

# We believe...

THE CREED OF THE NEW APOSTOLIC CHURCH

**MARCH 2020**

**Session 1: The Holy Spirit**

**Session 2: The church is...**

**Session 3: The beyond**

SCRIPT

## Session 1 – The Creed: The Holy Spirit

Welcome! This month we'll be exploring the various parts and phrases of the third Article of Faith, which talks about the Holy Spirit. Let's read the article in its entirety:

***I believe in the Holy Spirit, the one, holy, universal, and apostolic church, the community of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and life everlasting.***

The article begins with a profession of belief in the Holy Spirit. Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity. He is the Creator of the universe, together with the Father and the Son (Genesis 1:2). He sanctifies us through rebirth of water and Spirit (John 3:5-6). The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople brings expression to the divine essence of the Holy Spirit: *We believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified...*

**We believe that the Holy Spirit calls us to faith in God and that our faith is a gift from God.** As it says in Ephesians: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...* (Ephesians 2:8). The Holy Spirit desires all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). He calls us to salvation, which we can accept by exercising our free will to believe. But we are also called to contribute to the salvation of others by sharing our belief in Jesus Christ with those around us. *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them* (Ephesians 2:10). This verse speaks to the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit awakens in us, to fulfill the purposes for which God has created us, and to contribute to the body of Christ.

At first glance, the third article might seem to be a random grouping of phrases. However, all of these phrases connect by revealing the ways that the Holy Spirit makes *us* holy. In the first three points, we see how the Holy Spirit is presently active: His activity through the church, the community of the saints, and in the forgiveness of sins. We believe these first three things are made available to us through our baptism, as we become a part of the body of Christ and profess our faith. The last two items, resurrection of the dead and life everlasting, are what we can look forward to in the future. This is how the Holy Spirit draws us into relationship with God, the Father and God, the Son.

The Holy Spirit calls us to **the church**, which was not created by humans, but is a divine institution. The Holy Spirit's activity in the church is evident through its preservation and evolution throughout history. It is the assembly of those who are baptized, follow Christ, and profess Him as their Lord. The purpose of the church is to make salvation accessible to humans by preaching the word of God (Romans 10:14-17), by dispensing the sacraments, and by bringing worship and praise to God.

Through our baptism, we are brought into the **community of the saints**, which is comprised of all those who are part of the church of Christ. The Greek word used for "saints" means *holy ones*. The idea that the church would be a group of people called to holiness was already firmly established in the Old Testament: *For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy* (Leviticus 11:44). Being part of the community of saints is a call to godliness, to a different way of living. We will never be able to live out perfectly the things we profess as Christians, but together we can help each other along in this process of sanctification and sculpting into the holiness of Christ. We were never meant to walk this journey alone – through the church, we have a community that supports, strengthens, and loves us.

The last phrase we'll discuss today is the **forgiveness of sin**. The Holy Spirit is active in the forgiveness of original sin at baptism. He also moves us continuously to repentance, remorse, and confession of our personal sin. Apart from forgiveness, He strengthens us when we receive the real presence of Christ through the sacrament of Holy Communion.

This session began our journey to a deeper understanding of the third article. We'll continue to explore this article next week when we discuss the church of Christ.

## **Session 2 – The Creed: The church is...**

Welcome back! Today we'll continue our discussion of the third article by looking at the characteristics of the church of Christ, which we find in the first line:

### ***I believe in the Holy Spirit, the one, holy, universal, and apostolic church...***

We believe that Christ gave us the church because we need each other to complete the body of Christ. Our new life in Christ is actualized in and with others. We were created by God to exist in fellowship with Him and with each other. Hebrews encourages us to come together where we can experience the fullness of being a Christian as Jesus intended (Hebrews 10:25). To fulfill Christ's commands, we need a neighbor!

Let's take a closer look at the four characteristics listed in the article: *one, holy, universal, and apostolic*.

#### **We believe the church is one.**

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all* (Ephesians 4:4-6).

The profession of the one church arises from belief in the one God. The triune God has founded and preserved the church through the Father who sent the Son; through Jesus Christ, who as the head of the body, is united with the congregation; and through the Holy Spirit, who is active in the church of Christ and fills believers with the knowledge of the truth. Therefore, the one church attests to the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What we are professing here is the whole church of Christ, not a specific denomination. That is, those who believe in Christ are baptized and are committed to being His disciples. This provides an ecumenical unity where we can have respect for other churches, even if our beliefs are not all the same. We can make every effort to understand our differences, while recognizing what binds us together.

Jesus described oneness with one another and love for one another as identifying features of those who belong to Him and follow Him, and even articulated these in a prayer to His Father, ...*that they may be one just as We are one...* (John 17:20-23, John 13:34-35).

#### **We believe the church is holy.**

The Hebrew word which translates into English as "holy," means *set apart, separate, sacred*. The church of Christ is holy through the sanctifying activity of Christ's sacrifice and through the activity of the Holy Spirit in word and sacrament. This holiness is founded only upon the triune God, not the human beings who belong to the church. The writer of 1 Peter describes those faithful to Christ as *a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...* (1 Peter 2:9). While the church is a perfect institution of God, it exhibits shortcomings on account of the people who are active within it. Our individual sinfulness does not invalidate the holiness of the church. This contradiction is held in the dual nature of the church, which corresponds to the dual nature of Jesus Christ, who was both true Man and true God. The invisible side of the church cannot be understood by reason, but can be experienced through faith, for example when we feel the nearness of God in the preached word and sacraments. The visible side expresses the human side of the church. Thus, the mistakes and deficiencies of our human nature are also present in the church.

#### **We believe the church is universal.**

The Creed, in its original wording, speaks of the church as *catholic*, or to use another word, *universal* – that is, existing throughout all time and throughout the world, including people who confess and believe in Jesus Christ from every background, both the living and the dead. In other words, it far transcends anything that can be experienced by human beings. The universality of the church comes from God's will to save all men. It is reiterated by Jesus Christ in His commission to the apostles to *make disciples of all nations* (Matthew 28:19), and to *go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature* (Mark 16:15). All Christians, who are called to testify of their belief in Jesus Christ, share this task.

Ephesians 2 creates a warm picture of this universality and also touches on our next word, apostolic: *Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit* (Ephesians 2:19-22).

### **We believe the church is apostolic.**

The church of Christ is apostolic in two ways: it is where the apostolic doctrine is proclaimed, and it is where the apostolic ministry is active. This doctrine is the message of the life, death, resurrection, and return of Jesus Christ, according to the teaching of the first apostles, attested to in the New Testament, and believed by the early Christians (Acts 2:42). The apostle ministry is the ministry given by Christ and led by the Holy Spirit, with the responsibility to preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, and proclaim the forgiveness of sins. We believe the apostle ministry was given by Jesus for the church of Christ. We'll discuss our beliefs about ministry in more detail when we discuss Articles 4 and 5.

The visible church will never be able to fulfill the requirements of being one, holy, universal, and apostolic due to the sinfulness of the human beings active in it, among other things. But it is central to our discipleship in Christ, and a fundamental element of our Christian faith.

Join us next week as we wrap up our discussion of the third article by focusing on the last two phrases: "resurrection of the dead" and "life everlasting."

### **Session 3 – The Creed: The beyond**

In this session, we'll continue examining the third Article of Faith, concentrating our discussion on the last two phrases, "the resurrection of the dead" and "life everlasting."

The resurrection of the dead and life everlasting are fundamental convictions of the Christian faith. References to life after death are found in both the Old and New Testaments, for example, 1 Corinthians 15. There we read that if Christians in this life only have hope in Christ, then they *are the most pitiable of all people* (1 Corinthians 15:19). Indeed, as Chief Apostle Schneider said in a service webcast throughout the USA last year, the Christian faith "is all about eternal life."

God created humans as physical and spiritual beings in His image, as we read in Genesis 1:27. Thus, God created humans to be immortal. God also gave humans a free will, but their poor exercise of it resulted in the fall into sin and, as a result, separation from God. Scripture teaches that sin leads to death: *For the wages of sin is death...* (Romans 6:23). At physical death, the body separates from the soul and spirit. The body returns to the earth, however, the soul and spirit remain alive – with their personality intact – and enter into the "beyond" – a place that is "beyond" the material world and "beyond" the reach of us on earth.

Human beings enter the beyond in the same spiritual state with the same proximity to God that they had on earth. Their spiritual state depends on how they lived their life in relation to God's will. Death does not transform a non-believer into a believer, or vice versa. Those on earth who were "living in Christ" become part of the "dead in Christ." Scripture further suggests that those who were "living in Christ" on earth will not regress in their relationship with God in the beyond (Catechism 9.5).

We often describe the dead as being in the realm of the departed. In the past, we were inclined to pigeonhole people to specific realms, depending upon what they did in life. Those who murdered went to the realm of the murderers, and those who were liars went to the realm of the liars. Given the complexity of human beings however, it is not logical to designate them to one specific group. **Today, we understand the word "realm" to be a description of a person's nearness to or remoteness from God.**

For the early Christians, physical death was a cause for great concern. They lived in the hope of the imminent return of Jesus Christ, and were troubled by the fate of their fellow Christians who died prior to Christ's return. They were comforted by the words of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and we can also be. These verses will be the focus of part of your discussion.

On earth and in the beyond, until God becomes all in all, we seek to draw near to God, and to become more like His Son. Thus, the living and dead in Christ continuously seek a deeper relationship with Him, and strive to become more like Him. They seek to increase their faith by hearing the word of God, and to receive strength and fellowship with Christ in the sacrament of Holy Communion. It is our conviction that the "dead in Christ" can experience the divine services with the living. They are able to hear the proclamation of the gospel and the absolution, and can share in the sacrament of Holy Communion. On every Sunday and church holy day, the Chief Apostle and designated Apostles celebrate Holy Communion for the departed. In this way, they remain in fellowship with God and their fellow believers.

But what about the "others," those who enter the beyond unredeemed, who do not know or believe in Jesus Christ, or who have not received the sacraments of salvation? God is love, and it is God's will that all mankind be saved. His universal will to save does not end at the grave, as God is the God of both the living and the dead. Jesus Christ overcame death and grave; He holds the keys to Hades and death (Revelation 1:18). 1 Peter teaches that Jesus entered the realm of the departed and preached to the "spirits in prison," and that the gospel was preached to those who are dead (1 Peter 3:19).

In His love for mankind, God continues to reach out to the unredeemed in the realm of the departed, that they can come to salvation. What must the unredeemed do? **They must do the same as the unredeemed on earth**, and the same as those who comprise the living and the dead in Christ: believe in Jesus Christ, receive the sacraments, be humble and repent, adhere to the gospel, and endure until the end. To enable this, the departed can participate in each divine service. In the services for the departed, they can receive the sacraments as they desire and are prepared to receive them – a practice which has its foundation in 1 Corinthians 15:29.

In response to God's love for them, the living and dead in Christ are inspired to desire salvation for their neighbor as much as they want it for themselves. If we love in the manner in which God loves – which we can do, given that the love of God was poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit – then our desire for the salvation of the physically dead will manifest itself in our sincere prayers for them.

Next month, we'll be jumping to article seven to discuss Holy Communion in conjunction with Holy Week.