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Tillamook, Oregon

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*I Believe in the holy catholic
church,
the communion of saints –*

The Apostles' Creed, Part 9

December 10, 2023

Sermon Text: Romans 11:1-5

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 19

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Eph 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, (20) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ

Jesus Himself being the corner stone, (21) in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, (22) in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

We know that the church is presented to us in Scripture in a number of different images, perhaps most prominent is *the body of Christ*. Or, as we have just read here in Ephesians, as a *holy temple – a dwelling of God in the Spirit*. The church is *the bride of Christ*. She is the *New Jerusalem*. A *holy nation*. A *royal priesthood*.

Every one of these pictures of the church has been and is being counterfeited by that great deceiver, the devil. He deceives with:

- An unholy and false priesthood
- A counterfeit Jerusalem which in reality is Babylon
- A false “bride” who is actually the harlot of Babylon, the religion of Antichrist
- False sacraments
- A false gospel
- A false christ – such as the “vicar” in Rome
- A false spirit

It is not surprising then, at least for anyone who diligently studies God’s Word and believes it, that Satan has his false church in this world.

When we confess, as we do in the Apostles’ Creed, that we believe in *the holy catholic (ie, universal) church*, then we are professing to believe in the one true church. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The true people of God. The kingdom of God.

But, and this is the central theme we are considering this morning, *how can we confess faith in Christ’s church if we do not know*

what His church looks like? The answer is obviously, *we cannot*. If you don’t know what the real looks like, then it is impossible to know what a counterfeit looks like.

I want to put this premise before you this morning and show you that it is true by demonstrating this from Scripture. The premise is this:

Most people who claim to believe in Christ’s church do not know what His church looks like. In fact, many such people do not like His church when they come in contact with it. They have been deceived so that they reject the true and embrace a lie.

And isn’t that the fundamental tactic which the father of lies uses constantly in all that he does? –

<p>Rom 1:22-23 Professing to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.</p>

Rom 1:25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

That is to say, many if not most people who claim to be Christians (we will call them “professors”) have accepted this demonic exchange and embraced a false church while rejecting the true church.

If that sounds like paranoia, a gross exaggeration, consider this:

Rev 2:9 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Of all of the Jews from Moses’ day down to the time of Christ and even in our own day, the vast, vast majority were a synagogue of Satan. Idolaters.

And so it is today with Satan’s counterfeit “church.” Let’s examine Scripture and answer the

question, “what does Christ’s true church look like?” and then compare that answer with what is commonly presented in our day as “the church.” Because, *most people who profess to be Christians, most people who confess that they believe in the holy universal church, have embraced a lie. Their idea of Christ’s church is a false one.*

The Church is a Remnant

Is “big” better? Certainly it seems to be in our day – at least that is what most people think. Big business, big profits, big following, big names. But is Christ’s true church “big”? Is bigness a characteristic we confess to be a quality of Christ’s church?

Rom 11:1-5 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. (2) God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against

Israel? (3) “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” (4) But what is God's reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” (5) ***So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.***

A remnant. 7,000 may sound like a lot, but it wasn't. Out of all Israel, only 7,000. And the only reason they existed, the only reason they refused to bow the knee to Baal was...they were chosen by God's grace. That is the church. Chosen by God. Created only by His grace, not by the work of man's hands.

The true church then is *a remnant*.

Rom 9:27-29 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, (28) for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” (29) And as Isaiah predicted, “If the Lord of hosts had

not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.”

Why does the church even exist? *Chosen by grace. Maintained by grace.* Not as the result of man's doings – but entirely by God's election and power. If God had not created His church, if He had not left a seed, a remnant, all of humanity would have descended into hell along with Sodom.

In all of this language of Scripture, do you see any place for “bigness” as a mark of the true church? *Elijah thought he was the only one left!!* And for all appearances he was right! But the true church was there. *There is a remnant. The body of Christ is a remnant, but most people are convinced that the true church is the main course. Wow! Look at out glorious that building is and how many people are here!*

Luk 18:7-8 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? (8) I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

The Way is Narrow – Finders are Few

Luk 13:22-24 He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. (23) And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, (24) "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

Matthew puts it this way:

Mat 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. (14) For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, **and those who find it are few.**

Remnant. Chosen by grace. Finders are few. And of course all of this is true because man in his sin

hates the Lord, he hates the truth of God's Word, his will and desires are in bondage so that he cannot choose the right way – he will not choose it. *Unless the Lord elected His people to salvation, no one would ever be saved. We would all have become just like Sodom and would perish in the same way.*

Are you seeing it? Do you believe what God's Word says on these things? Is the true Church characterized by *bigness and greatness and popularity*? Yet this I am certain is what so many professing Christians really believe when they say, "I believe in the Church."

Isa 10:20-22 In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. (21) A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. (22) For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with

righteousness.

How “Big” Was Paul’s Following and What did they Look like?

1Co 1:26-31 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

(27) But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; (28) God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, (29) so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

(30) And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, (31) so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

We know that Paul did not have a

big following. Nor did he have the “big” names of his day in his church. The world did not look at Paul and the fledgling remnant church with amazement, marveling over the wisdom of the gospel he preached. No, they were regarded as fools. Losers. People of no account. Paul even had this to say –

2Ti 4:14-16 Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. (15) Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. (16) At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!

And How Big was *Christ’s* Following? How was He Regarded?

Joh 6:60-67 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” (61) But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? (62) Then what if you were to see the

Son of Man ascending to where he was before? (63) It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

(64) But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) (65) And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

(66) After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. (67) So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?”

Are we better than Jesus? It would seem that many if not most people who claim to be Christians, who marvel at the glory of their own local church...do in fact think themselves more successful, better Christians than Jesus!

Christ's Church is Holy

“I believe in the HOLY church...”

1Co 6:9-11 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, (10) nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (11) And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Many if not most professing Christians today *do not really believe in the HOLY Church*. They believe half-truth distortions like this:

- We are all sinners
- The church is a hospital for sinners
- The church doesn't judge
- We aren't perfect, just forgiven
- God loves everyone

And as a result, when most people claim to believe in the holy church, they don't really believe what they are saying. In fact, here is God's truth on this:

1Co 6:18-20 Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. (19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, (20) for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

And again:

2Co 6:14-18 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? (15) What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? (16) What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling

among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (17) Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, (18) and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

Conclusion

Do you see it then? Are you understanding more clearly just how skewed the popular notion of our day is when it comes to identifying Christ's true church?

Why are we emphasizing these things? *Because our enemy is cunning and subtle and deceptive and unless we are wise in the Lord's wisdom, we will most certainly fall for his counterfeits and walk right down Broadway to hell.*

One final note – *The true Church is the body of Christ, the temple of the Lord. It is where His Spirit dwells in His people and where the Lord's*

means of grace to us are particularly present. The ministry of His Word, His people gathered to pray and to worship Him and encourage one another.

The church, in other words, is not some social club that we can take or leave with the idea that we can do just as well following Christ by ourselves without the church. I am afraid that such was the thinking that I was raised in, and while it is good to reject the “high church” false models of Rome, it is very easy for us to have a false “low view” of the church. Seeing her as relatively unimportant. Rather optional. Her baptism is optional. Her communion as optional. Her fellowship as optional. Her preaching is optional. As I say, that is the mentality I was raised up in.

We believe in the holy catholic church, *the communion of saints*. Do we? Do we truly believe that in Christ we are joined together in the same spiritual body, that to be one with Christ is to be one with His people and that if we therefore are going to exercise the spiritual gifts He has given each of us, we must

necessarily gather together in this communion, this sharing, this koinonia of His people? Or is it all optional – take it or leave it?

If we are going to confess that we believe in the holy catholic church and the communion of saints, then surely we must live out what we are confessing, else we will be hypocrites, and the visible church of our day has more than enough of those kind.