

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

Topical Bulletin, October 2022

This month's topic for consideration is a continuation of: **The Apostles' Creed; the third Article.**

To review, Luther's Small Catechism puts it thus:

THE THIRD ARTICLE

SANCTIFICATION

I believe in the Holy Ghost; 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 Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith;

even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith;

in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers,

and will at the Last Day raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life.

This is most certainly true.

Comment: Having considered in last month's bulletin the broad depth of what it means when we confess, "I believe in the Holy Ghost"; we will now continue with our contemplation of the Apostles' Creed; the third Article.

The phrase which we will consider is: **I believe in... the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.**

Comment: Notice from the words confessed, the "holy Christian Church" is identified and described by the expression: "the communion of saints."

The Holy Bible proves the confession made to be true, as we shall presently see.

**"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."
(Ephesians 2:19-22)**

"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Romans 8:9)

"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." (Romans 12:4-5)

"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." (1 Corinthians 12:27)

**“O love the LORD, all ye his saints: for the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.”
(Psalm 31:23-24)**

Comment: The Holy Scriptures quoted above make it clear that the holy Christian Church is built upon the FOUNDATION OF the apostles and prophets – that being, the inspired WORD OF GOD the apostles and prophets were moved by the Holy Ghost to pen – the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, being the Chief Cornerstone of the holy Christian Church. There is but ONE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH, which is the COMMUNION OF SAINTS, since those with faith in Jesus Christ are identified as saints by the apostle Paul, who writes: “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 1:1-3) Thus, those people, whom the Holy Ghost – the Spirit of God – has gifted with faith in Christ, and kept in that faith, constitute the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.

“And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20-21)

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” (2 Timothy 2:19)

**“The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.”
(Nahum 1:7)**

Jesus says: **“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.” (John 10:14)**

Comment: The holy Christian Church is INVISIBLE to us sinful human beings, since none of us can look into another’s heart to see whether he or she believes. ONLY the LORD GOD knows ALL the members of the holy Christian Church. Accordingly, we Christians individually confess: “I believe in the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.”

“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:16-18)

Comment: Even though the holy Christian Church is INVISIBLE to us – in that we cannot read the hearts of others to know who truly believes and who does not – we, in honesty, confess our belief in the holy Christian Church, because we are assured in the Holy Scriptures, by the Holy Ghost, Himself – in those Holy Scriptures which He inspired – that He, at all times, gathers and preserves a congregation of believers, a communion of saints. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it

shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:8-11) “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10:17) “Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” (1 Corinthians 12:3) *Thus, GOD THE HOLY GHOST CALLS, GATHERS, ENLIGHTENS, AND SANCTIFIES THE WHOLE CHRISTIAN CHURCH ON EARTH, AND KEEPS IT WITH JESUS CHRIST IN THE ONE TRUE FAITH.*

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are 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 4:1-6)

“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” (Romans 12:3-5)

“And he [God’s dear Son, Jesus Christ] is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” (Colossians 1:18)

Comment: When one confesses, “I believe in the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints,” such is confessed because there is ONLY ONE CHURCH, ONE SPIRITUAL BODY, WHOSE ONE AND ONLY HEAD IS JESUS CHRIST! “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” (Ephesians 1:15-23) Hence, THE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, IS THE BODY OF WHICH CHRIST IS THE ONE AND ONLY HEAD!

“...Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25-27)

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5)

Comment: The Christian Church is called HOLY because it is the communion of SAINTS, people who are HOLY in God’s sight, since they have faith in Jesus Christ. They are people fruitful in the faith, serving the Lord with truly good works, works done in full accord with God’s Word, works accounted as HOLY by God, because they are fruits of living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not

of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:11)

“Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.” (Isaiah 28:16)

“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:10-12)

Comment: The communion of saints, the holy Christian Church, is called CHRISTIAN because it is built upon JESUS CHRIST, ITS ONE AND ONLY FOUNDATION!

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:16-17)

Comment: The holy Christian Church is to be found wherever the Gospel of Christ is in use, for God’s power works with His Word and ALWAYS accomplishes that which He pleases. Fellow Christians, never forget: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (James 1:18)

Besides the holy Christian Church – the invisible Church, which is the communion of saints – the term “church” is used in other ways, those being: a) the visible Church of God; b) a denomination; c) a local congregation; and, d) a house of worship.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.” (Matthew 13:47-48)

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead,

and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.” (Acts 5:1-11)

Comment: The visible Church is the whole number of those who use the Word of God and profess the Christian faith, but among whom, besides the true Christians, there are also hypocrites. Like the net with both good and bad fish, so the visible Christian Church on earth has both true believers and hypocrites. Additionally, the case with Ananias and Sapphira demonstrates that attachment to the Church on earth can be a mere outward show without genuine inward, heart-deep faith in Jesus Christ. It’s like the folks Jesus described in the following words: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.” (Matthew 15:8)

The term “church” is also used for a religious denomination, that is, a church organization with a distinct name and distinctive doctrines. For example: Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox.

“The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD.” (Jeremiah 23:28-32)

“But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” (Matthew 15:9)

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-29)

Comment: Note, from the content of the foregoing Bible passages, the importance of holding fast to GOD’S WORD and ALL DOCTRINES DRAWN THEREFROM and ONLY THOSE DOCTRINES; AND, TEACHING ALL THINGS COMMANDED BY CHRIST! Hence, that denomination is the TRUE VISIBLE CHURCH WHICH HAS, TEACHES, AND CONFESSES THE ENTIRE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD; AND, ADMINISTERS THE SACRAMENTS OF HOLY BAPTISM AND THE LORD’S SUPPER ACCORDING TO CHRIST’S INSTITUTION. It is grossly sinful for a denomination, or a local congregation, to compromise on ANY BIBLICAL DOCTRINE for

the sake of a mere OUTWARD unity of congregations or denominations, for the Holy Bible plainly instructs:
“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” (Romans 16:17-18)
“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.” (2 Timothy 1:13-14) **WE MUST ALL ENDEAVOR TO HOLD FAST TO THE ONE TRUE GOD AND HIS PURE, PRESERVED, HOLY WORD!**

**“For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.”
(1 Thessalonians 2:14)**

“The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.” (1 Corinthians 16:19)

“Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in thy house: Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Philemon 1-3)

Comment: The word “church,” as used in the above three Bible passages, denotes local congregations—groups of professing Christians who gather regularly for worship. The word “church” is also used to designate a house of worship (not unlike the word “synagogue” is used in the Holy Bible to designate a house of worship among the Jews of old).

Jesus says: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32)

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Comment: Holy Scripture, as quoted above, makes it clear that we use the Biblical doctrine regarding the Church, properly, WHEN WE TAKE HEED TO BE AND REMAIN MEMBERS OF THE INVISIBLE CHURCH BY SINCERE FAITH IN THE REDEEMER, OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.

“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42)

Comment: Holy Scripture, as quoted above, makes it clear that we use the Biblical doctrine regarding the Church properly when we ADHERE TO THE CHURCH – both locally and denominationally – WHICH TEACHES THE WORD OF GOD, THE HOLY BIBLE, IN ALL ITS TRUTH AND PURITY.

“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.” (Acts 8:4)

Jesus says: **“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:15-16)**

“Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 9:14)

Comment: Holy Scripture, as quoted above, makes it clear that we use the Biblical doctrine regarding the Church, properly, when we do ALL in our power to maintain, promote and extend this Church by prayer, personal service, and financial support.

Jesus commands: **“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” (Matthew 7:15)**

“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” (1 Corinthians 15:33)

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1)

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

Comment: Holy Scripture, as quoted above, makes it clear that we use the Biblical doctrine regarding the Church properly, when we mark and avoid ALL false churches and ALL other organizations – such as lodges and scouts – which profess a religion that is false, teaching things contrary to the doctrines of the Holy Bible.

As we’ve examined various passages from the Holy Bible, it has certainly been shown that there is much involved when we confess, in the Apostles’ Creed: **I believe in... the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.**

In next month’s topical bulletin, we will continue to consider: **The Apostles’ Creed; the third Article.**

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