

# One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church

Ephesians 2:19-22

This is Reformation Sunday, the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, set off by Martin Luther posting his 95 Theses on door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517. The Reformation was a movement to reform the Church from some abuses that had taken hold in the late Middle Ages, and not a revolution to start a new church. The Reformers went back to Scripture and what the Church taught over the centuries.

## One

The phrase “one holy, catholic and apostolic church” comes from the Nicene Creed, which was written in A.D. 325 and revised in A.D. 381 at the Council of Constantinople. Constantine initiated the Council of Nicaea, gathering 318 pastors (according to Athanasius) from all over the Roman Empire. It put to rest the heresy of Arius who taught that Jesus was created by the Father and therefore not eternally God. Even though there was diversity and disagreements within the Church, they demonstrated that the Father answered Jesus' prayer: “that they may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (Jn. 17:21). For over two millennia Christians have confessed the same primary doctrines that unite us. The Reformers didn't divide the Church or even leave it; they were kicked out of a corrupt part of the Church. When Luther was excommunicated in 1521 by Pope Leo X for opposing the sale of indulgences, he joined the company of the faithful who “wandered in deserts and mountain, in dens and caves of the earth” (Heb. 11:38). God used his excommunication to purify and gather the Church. The Pope couldn't take Luther out of the body of Christ, but by trying to he showed himself to be an incompetent under-shepherd at best but more likely a wolf (cf. Acts 20:29-30). We see the same thing today with apostate liberal “Protestant” churches. The Church is one body with one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, and we keep this given unity in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3-6). At the same time, God is maturing the Church, fitting us together to be a dwelling place of God in the Spirit, increasing our unity “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13; vv21-22). Paul writes to many congregations who are part of the one household of God (v19). We should pursue truth and unity with other churches like the Reformers did in 1541 at the Colloquy of Regensburg. Denominations are a helpful way to identify our brothers and connect to them.

## Holy

Holiness is a mark of the Church. God's people were washed, sanctified, and justified in the same of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 6:11). We have a positional holiness based on the objective death and resurrection of Christ, which is reckoned to us through faith. The Church is the company of the forgiven, and forgiven sinners grow in holiness,

NOTES:

# One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church

Ephesians 2:19-22

“without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). We’re not received because of our holiness; we become holy because God has already received us in Jesus. Christians generally understand that we grow more and more like Jesus over time, but so does the Church as a whole. Jesus is efficaciously loving His bride “that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27). The presentation happens at the end of history.

## **Catholic**

As our bulletin points out, catholic means universal. There’s nothing wrong with having big, blessed churches that influence others whether in Rome, Strasbourg, Geneva or Edinburgh. But Jesus never centered His kingdom in one city and gave it control over others. The gospel went out from Jerusalem and flourished in many cities, and Paul warned the church in Rome that God could cut her out just like He did Israel (Rom. 11:22). Where two or three are gathered in Jesus’ name, He is in their midst (Matt. 18:20). The Church of A.D. 400, 1400, 1517, 1646 and 2017 is ours, and it’s growing all over the world, particularly in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Catholicity is reformational. We rejoice in the existence of the Church wherever we find it, but we don’t pretend every church is equally healthy. Like John writing to the seven churches in Asia, we have specific prayers and hopes for different churches.

## **Apostolic**

The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone (v20). The Church is apostolic because it is built on Him and His Word the apostles gave us. Every subsequent word, doctrine, and practice to be measured by the Bible and rejected if it contradicts Scripture. This is how the Bereans treated Paul and apostles (17:11). Where you find Jesus’ Word and sacrament, there is His Church. Sometimes the Word is not proclaimed like it should be, and sometimes the sacraments are held (or withheld) in superstition, but Jesus is patient. He loves the Church as a whole just like He loves you.