen.

Power Point

“The Holy catholic Church”

- I. Church
- II. Catholic
- III. Holy

LIFE TAKEAWAY

Because true Christians believe in the invisible and triumphant “Holy catholic Church,” we intentionally commit ourselves and our families to the visible and militant Church by the Grace of God, for the Glory of God, to extend the Kingdom of God.