

Back to the Basics

The Apostles' Creed: 3rd Article, Part II

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean? *I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.*

In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

Last week, we talked about the Holy Spirit, who He is and what He does. He is the third Person of the Trinity who works faith in us and forgiveness of sins by the Word of God. He sanctifies and sustains us throughout our earthly life, bringing us to the resurrection and eternal life with Jesus in heaven. Today, we focus on the medium the Holy Spirit works in. All these blessings are not ours alone, but we share them with others in the “holy Christian church, the communion of the saints.”

The phrase “communion of the saints” is another way to refer to the “holy Christian church.” All believers, and only believers, are members of this church (the invisible church).

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (**Ephesians 2:19-22**).*

*Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him (**Romans 8:9**).*

Since the church is invisible, we only know it by faith, which is why we say “I believe” in the church.

*[Jesus said,] “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (**Luke 17:20-21**).*

It is the Holy Spirit who gathers and preserves the church.

*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. ... And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (**Acts 2:41, 47**).*

There is only one church, one body, whose head is Christ.

*[Be] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (**Ephesians 4:3-6**).*

The church is called “holy” because it is made up of saints, cleansed and made righteous by the blood of Jesus.

*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (**Ephesians 5:25-27**).*

It is called “Christian” because it belongs to Christ and is built on Him alone.

*For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (**1 Corinthians 3:11**).*

There is also a visible church, which is the whole number of those who use the Word of God and profess Christian faith, but among whom, besides true Christians, there are also unbelievers. However, there is only one church – all believers in Christ. the visible church is called “church” because of the believers gathered around the means of grace in an assembly in which there are also hypocrites.

- As believers in Christ, we should:
 - Seek to be and remain members in the invisible church.

*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (**John 15:5**).*

- Be faithful to that visible church

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (**Acts 2:42**).*

- Avoid false teachers and organizations

*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits (**Matthew 7:15-16**).*

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world (**1 John 4:1**).*

- Maintain and extend God’s church through personal service, prayer, and financial support

*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you (**John 20:21**).*

*Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches (**Galatians 6:6**).*

*The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.*

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.
