



The Apostle's Creed

Part 8 – Who Needs the Church?

I believe in the holy catholic church...

Ephesians 2:11-22

In the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul's chief concern is to explain the gospel and the Christian's identity in Christ on the basis of Jesus' death. It is significant that Paul makes a doctrine of the church central to the Christian's self-understanding.

Christians believe that they need the church. They believe that the church is catholic (worldwide).

They believe that the worldwide fellowship of

Christians is God's chosen people, his holy nation, his kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:9). Christians believe that the church is catholic because it embraces all true believers in Jesus Christ everywhere in the world. It is through faith in Jesus Christ that men and women are grafted into the church. This worldwide church finds its expression in local congregations of believers. It is within these local churches where God cares for and sanctifies his people.

Michael Horton writes: "The church is not a civic group or a voluntary organization that has been formed to advance human goals and longings. The church is God's idea, and he creates this church for himself and by himself." Far from being emancipated individuals able to worship God in our own way and own time, Christians belong to God as a covenant community, a family of faith, a communion of saints.

1. God saves his people into his church.

Vv. 11-12

- Here Paul addresses the Ephesian Christians' former separation from God and His people. It is the Gentiles specifically that Paul has in mind. The division between Jew and Gentile was wide. Generations of failure on the part of Israel to be a light to the nations and a sense of ethnic superiority had driven what seemed to be an unbridgeable chasm between Jews and Gentiles. The difference between Israel and the nations was not arbitrary however. God had chosen Israel to be the people through which he would bless the world (Genesis 12, 15, 17). Because of their sin and idolatry the Gentile nations were strangers to the covenant of grace. They were excluded from citizenship in God's kingdom. This is the condition of all, both Jew and Gentile, who does not come to God in faith.

Vv. 13-18

- Through faith in Christ both Jews and Gentiles enter into a new relationship of unity by being included on equal footing in the household of God. This change was wrought by the dying of Christ whose blood was shed for the forgiveness of sins and has brought about the fulfillment of the Old Covenant regulations. The church is God's new humanity which enjoys peace with God and with one another. So, God saves his people into membership in his covenant people. There is no ordinary means of salvation outside the church. And there is no salvation that does not include inclusion into the church.

- Vs. 14 – “The dividing wall” most likely is a reference to the nearly 5 foot wall or stone fence (*soreg*) that separated the temple’s inner court from the Gentiles. The wall was constant reminder that Gentiles were prohibited from entering into the sanctuary. But in God’s holy temple – the church – there are no dividing walls. All of God’s people, Jew and Gentile alike are one in Christ Jesus.
- While the worldwide or *catholic* church is a beautiful reality, it is the *local* congregation which receives the attention of the New Testament writers. Every time the primary word for church (*ekklesia*) is used in the New Testament it is in reference to a local congregation. This is important because it demonstrates that Christians are not grafted into a vaguely defined group but into a real community.

2. God makes his people holy in his church.

Vv. 19-22

- Paul’s “so then” indicates that he is drawing out the implications of the Christian’s fellowship with God and one another in the church. He employs the metaphors of kingdom, family, and temple to illustrate the status of those who belong to the church.
- In the church we are simultaneously built and *being* built. That is, there is both a completeness and an ongoing-ness to God’s work in our lives. We are sanctified and *being* sanctified at the same time. And all of this happens within the context of the community. There is simply no category for a Christian who is not “being built together” with other Christians, “into a home for God...”
- God has entrusted certain *ordinary means of grace* to his church through which he has determined to build up his people. Chief among those ordinary means are the ministry of the Word, the sacraments, and the fellowship of God’s people.
- For centuries, theologians have written about the necessary “marks of the church.” What are those things that must be present for a church to be a church in any biblical sense?
 - a) The Ministry of the Word
 - b) The right administration of the sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper)
 - c) Church discipline

3. God cares for his people through his church.

Vs. 19

- Certainly much is being said in verse 19. But among the blessings attached to being “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,” is that Christians receive the care of family members. We “are no longer strangers and aliens.” We know from elsewhere in Scripture that God’s people are indeed strangers and aliens *in the world*. But this is not our condition within the household of God. We who once were far off from one another have been reconciled.
- The New Testament demonstrates repeatedly that within this reconciled community there is to be Christ-like love, compassion, provision, and discipline. Most of the New Testament books were written to particular local congregations. The instructions in those epistles are meant to be applied in the setting of local churches. The work of the apostles was directed to establishing local churches who would be served by elders and deacons. When Christians absent themselves from membership and active participation in a local church they are removing themselves from the chief means by which God cares for them.