

# Help Our Unbelief

## The Apostles' Creed

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,  
 And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the  
 Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead,  
 and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead;  
 he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from  
 thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.  
 I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness  
 of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.*

### Part 9: “The Holy, Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints”

#### I. Scripture: Ephesians 3:14-4:7

- In Paul’s vision, in what way is the church holy? How is it catholic?

#### II. What this doctrine does not mean:

- That the Roman Catholic Church is the only true church.

Nicene Creed	<i>one</i>	<i>holy</i>	<i>catholic</i>	<i>apostolic</i>
Roman	There is only one church, in communion with the Pope.	Church produces saintly people and is kept from radical sin.	Holds the full faith in trust for everyone worldwide.	Unbroken succession from the apostles; teaching grows from apostles.
Protestant	One worldwide fellowship of believers whose Head is Christ.	Consecrated God (though capable of grievous sin)	Embraces all Christians everywhere.	Seeks to maintain the apostles’ doctrine in Scripture.

- That the church does not Sin.
  - “All churches (like those in Corinth, Colosse, Galatia, and Thessalonica) are prone to err in both faith and morals and need constant correction and reformation at all levels (intellectual, devotional, structural, liturgical) by the Spirit through God’s Word” (Packer).
- That our need for Community is secondary, or unfortunate.

- “It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18); “But for the man no suitable helper was found” (Gen 2:20).
  - Adam names the animals. Presumably he sees that there’s more than one of each.
- Companionship for Adam is a must for creation to be “very good”.
- This all happens *before* the fall into sin! Depending on one another for help and companionship is not a “crutch”--it’s a created good and a reflection of God’s own trinitarian being.

### III. What this doctrine *does* mean:

- Church means “**Assembly**.” (OT “Qahal”; LXX “Ekklesia”)
  - God has always had “called out” ones.
    - Adam is called out from among the animals. Noah, Abram, Moses, David are all “called out” individually in order to gather together a people who are “called out” and “assembled” for God’s mission.
- The Church’s catholicity and holiness was **Prophesied** in the OT:
  - **Adam** and **Eve** were meant to extend the **Holiness** of the Garden into all creation (Gen 1:28).
  - **Noah** was meant to start this mission again (Gen 9:1; 27).
  - **Abraham** was chosen to re-start the mission again (Gen 12:1-3).
  - **Moses** was chosen to release Abraham’s family to carry on the mission, stemming from the promised land (Ex 3:16-17).
  - **David** was promised a descendant who would sit on his throne and fulfil Israel’s calling among the nations (2 Sam 7:12ff).
  - The **Prophets** declared it would still happen, despite the called-out assembly’s sins and God’s judgment (Is 54:1-2; 60:1-3; Ezek 37).
- The **Holy Spirit** *creates* the holy catholic Church (Acts 2).
  - “It is by strict theological logic that the Creed confesses faith in the Holy Spirit before proceeding to the church, and that it speaks of the church before mentioning personal salvation (forgiveness of sins, resurrection, everlasting life)” (Packer).
- The **Holy Scriptures** *govern* the holy catholic Church.

- The most fundamental question for every local church, in assessing its holiness and catholicity, is whether it sits in judgment over the Bible, or sits in submission under it.
- “Every **Local** gathering [ahem, Assembly!] of believers is a full **Expression**” of mysterious catholicity” (Myers).
  - In the same way that each particular, unique human being fully and uniquely embodies human nature, each true congregation uniquely displays the universal church.
- Living believers are **Mysteriously United** with those who have died in Christ.
  - “The greatest barrier that divides human beings from one another is not culture or language or class. The greatest barrier is death. It splits the human family into two classes of the living and the dead. All other social divisions are petty compared to this great division. All human beings are powerless before this fundamental boundary. But in the resurrection Jesus has stepped across the barrier and restored communion between the living and the dead. He has formed one family that stretches out not only across space but also across time. The body of Christ is the most inclusive human community imaginable because it includes not only those who are now living but also all believers who have ever lived” (Myers).
  - The union of “the Church **Militant**” with “the Church **Triumphant**” (see Heb 12:22-24).
  - “A Debtor to Mercy Alone,” by Augustus Toplady (1740-78):
 

My name from the palms of His hands / Eternity will not erase;  
 Impressed on His heart it remains / In marks of indelible grace.  
 Yes, I to the end shall endure / As sure as the earnest is given  
***More happy, but not more secure / The glorified spirits in heaven.***
- The notion of a Christian who is not a **Member** of a church is **Foreign** to the New Testament.
  - “Every letter in the New Testament assumes Christians are members of local churches. The letters themselves are addressed to local churches. They teach us how to get along with other members, how to encourage the weak within the church, how to conduct ourselves at church, and what to do with unrepentant sinners in the church. They command us to submit to our elders, and encourage us to go to our elders to pray. All these things are impossible if you aren’t a member of a local church” (R Jones).
  - “No one can have God for his Father, who does not have the Church for his mother” (Cyprian, d. AD 258).
  - "There is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, [and] nourish us at her breast...[A]way from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation” (Calvin).

- "... outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (WCF).
- It is the context within which we practice the 59 "**One-Anothering**" commandments of the New Testament.
  - John 13:35 is the summary of the 59. The reality of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, ascension, and session is displayed in the loving life of the local church. People should see us and say, "Wow, the only place I've seen communal love like this is in those other churches." Our love is a mark of our catholicity.
- An individual Christian isn't "the **Bride of Christ**" (Eph 5:25ff).
  - Jesus is not polygamous! There is only one beloved.
  - It is *Zion's* name that is written on the palm of his hand (Is 49:14-16). The question is: are *you* a member of Zion?
  - If so, then your (individual) names are written in "the Book of Life" (Rev 3:5; 21:27; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3).
- The Church is **Glorious!**
  - "On earth she is often in rags and tatters ... But one day she will be seen for what she is, nothing less than the bride of Christ, holy and without blemish, beautiful and glorious" (Stott; Eph 5:27).
  - "I have been hurt by the church; sometimes deeply. I have also been healed by her. She baptized and raised me. She preached the gospel to me and gave me the Eucharist. ... The church is too precious to abandon" (Esau McCaulley).

#### IV. Discussion

- How does the biblical revelation of "the holy, catholic church, the communion of saints" surprise, confuse, encourage, correct, thrill, startle, or delight you, and challenge you to live differently?
- What (if any) intellectual or volitional roadblocks remain?