

“The Church”  
Apostles Creed  
Various  
08/20/2023

## Introduction

Tim. Pastor. **Special welcome.** **Ephesians 2:13-22.**

**As you're turning there, let's stand and read the Creed together.**

### **THE APOSTLES CREED**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. 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.**

### **PRAY.**

Believe it or not we have reached week 10 of our Apostles Creed series. And we've come today to I believe one of the more difficult lines – **“I believe in the holy catholic church, the communion of saints.”**

### **“CATHOLIC”**

Now let's just get it out of the way from the jump – **when the creed says “catholic” it does not mean big ‘C’ Roman Catholic.** Remember the Creed has been written and confessed by Christians since the 2nd century, long before there were the divisions of Catholic and Protestant. The word here carries the old meaning of “universal”.

When we confess we believe in the holy catholic church, we are confessing that we believe the church is made up of people from everywhere – from every culture, from every time, from every place in the world. You can go across the world today and you will find communities of God's people gathered together around His Word and around the sacraments of communion and baptism and the worship of Jesus.

**Now, you might ask – what's so difficult about that? Seems good to go, let's wrap up the sermon and get to ooh-ing and ahh-ing over some babies.**

Well to be honest with you – nothing. The difficulty of confessing our belief in the church is not typically with the church **global** or **universal** but with the church **local**. Our difficulty is not with the fact that we, if we are followers of Jesus, are part of His global big “C” Church, but that that reality then must be lived out in a local little “c” church. It's not with the idea of Church, as much as it is our lived experience within the Church.

**That's where the creed gets difficult.**

**Because let's be honest, it's hard to be a part of a local church, is it not?**

- It can be scary, especially for those of us who have some form of church hurt in our past – it can feel daunting and vulnerable to trust ourselves to a group of people.
- It can be costly. It requires something of us that takes time, energy, and sacrifice.

- It can be embarrassing, when we see Christians acting in ways that don't bring glory to God we can think "do I really want to associate with one of those?"
- And maybe even for those of us who believe in it, desire it, it can at times just be tiring – is this really worth it? Like trying to intertwine my life to the lives of others in a local church just feels like it's bringing more L's than W's, right?

And so many of us try to pull the plug on the whole "local" part. People want to say this all the time – I'm a part of **THE** Church, I don't need to be a part of **A** church. That would make no sense to followers of Jesus throughout history. And it should make no sense to us. That statement doesn't mean anything.

**College Football.** College football starts next week. It's like week 0, then two more weeks till the good stuff. College Gameday is going to be like half a mile from here, isn't that fun? Anyways. Let's play out a hypothetical scenario.

Imagine you meet someone and they say they're a college football player. "Cool, which team are you on?" "I'm on team college football." "Yeah, but like who's team do you play for?" "Oh no you don't understand, I play college football." "No, you don't understand, you can only play if you're on a team." "No good sir, I'm a part of big C College football." "No you don't understand, you can only be a part of big C college football if you're a part of a little "c" COLLEGE."

But listen, belonging to "THE Church" comes with no skin in the game. It comes with no accountability. It comes with no spiritual authority. It comes with no ownership and responsibility. The way Christians have always lived out their big C Church identity is through little c church participation and ownership. Local communion with God's people. Local fellowship. Knowing others and being known.

**This is what the NT expects of you. This is what Jesus expects of you. And that is difficult, because the church is broken and messy.**

**So here's what I want this morning...**

**I want us to walk out of here being totally honest about the flaws of the church, and yet totally committed to the church.**

Is that possible? To be able to be totally honest about the flaws and weaknesses of the church, and yet totally committed to the church. That's what I'm after this morning. What can help us say this part of the Creed with confidence? What can help us believe, convictionally, in the church?

**And I'm convinced in order to get there, we need to see three things:**

- 1. What the church is meant to be**
- 2. Why we cannot be that**
- 3. How, through Jesus, we can be**

### **Passage - Ephesians 2:13-22**

So hopefully you're at Ephesians 2 now, let me read it for us, starting in verse 13...

**13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross,**

thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 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.

### What the Church is Meant to Be

Let's first talk about what the church is meant to be. The text gives us 2 images/metaphors to describe the church as God intends it to be..

The first image we are given of what the church is meant to be comes in verse 19, the church is...

#### **1. The Household of God**

**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,**

The Greek word used for household here is the word *oikeios* (οἰκεῖος), which is a word that means *family* in the broadest sense.

It definitely includes mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters, but it might also include aunts and uncles, grandparents, cousins and even household servants in the old roman world. It's your household, your family.

And so when the text says we're meant to be the household of God, the emphasis is on family unity.

**The church is meant to be a family that is united by thick relational ties.**

Have you ever heard the phrase, or cliché "**blood is thicker than water**", have you ever heard that? Part of the origin of that phrase was religious. It was a way of trying to communicate "family ties (blood) are more lasting than religious ones (the waters of baptism)".

But that's not in fact how it's meant to be. What God intends is that **water would be thicker than blood.**

God intends for the household of God, the people of God, to be our truest and deepest family. Isn't that what Jesus himself says, when he's teaching in Matthew 12, and someone tells him – your family is outside. What does He say? "**Who are my mother and my brothers? Those who do the will of my Father in heaven.**"

**The church is meant by God to be a family.**

- It's meant to be a family where the fatherless can find fathers.
- Where the motherless can find mothers.
- Where the lonely can find welcome.
- Where the childless can gain more children than they can count.

Before we close today we'll celebrate our annual parent commissioning. It's meant to be a challenge to these parents to raise their children in the Lord, to take responsibility as their primary disciple makers for their children while they're at home and then send them into the world for the glory of God.

But it's just as much a challenge for us. Because in the household of God, these children are our children. Their discipleship is also our goal. Their care is also our responsibility.

The church is meant to be a beautiful, interwoven, interdependent family with God as our Father showering down His love on us as His children. Where we care for one another, pray for one another, serve one another, welcome one another, weep with one another, celebrate and rejoice with one another, help one another make decisions, help one another carry burdens.

The second image the text gives us of what the church is meant to be is...

## **2. The Temple of God**

**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 a temple? A temple is a holy place. It's a physical building that has spiritual significance. In the Old Testament the temple was the place where heaven met earth. It was the place where God's presence came to dwell in a unique and special way.

**The church as a temple means the church is meant to be a place where God's presence is experienced and encountered and felt in a tangible and powerful way.**

And you know this, that doesn't mean the building. Paul is using an architectural metaphor about a place of transcendence, to make a point about the people of God. It's not the brick and mortar that makes the church a holy temple. It's the sense of God's presence and power.

You can have a really beautiful, gothic style, raised ceilings, fantastic artwork building where God is absent. Or you can have a group fitness room, that in roughly 2 hours will play host to classes called Cardio Strength and Cardio Funk, where there's a deep sense of transcendence because God's presence and power is there.

That is what God says His Church, His people are meant to be – the holy temple, the dwelling place for God, His presence, His power.

And there's a beauty that is meant to come from that, where the way we worship, the way we pray, the way we encounter God is meant to feel...unordinary. Is meant to feel "other" than the rest of our sort of secular, un-transcendent western lives. That the beauty of what we do here and the power of what we do here would be evidence God's presence is here with us.

**So what is the church meant to be?**

- **The Household of God – a Family. Who loves one another, cares for one another, serves one another.**
- **The Temple of God where the transcendent power, presence, and beauty of God comes to dwell.**

### **Why Can't We Be That?**

**Doesn't that sound great?** This is in some sense what we all long for is it not?

I mean you're here, you showed up on a Sunday when you could have been a million other places. Isn't there a longing at your core for this? Even if you've been hurt by the church. Maybe especially if you've been hurt by the church. Isn't this what we all wanted to or thought we were saying yes to?

So the question becomes – **Why can't we? Why can't we be what God says the church is meant to be?**

**The passage tells us. It's the same word used in two places, v14 and 16 – Hostility.**

The original context of this passage is describing the tension and separation, the *hostility* that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles (non-Jewish people) in the 1st century. The gospel had come to both groups, and now they are trying to figure out how to live as the family of God together. But there is deep rooted and massive hostility.

This was hostility that was – Cultural | Ethnic | Historical | There were two opposite sets of values and traditions.

And the hostility is so great Paul calls it a ***dividing wall that needed to be torn down and demolished.***

**What keeps us from being all that the church is meant to be?**

**What keeps us from being the family of God that lives in unity and peace and love?**

**What keeps us from being a people of transcendent beauty where God's presence dwells?**

**Hostility. Walls. Sin-fueled and sinful divisions.**

Why can't we be what the church is meant to be? Because sin divides us. It separates us from God, and it separates us from one another. It pulls us apart.

Sin, in the core of our being, makes the gravitational pull of our lives not towards other Christians, not towards God's people, not towards one another as a family and temple, but it pulls us apart.

You see this in the beginning of the Scriptures. God creates Eve because it's not good for Adam to be alone. The design is harmony, peace, unity between God and man and mankind with one another. But as soon as they rebel, as soon as they eat the forbidden fruit and sin enters the world, what happens? They hide from God, and accuse and blame shift towards one another. And then one chapter and one generation later their firstborn murders their second born.

It's like the Scriptures want to make sure we're aware from the jump that sin not only breaks our relationship with God, but also does corrosive damage to our relationship to one another. To our ability to be the Church as we're meant to be.

**So what does this mean?**

- It means the trouble you have caring about and relating to that difficult group member is not simply a result of personality differences. It's a sin-fueled division.
- The seemingly incredible barrier you feel to get out the door to go to Community Group, that you don't feel to go to a movie is not simply the result of a rough day. It's a sin-fueled division.
- The part of you that wants to pull back and isolate, who when you start to actually open up and be vulnerable it's like everything in you is screaming "don't do it!", it's a sin-fueled division, sin-fueled separation.
- That inability you feel to forgive the person in the church who wronged you, it's sin-fueled division.

**And as much as we want to point the finger, it's all of our faults. We're all to blame. This is at the core of makeup and wiring as humans.**

**Acts 2.** I remember a few years ago, talking with a friend of mine about my frustration with the disconnect between what the Bible says the Church should be and what it so often actually is. And specifically I was talking about Acts 2. This picture of the early church, the first Christians who were so moved by the gospel they were selling their possessions, daily sitting under the preaching of the word, people were being added day by day, this picture of what we long to be. And I was expressing to him – "why can't the church today be like the church then?"

And he said to me, “Tim – Did you keep reading? Like 12 chapters later they’re fighting. And two books later you have 1 Corinthians which is basically one big letter about church fighting. And then you get to Ephesians all about...church fighting.”

And then just for good measure before we moved on he said with a smile **“and, by the way, if you were to find a church as perfect as the one in your head, do you think they’d let you in?”**

This is all of us. And it’s deep, and it’s pervasive. These dividing walls of hostility have always been keeping the church from being what it’s meant to be. And it keeps us from what we’re meant to be even today.

### Hope in Jesus

**SO...is there any hope? Is there any hope for us to actually be what the church is meant to be?**

There is hope, and that’s the good news this morning. And that hope is found in Christ Jesus.

Look back at the passage with me...

**13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.**

Here’s the point the text is making...

- Jesus breaks down walls.
- Jesus kills hostility.
- Jesus preaches peace to those who are far and to those who are near.
- Jesus, in his life, death, and resurrection destroys and dismantles the divisions our sin wants to build.

And do you see how he does it?

- By his blood (vs 13)
- In his flesh (v14)
- In Himself (v15)
- Through the cross (v16)

Jesus breaks down the dividing wall of hostility through the shedding of his blood. Through his life, his death, his sacrifice, Jesus creates out of two people, one people. One Church.

Look at v19...

**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.**

Christ has now brought us together. He has now reconciled us to one another. We’re not strangers anymore, but fellow citizens and a part of God’s family. This is what it means to become a Christian. That the us vs. God is done, but so is the us vs. them. The division that separated us from God has been torn down, BUT so has the divisions that separate us from one another. That’s what is accomplished for us in the gospel.

**And it’s not simply that it’s a good thing, it’s a central, already-done for us thing.**

Being a part of the family of God is not an add-on to the good news of salvation, it is central to the good news of salvation.

You're not saved to Jesus, then decide if you want to interact with His people. That's how we often think about it, right? We tend to think that the Church is sort of the afterthought optional part of the Christian life. Once we enter our personal relationship with Jesus we can decide which one to be a part of and then it's there to help us in our individual faith journeys.

***But church is not an add-on to salvation. You are saved into His people, the Church.***

**Ben Myers – “The message of the gospel is directed not primarily to individuals but to this new community. God's plan of salvation all along has been to create one human society as the bearer of the divine image. In that sense, the church isn't just the way people respond to salvation; the church is salvation.”**

That's what Jesus has come to do. To break down the dividing wall of hostility between us and God and between us and one another. To make us, through the shedding of His blood on the cross into a new family which welcomes the presence and power of God.

**But then notice, that's the past reality. That's what Christ has done – His blood has reconciled us. But the passage doesn't end in the past. There's a progressive, ongoing part to it...**

**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.**

This passage reminds us that the work of the gospel is both finished and ongoing. Jesus has died for sin once for all, AND the Holy Spirit is right now working that out in the context of our actual community.

- Christ reconciles us and keeps reconciling us.
- Christ breaks down walls and keeps breaking down walls.
- We are joined together and we are being built together.

So only the church that holds Christ at the center can be what the church is meant to be. Only the church that keeps Christ and what He has done for us as the cornerstone, as the central reality can be the family and temple we were meant to be. Christ reconciles us and builds us together and will keep building us together.

Christ does the work, and then keeps doing the work.

- When we want to put up more walls, Christ has the power to tear them down.
- When we want to isolate and pull back, Christ has the power to unite us together.
- When we want to withhold, judge, point fingers, Christ has the power to humble us with his love.

### **Conclusion**

**So, let's go back to where we started. Is it difficult to confess and believe in the holy catholic church? Absolutely it is. Is it difficult to want to engage over the long haul with a local body of believers? Of course.**

But you know what? Holding back, holding out, judging the church, pointing at the church and saying “those people don't get it. Those people don't do what they should. That's not something I want to be a part of.”

**It's just another version of sin-fueled division. It's just another way the enemy gets what he wants. It's just another way sin wins. All of that won't solve the problem.**

**The only thing that can solve the problem, the only thing that makes the church what it ought to be, is the gospel.**

**What do you need to be able to see all of the flaws of the church and yet say with confidence "I believe in the holy catholic church" ?**

**You need to believe the gospel, and you need to keep believing the gospel.**

You need Jesus to break down the dividing wall of hostility in your heart, and you need the Spirit to keep building you together with His people into a dwelling place for the Lord.

The hope of the Church is not the Church. The way you can leave this place confessing and believing in the holy catholic church and your place in it, is not by getting a better church. Is not by finding the perfect place. That's what we think. "If I find the perfect place, then I'll get involved." Or that's how churches sell it, do they not? "Hey I know your old church hurt you, but we're different. You can find a REAL community here."

But I need you to hear me on this – Hope for your participation in the church, is not the Church. Because as long as your participation in the church is based on the church, it will keep letting you down. It will keep coming up short. You and the people you try to be family with will keep being, spoiler alert, sinners.

Your participation in the church, your ability to confess "I believe in the holy catholic church" must be built on the foundation the church is built on – Christ and Christ alone. He is our hope.

**So two questions for you as we close:**

**First, have you joined the holy catholic church?**

Not by coming to a building or joining an organization but by believing the gospel. Have you confessed your hostility against God and against others and received Jesus' pardon for your sins and reconciling work through His death and resurrection?

**Second, are you allowing the Holy Spirit to build you together into a dwelling place for God alongside other real live sinners in a particular church?**

This doesn't happen in the abstract, you get that right? This only happens in the concrete. When it says "Christ in whom the whole structure grows into a holy temple in the Lord" some of us are like – "That's beautiful. I'm going to underline that, put it on a coffee mug, pray about that later today" as long as I don't have to talk to any actual people. As long as it doesn't start costing me something in my everyday life.

But this doesn't happen in the abstract. It only happens in the concrete. It means you being joined together with other people, who are different from you, in a community of people united in the Lord Jesus Christ. And all of that happens in the messiness of a specific local church like this one.

**So have you joined THE Church?**

**And are you allowing the Holy Spirit to build you into a holy temple in A church?**



**And where does Christ need to continue today and this week doing the renovating work in your soul to tear down the dividing walls of hostility and reconcile and continue reconciling you to His people?**

The hope of the Church is not the Church, the hope of the Church is Christ. Let's let the gospel do the work as we seek to be built up together as the family and temple of God.

**Pray.**