

WE BELIEVE...

A fifteen session small group study



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Getting the most out of this study

Below you will find a few ideas to get you started in preparing for and participating in your small group.

Personal Preparation

1. Read the chapter and start to think through some of the questions. Jot down a few initial responses.
2. Read through the Bible references, perhaps even more than once. Highlight or underline inspiring phrases in your Bible that you'll want to share with your group. The Bible references in this booklet are from the New King James Version (unless otherwise noted), but feel free to read a different translation if you would prefer.

Group discussion

1. Come to the study prepared.
2. Be willing to participate in the discussion. If you are worried about speaking in public, just read the answers that you have prepared ahead of time.
3. Be sensitive to other members of the group. *Listen* attentively; you may be surprised by their insights. *Observe* body language so you can properly gauge emotions and feelings. *Validate* and encourage one

another. *Engage* in the discussion and connect your responses to what others are saying. Many questions do not have “right” answers, but could have a variety of responses.

4. Be careful not to dominate. Sometimes we might get a little over eager to share our ideas! By all means participate, but be sure to allow others to also.
5. Expect God to teach you through your reading of Scripture and your discussion with others. Pray that you will be open to His teachings and that He will show you how to change and grow.
6. Remember that things shared in the group are confidential and should not be discussed outside of the group, unless permission was given to do so.
7. If you are a facilitator, you will find additional suggestions at the back of the guide.

Foreword

What do you know about what we believe as New Apostolic Christians? Our Church creed, also known as the Ten Articles of Faith, defines the way we live our faith. It's something we are meant to know and confess. Not just to memorize and recite words, but to guide us in our own lives and show us how we relate to the world around us.

In this book, we will look at how the early church creeds bind our beliefs with much of Christianity, unifying us in a way we don't often consider. We will also study the specific elements of the New Apostolic Creed and how we view certain things, such as the Trinity, the sacraments, ministry, and how we are to live within society.

The New Apostolic Creed exists with the awareness that God's love, grace, and omnipotence cannot be exhaustively expressed in doctrinal and confessional statements. God will always be greater than anything human beings can ever say about Him and His nature (CNAC2.4).

As you journey through this study, seek to learn how the creed is personal to you. Explore new ways to express your faith. Embrace the similarities you discover when you talk with others about what you believe. And rejoice in the relationship that you have with God – it will only grow and deepen the more you seek Him.

An introduction

Welcome! For the next 15 sessions, we will be focusing on a study of our Creed. Today's session will be an introduction, and then we will proceed by spending time studying and discussing each of the ten articles of our faith that make up our New Apostolic Creed. In doing so, we hope that together we can not only become more knowledgeable about our beliefs, but also build up our *most holy faith* as it says in the book of Jude (v. 20-21).

Why does the New Apostolic Church need a creed?

One of the most often-quoted Bible verses is Acts 16:31 – *Believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved*. Every Christian believes this passage, and yet one could ask the question, “What is belief in Jesus Christ?” Is it believing Jesus was the Son of God? Is it believing He once lived and then died? There are many different interpretations of this verse. However, the New Apostolic church's definition of “belief” is what is stated in the ten articles of faith.

What is this creed?

The word creed comes from the Latin word *credo*, which means, “I believe.” A creed is a church's statement of core beliefs and often starts with the words, “I believe.” A denomination is defined by its creed, which distinguishes it from the doctrine of others, but also shows similarities.

The Old Testament already had confessional statements of its own, linked to God's deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt; for example, *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!* (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

Early creeds of the first Christians can be found in the New Testament, and express God's act of salvation in the sending of Jesus Christ. Some examples are:

- *Jesus is the Lord!* (Romans 10:9)
- *The Lord is risen indeed.* (Luke 24:34, 1 Corinthians 15:3-5)
- *O Lord, come! or Our Lord is coming!* (1 Corinthians 16:22)

Further confessional statements of Jesus Christ and His work can be found in early church hymns, as recorded in 1 Timothy, Philippians, and Colossians (1 Timothy 3:16, Philippians 2:6-11 – see Summer 2019 VISION article, Colossians 1:15-20).

As Christianity spread through the Roman Empire, different views and beliefs were incorporated into the Christian doctrine. This fusion of perspectives caused confusion and uncertainty among the believers; in particular, the doctrines of the Trinity and the nature of Jesus Christ ignited serious disputes. To counter this development, various creeds were formulated over the course of time. We'll look at three of the most important for our purposes: The Apostles' Creed, the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople, and the Athanasian Creed.

The **Apostles' Creed** was compiled in the second century and lightly supplemented in the fourth century (120-250). Its essential statements are based on the sermon preached by Apostle Peter in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:37-43). It covers Christianity's core beliefs about God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The **Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople** was the product of the Council of Nicaea in 325, convened by Emperor Constantine, and further refined, most significantly in the Council of Constantinople in 381. This creed goes beyond the Apostles' Creed to solidify the profession of the Trinity and emphasize distinguishing features of the church. Corresponding to the Nicene Creed in its statements regarding the Trinity is the much more detailed **Athanasian Creed**, which likely came into being during the sixth century. Divergences on specific

wordings, especially in regard to the Holy Spirit, eventually led to the separation between the Eastern and Western Churches in 1054.

The doctrine of the New Apostolic Church is based on Scripture, and professes the beliefs outlined in both creeds of the early church, since they essentially summarize the core beliefs found in the Bible. As such, they stretch beyond confessional borders and represent a unifying link between all Christians.

REFERENCES

Jude 20-21	1 Corinthians 16:22
Acts 16:31	1 Timothy 3:16
Deuteronomy 6:4-7	Philippians 2:6-11
Romans 10:9	Colossians 1:15-20
Luke 24:34	Acts 10:37-43
1 Corinthians 15:3-5	

Apostle's Creed (120-140 AD):

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal [catholic] church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (325, 381 AD):

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary, and

was made man; He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And 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, who spake by the prophets. In one holy universal [catholic] and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Athanasian Creed (Sixth century):

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith unless every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinities, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son;

neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Substance [Essence] of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Substance [Essence] of his Mother, born in the world. Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of Substance [Essence]; but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies; And shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved.

1. Why are creeds important?

2. Why is it so important that each one of us becomes more knowledgeable about our beliefs?

3. How do beliefs shape a person's life?

4. What does the existence of so many varying church creeds tell you about the state of Christianity? How can varying creeds represent a unified body of Christ?

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5. What does it mean for you to personally state “I believe?” What is the difference between “believing” and “knowing” something?

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6. The doctrine of the Trinity is mentioned in the chapter. As a church, what do we believe when it comes to the triune God?

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7. Take some time to read the Apostles’ Creed, the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople, and the Athanasian Creed with your group (at the end of the chapter), and discuss both the differences and similarities between them. Why do you think they progressively became more detailed? What phrases stick out to you? Discuss what they mean.

2

God, the Father

Welcome back!

In our last session we discussed the history of the early church creeds. The New Apostolic Creed is closely related to, and largely corresponds to, these creeds, especially the Apostles' Creed. You will see this very clearly as we look at the first three articles of our faith. The remaining seven articles represent a further interpretation, and complement these creeds, expounding on ministry, the sacraments, the teaching of the last things, and the relationship between the individual and society.

Our Creed has been revised on several occasions in accordance with the dynamic tradition of the writings of the New Testament itself. Dynamic tradition is not rigid, but is instead characterized by both preservation and change. Preservation is vital if we do not want to forget our history and origins. Change is essential for our doctrine to be sure that we do not get stuck in the insights of a particular period, but rather remain relevant to the present generation. Our Creed helps us define our faith and share it with others in a concise way.

We believe that God's love, grace, and omnipotence cannot be exhaustively expressed in doctrinal or confessional statements. God will always be greater than anything human beings can ever say about Him. Therefore, our Creed does not draw any boundaries that would deny other Christians access to His love and also salvation.

Let us take a look at the first article of our Creed:

I believe in God, the Father, the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth.

This first confessional statement attests to God as our Father and Creator, and His provision and generosity in our lives.

God, the Father... We understand that all human beings exist in a relationship of children of God because they have been created by Him, and so can call Him Father. In a narrower sense, we believe that childhood in God is the relationship between God and those who believe in the gospel, have received the sacraments, and align their lives to the return of Christ.

God is Almighty, not only with regard to His creation, but He is omnipotent in all respects. This is demonstrated by the fact that He authored all that exists from nothing (Hebrews 11:3). The reference to *heaven and earth* refers to “all things visible and invisible,” as stated in the Nicaea-Constantinople Creed (Colossians 1:16). Both material and spiritual exist because God created it, and it testifies of Him. He is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient.

Although the first article speaks of God, the Father as the Creator, Scripture indicates that the triune God as a whole is the Creator – that is God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit – as is suggested in Genesis 1:26: *Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.*

How does seeing yourself as God’s creation shape your relationship with Him and His world? Surely, when we consider who God is to us, it should elicit some response. In our discussion, we’ll explore some of the writings of Psalms and see how their authors answered this question. We’ll find that many of their responses consisted of expressing their thankfulness and praise to God, and also their conviction to serve and obey Him. Another response that we should consider to this foundational belief statement is stewardship. God Himself encouraged this when He told Adam and Eve to tend and care for the garden. We can interpret this invitation in a few different ways, most obviously in our attention to the keeping and caring for our planet. This is our duty as Christians! This also means that we are

good stewards over what God has given us personally in our lives: our gifts, talents, time, money, and resources. How are we using these things? How are we sharing them?

As we work through the rest of the articles of our Creed, we should always ponder what our response should be to the statements we are declaring. I believe that this will make these statements real for us and help us apply them in our lives.

REFERENCES

Hebrews 11:3

Genesis 1:26

Colossians 1:16

First Article of Faith:

I believe in God, the Father, the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth.

Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (325, 381 AD):

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary, and was made man; He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And 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, who spake by the prophets. In one holy universal [catholic] and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

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1. Why are both preservation and change important when it comes to a creed, or beliefs in general?

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2. Why can we call God “our Father?”

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3. Read Genesis 2:7-25. How were we created in relationship with God and the rest of the world? How does seeing yourself as God’s creation shape your relationship with Him and His world?

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4. Many have questioned God’s creation of the world. It is argued by believers and non-believers of all ages. Why are you confident in your profession of the first Article of Faith that God, the Father, is the Creator of heaven and earth?

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5. In the first session, it is mentioned that the word creed comes from the Latin word *credo*, which means, “I believe.” Another meaning of this verb is “to trust,” and more literally, “to put in one’s heart.” Does this give you a new perspective on the creed?

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6. It’s mentioned in the chapter that God is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. How have you experienced these defining characteristics of God in your life?

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7. Read Psalm 104:10-30. How does the psalmist describe the beauty and joy of creation under God’s care and provision?

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8. What is your response to the belief stated in the first Article of Faith?

3

Jesus Christ

Welcome! Today we're going to discuss the second article of our Creed. Let's read it together:

I believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, entered the realm of the dead, rose again from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from where He will return.

This article answers the question – *who is Jesus?* Each statement has a direct relationship to the New Testament. Let's explore a few of the phrases.

Right from the beginning, the designations of *Jesus Christ* and *our Lord* hold significant meaning, and are professions in and of themselves. *Christ* means “Anointed One” in Hebrew, and points to Jesus as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. *Lord* was a designation for God in the Old Testament, but is applied to Jesus in the New Testament, emphasizing His divine nature and dominion over heaven and earth (Philippians 2:9-11). This is further shown when He is referred to as *Immanuel* or *God with us*. Clearly stated, Jesus is the incarnation of God on earth.

We can look to the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople for clarification on the meaning of the phrase - *only begotten Son of God*. The Creed states, “begotten of the Father before all the worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.” In essence, this points to Jesus as a Person of the

Trinity, inseparable and One with God, the Father and the Spirit. It also clarifies that Jesus was not created by God, but He existed from the beginning, and is true God and true Man.

The next few phrases express our belief in the incarnation of Jesus and His miraculous birth. The mention of Pontius Pilate substantiates Jesus historically. Pilate was the Roman governor in Palestine from 26 to 36 AD, which means Jesus' sufferings took place during his time of rule.

He was crucified, died, and was buried. We believe that Jesus willingly laid down His life for our sin and our redemption. While His death was the saving event, His resurrection from the dead is something that we can only grasp and understand from the perspective of faith. His resurrection is also the prerequisite and promise of our resurrection and the resurrection of the dead. We'll talk more about this and Jesus' descent into the realm of the dead when we discuss the third Article of Faith.

Jesus' ascension brought His direct presence on earth to an end, and signified His return to the Father and His exaltation. The last sentence of the article looks to the future, when Jesus will return and establish His kingdom.

As we journey through this next week, let's take time to contemplate who Jesus is, as brought to expression in this second statement of faith, and what that means for us. How do I acknowledge that Jesus is my Lord? What does it mean that Jesus is true God and true Man? We can discuss these questions in our small group now.

REFERENCES

Philippians 2:9-11

Second Article of Faith:

I believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, entered the realm of the dead, rose again from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from where He will return.

Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (325, 381 AD):

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary, and was made man; He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And 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, who spake by the prophets. In one holy universal [catholic] and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

1. In your own words, who is Jesus?

2. Jesus is *begotten of the Father*. Humans are created by God. Why is it important to note the difference between “begotten” and “created?”

3. The second Article of Faith is rather historical, in that it tells us of moments in Jesus’ life. Why is this historicity important to us and our statements of faith? (Reference page 63 of the Catechism)

4. How do we reflect our belief that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior in what we say and do?

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5. Pick one part of the second article and describe what that truth about Jesus means to your faith.

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6. What does it mean that Jesus is true God and true Man? Discuss how the different creeds printed at the end of chapter one explain this belief.

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7. What is your response to the belief stated in the second Article of Faith?

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8. PERSONAL REFLECTION: In Mark 8:27-29, Jesus asks His disciples, who do you say I am? This question is still valid for us, too. Write down the second article of our creed and place it somewhere visible in your home. Throughout the week, ponder over how each of its statements can deepen your personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

4

The Holy Spirit

Welcome! In the next few sessions 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 in our next session when we discuss the church of Christ.

REFERENCES

Genesis 1:1-2, 26

1 Timothy 2:4

John 3:5-6

Romans 10:14-17

Ephesians 2:8, 10

Leviticus 11:44

Third Article of Faith:

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.

Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (325, 381 AD):

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary, and was made man; He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And 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, who spake by the prophets. In one holy universal [catholic] and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

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1. How would you describe God, the Holy Spirit, to someone? Why is it appropriate that we refer to the Holy Spirit as “He” and not “it”?

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2. Why is it appropriate to call all three Persons of the Trinity “Creator” (Genesis 1:1-2, 26)?

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3. How is the Holy Spirit active in your life? What is the evidence of His activity?

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4. Read Acts 9:1-22 (Paul's conversion) and Acts 16:13-15 (Lydia's conversion). What role did Paul and Lydia play in their coming to faith? Reflect on the moment when you felt God called you to believe in Him. How did God use an experience or person to influence your decision?

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5. The phrases of the third article reveal the ways that the Holy Spirit makes us holy. Was this a new thought for you? Have you ever thought about the third article in that way? How could this explanation open the door to a different perspective about the Holy Spirit for you?

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6. *Being part of the community of saints is a call to godliness, to a different way of living.* The Israelites in the Old Testament had a set of rules that laid out how they were to live in relationship with God and each other. How can you tell if you are living a godly, holy life?

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7. What gifts has the Holy Spirit equipped you with so that you can contribute to the church?

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8. What is your response to the belief stated in the third Article of Faith?

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.”

NOTE: *Be sure to keep in mind throughout this session that we are talking about the church of Christ – not the New Apostolic Church.*

REFERENCES

Hebrews 10:25

Ephesians 4:4-6

John 13:34-35

John 17:20-23

1 Peter 2:9

Matthew 28:19

Mark 16:15

Ephesians 2:19-22

Acts 2:42-47

CNAC 2.4.3 / 6.3 / 6.4

Third Article of Faith:

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. Read the *Parable of the Persistent Widow*. Discuss the events in the story.

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1. What is the church of Christ? Who belongs to it? (CNAC 2.4.3 / 6.3 / 6.4)

2. Why do we believe that we need the church?

3. Read Acts 2:42-47 together. How is the early church described?

4. We believe the church is universal. How does this belief relate to our call to share the gospel?

5. What brings the church of Christ together, even though there are different denominations? Refer to Ephesians 4:4-6.

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6. How could differences between denominations promote and fulfill the mission of the church? On the other hand, how could differences hinder Jesus' gospel from reaching all people?
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7. How does the sinfulness of humanity affect the holiness of the church? How does that sinfulness affect the church's message to the world?
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8. Session 1 mentioned that we were never meant to walk this journey alone. How do the different aspects of the church help you in your walk as a Christian?
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9. PERSONAL REFLECTION: Research the creed of another Christian denomination. What similarities do you see?

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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 only have hope in Christ in this life, 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, 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.

REFERENCES

1 Corinthians 15:19, 29

Genesis 1:27

Romans 6:23

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Revelation 1:18

1 Peter 3:19

1 Peter 4:6

CNAC 9.5

Third Article of Faith:

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.

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1. Perhaps some of the teaching in this session was new to you. Share your new insight.
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2. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Discuss the different phrases. Which stick out to you? What do they mean?
 - a. What do these verses tell you about what we believe about the return of Christ?
 - b. How do these verses offer you comfort and hope for the future?
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3. How do our beliefs about the departed confirm God's love and universal will to save?

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4. Even as believers, death still causes great grief. Why is grieving important? Describe how your belief in Jesus Christ guides your grieving process.

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5. Do you think that bringing our hope in eternal life to the forefront helps us make better decisions today? How? If so, what are some practical ways to remind ourselves of this hope every day?

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6. Our Chief Apostle has stressed that there are many things that we do not know about eternity. That is the reason we call it “the beyond” – it is beyond our understanding. Why do you think it’s important for us to grasp this? What is the danger in getting lost in or extrapolating the details, rather than having faith and trust in God?

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7. The celebration of Holy Communion for the departed in an Apostle or District Apostle service is for those souls who are Christians and desire to be in fellowship with Christ. Alternatively, services for the departed are focused on souls who are just coming to belief in Christ to receive the sacraments. With this understanding, share who you might pray for in preparation for the next service for the departed.

Apostles & ministry

In this session we'll look into the fourth and fifth articles, which focus on the apostolate and ministry.

Let's start by reading the fourth article. It reads: ***I believe that the Lord Jesus rules His church and thereto sent His Apostles, and until His return still sends them, with the commission to teach, to forgive sins in His name, and to baptize with water and Holy Spirit.***

The word “apostle” derives from the Greek word, *apóstolos*, which in the New Testament means “ambassador.” The apostles are ambassadors of Jesus Christ, from whom they received their ministry and commission, and on whom they are completely dependent. They work in accordance with the will of their Sender and, following His example, are servants to all.

The apostle ministry is the only ministry Jesus Christ gave directly to His church, and they seek to serve both believers and those searching for salvation. The ministry's purpose is to build up the church by preaching the gospel, dispensing the sacraments, making the redemption offered through Jesus Christ known to all who are in desperate need for salvation. And, the apostles labor to prepare believers for the return of Jesus Christ by helping them to grow into the nature of their Savior and encouraging them to overcome the sinful nature that tries to keep them tied to their old self.

Now, let's for a moment ponder over some of the characteristics of the apostle ministry. Firstly, we believe it's the ministry of the new covenant. In the old covenant, the priests had to offer sacrifices again and again. But the once brought, eternally valid, perfect sacrifice

of Jesus Christ eliminated the old covenant sacrificial system and inaugurated a new covenant between God and humanity. While the old covenant only pertained to the people of Israel, the new covenant knows no borders and is available to people of all nations. That's why it is the mission of the apostles to make known the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and this new covenant throughout the world.

The apostle ministry is the ministry of the Spirit. Those who have been baptized with water receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through the apostle ministry and receive their childhood in God. As the ministry of the word, the apostles preach the gospel and teach the word of Scripture. As the ministry of reconciliation, the apostles urge people to repent, and lead them to the redeeming act of God, which was accomplished in Jesus Christ. "Reconciliation" signifies the restoration of the relationship between humanity and God, as well as between one person to another. The apostle ministry directs our attention towards perfect reconciliation that will be achieved when all believers dwell in the kingdom of God.

Additionally, the apostle ministry is the ministry of righteousness. While the Old Testament focused on condemnation, the New Testament points people towards the righteousness of God, which is afforded to believers through Jesus Christ. The apostle ministry draws attention to the fact that sinful humanity is in need of God's grace. Belief in Jesus Christ and acceptance of His sacrifice leads to righteousness.

Finally, we believe the apostles are stewards of the mysteries of God. Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:1, *Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.* As stewards, the apostles are responsible for the church, and ensure the proper proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. They are assigned the task of imparting and unveiling revelations or mysteries of God.

Now let's turn our attention to the fifth article and see how they are tied together. The fifth article states: ***I believe that those designated by God for a ministry are ordained only by Apostles, and that***

authority, blessing, and sanctification for their ministration come forth out of the apostle ministry.

This article expresses our belief that all ministers are called by God. Therefore, every minister is a gift from God to the congregation. Every ministry in the church is an extension of the apostolate. Through their ordination, every minister receives authority, blessing, and sanctification.

- ***Authority*** means that all ministries share in the ministerial authority of the apostolate, who have received its authority to teach and proclaim the gospel from Jesus Christ. The authority of a minister is dependent upon their relationship with Jesus Christ and willingness to act in accordance with the will of God.
- The ***blessing*** received at ordination assures the priestly and deacon ministries of the divine support and help of the Holy Spirit in the exercise of their ministries.
- And ***sanctification*** points to the fact that it is God Himself, in His holiness, who seeks to act through the ministry. This sanctification is necessary because the church is “holy,” which we profess in our third Article of Faith. Notwithstanding, God acts through an imperfect vessel.

Through our profession of belief in these articles, we announce our belief that the ministries of our church are connected to, dependent upon, and given by Jesus Christ. It is through Him that the church will fulfill its purpose.

REFERENCES

1 Corinthians 4:1

Fourth Article of Faith:

I believe that the Lord Jesus rules His church and thereto sent His Apostles, and until His return still sends them, with the commission to teach, to forgive sins in His name, and to baptize with water and Holy Spirit.

Fifth Article of Faith:

I believe that those designated by God for a ministry are ordained only by Apostles, and that authority, blessing, and sanctification for their ministration come forth out of the apostle ministry.

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1. Describe the connection between Jesus Christ and the ministries of the church. Why is it vital that this connection remains intact?
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2. The chapter said, “The apostles labor to prepare believers for the return of Jesus Christ by helping them to grow into the nature of their Savior and encouraging them to overcome the sinful nature that tries to keep them tied to their old self.” How have you been encouraged to overcome your sinful nature? How are you supported as you grow into the nature of Jesus Christ?

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3. How does preaching the gospel, dispensing the sacraments, and making redemption in Jesus known build up the church?

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4. What is the Church's role in making the gospel of Christ known to all?

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5. Jesus gave the Great Commission to the apostles (Matthew 28:19-20). How can we support them in fulfilling this commission?

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6. How can you show appreciation for your ministers? Discuss with your group and come up with a plan to do it!

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7. What is your response to the beliefs stated in the fourth and fifth Articles of Faith?

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8. Say a prayer for your apostles and ministers.

Holy Baptism

Welcome back! In today's session, we're going to explore the sixth article of our Creed, which highlights Holy Baptism. Let's read it together:

I believe that the Holy Baptism with water is the first step to a renewal of a human being in the Holy Spirit, and that the person baptized is adopted into the fellowship of those who believe in Jesus Christ and profess Him as their Lord.

Our catechism describes the sacrament of Holy Baptism with water as “the first and fundamental act of grace of the triune God bestowed upon a human being who believes in Jesus Christ” (CNAC 8.1). God draws us into fellowship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ. When we are baptized with water, God accepts us based on Jesus Christ's once brought and ever valid sacrifice. The sacrament of Holy Baptism with water allows us to leave a state of remoteness from God and come close to Him for the first time as the first step of our complete renewal.

The necessity of the sacrament of Holy Baptism with water is linked with the doctrine of original sin. Adam and Eve exercised God's gift of free will to defy God's word. The consequences of their act of rebellion, known as the Fall, broke man's relationship with God. Adam and Eve experienced remoteness from God for the very first time. As a result of original sin, a fundamental state of sinfulness and estrangement from God has weighed upon every human being. Mankind is powerless to change this condition on his own. Apostle Paul attests to this in Romans 5:12, *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...* (Romans 5:12).

This means that we are not sinners because we commit sin, but rather we sin because we are sinners.

Jesus Christ is God's response to sin and humanity's remoteness, and He is the way that leads back into fellowship with God *for all who believe in Jesus Christ* (ref. John 3:16). God's love for fallen humanity, and His desire to restore fellowship with us, is revealed perfectly in the sending of Jesus Christ, who conquered sin by living a sinless life and offered the perfect sacrifice on the cross. Through Holy Baptism with water, the baptized shares in the merit Jesus Christ acquired for mankind through His sacrificial death, as stated in Paul's letter to Romans, *Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous* (Romans 5:18-19).

We can understand Holy Baptism with water as an act of God's grace upon a human being in which the triune God says "Yes" to the believer and accepts them into His new covenant. Additionally, the one who is baptized with water also responds to God with their "Yes," and vows to live according to God's will as revealed in the gospel and teachings of Jesus Christ. God is the One who takes the first step in His desire to restore fellowship with us. Upon our baptism, we become a Christian, which is more than just a new title.

In Romans 6:3-4, Apostle Paul wrote, *do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

The Apostle illustrates, by the example of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that baptism is at first a death – of the old Adam, our old life, and allegiance to the evil one. Holy Baptism is also seen as the raising of new life – of the new Adam – shaped by our faith in Jesus Christ as our Redeemer, and our desire to grow into the new nature of Christ.

Holy Baptism with water is a wonderful, yet serious event, for we make a public profession of belief in Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and His return. This profession is renewed in the hearts and minds of the congregation every time Holy Communion is celebrated according to the promise of Jesus Christ, "for as often as you eat this bread and drink this wine, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." Jesus Christ imparts His strength and virtue to help us to resist the evil one and grow in His nature until He returns.

We believe that God desires to share His blessings with children, according to the statements and actions of Jesus: "*Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God...*" *And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them* (Mark 10:14, 16). We believe this includes the sacraments as well. In the case of the baptism of children, those entrusted to raise them profess their faith in Jesus Christ on their child's behalf and take responsibility for guiding them, in the sense of the gospel, and their relationship with Christ. Confirmation is the act of blessing provided by God upon a young adult Christian who is prepared to make a promise to remain faithful to Jesus Christ and to vow to "renounce Satan" and "surrender myself" to the triune God.

On the day of our baptism, we also commit to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. We want to become more like Him and grow into His nature, which we do by accepting the teachings of the gospel and by allowing it to shape our lives. As a true follower of Jesus Christ, we will also see to it that we do our part to share His gospel with our neighbors.

Finally, with the sacrament of Holy Baptism, we are incorporated into the church of Christ and the assembly of believers. It is a gift by which the Christian life is realized. We recognize that Christ is the One who gave us the church, and that we need each other. Just as God, the Father is in fellowship with the Son and the Spirit, so we were created to exist in fellowship with each other as well. The celebration of Holy Communion fosters this fellowship and strengthens our love for Christ and each other. Take some time now to think about the effects of the sacrament of Holy Baptism in your life, and consider how your commitment to the Lord has guided your decisions as His disciple.

REFERENCES

Romans 3:23

CNAC 8.1

John 3:1-21

Matthew 28:19

Romans 6:2-12

Mark 10:14, 16

Sixth Article of Faith:

I believe that the Holy Baptism with water is the first step to a renewal of a human being in the Holy Spirit, and that the person baptized is adopted into the fellowship of those who believe in Jesus Christ and profess Him as their Lord.

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1. How have you felt the effects of Holy Baptism in your life? Do you feel that God is renewing you, through the Holy Spirit, to be the person He created you to be?

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2. Read Romans 5:18-19 together. What do these verses mean to you? How do they connect to Holy Baptism?

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3. How do you show your daily commitment to being a disciple of Jesus?

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4. After reading and reflecting on Romans 3:23, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, describe the grace of God and what it means for you.

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5. What do we profess at the time of our baptism and every time we celebrate Holy Communion? Why is it important that we make that profession?

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6. If someone were to ask you to explain the significance of Holy Baptism, how would you respond?

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7. Share with the group why you are thankful for your assembly of believers. How does your congregation help strengthen your faith? How does your small group help you grow in your love for each other?

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8. What is your response to the belief stated in the sixth Article of Faith?

Holy Communion

Welcome! In the next few sessions we will be taking a deeper look at the seventh article of our Creed, which deals with the sacrament of Holy Communion. It reads:

I believe that Holy Communion was instituted by the Lord Himself in memory of the once brought, fully valid sacrifice, and bitter suffering and death of Christ. The worthy partaking of Holy Communion establishes our fellowship with Jesus Christ, our Lord. It is celebrated with unleavened bread and wine; both must be consecrated and dispensed by a minister authorized by an Apostle.

In this statement of faith, we are immediately drawn to Jesus Christ. He instituted this sacrament so that His disciples could have fellowship with Him, not only in the moments before His death, but also for all believers throughout time that desire to be in communion with Him.

It is only because of Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross that this sacrament has meaning. He established Holy Communion during Passover with His Apostles. Like the Passover feast, in which a lamb was sacrificed in order to commemorate the Israelites' liberation from Egyptian slavery, Holy Communion commemorates our liberation from sin. The Jewish people offered continual sacrifices to God; however, Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross was given once and lasts for all time. In our celebration of Holy Communion, we are not only reminded that His body and blood atones for our sin, but we want to experience His sacrifice and victory over death every time we approach the altar. 1 John 3 reminds us of what Christ came to do – *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil* (1 John 3:8). With His victory over evil,

our communion with Christ gives us strength to also fight against the works of the evil one.

Out of love for our Savior and all that He has done for us, we want to partake of Holy Communion worthily. While we can never be considered worthy of the perfect sacrifice of Christ as sinful human beings, we believe that we should be in a “clean” state before we have such close fellowship with Jesus Christ. This means that we prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacrament. Let’s look at Paul’s words to the Corinthians as guidance: *Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup* (1 Corinthians 11:27-28). Throughout the week leading to the moment of communion, we reflect on our actions and words, and repent for our sins. With a repentant heart and the grace of God, we are assured that our sins have been forgiven, which we will discuss in a later session this month. Through our faith in Christ and His sacrifice for our sins, we believe that this state of forgiveness prepares us to be in fellowship with Him. And though we are still sinful human beings challenged by temptation and prone to sin after we are forgiven, Holy Communion gives us the strength and desire to continue to do better and align ourselves to God’s will.

The unleavened bread and wine present in the communion wafer are a visible element of the real presence of Christ; the words of the consecration join His body and blood to these natural elements. Bread and wine represent the sustenance that humans need to live, and for God’s promised people, wine also is a symbol of joy and future salvation. By consecrating the communion wafer, bread and wine are set apart as something much more sacred than just providing for our physical life. Our celebration of Holy Communion, dispensed by a minister who ultimately has his authority through Jesus Christ, becomes a declaration that Christ has provided for our spiritual sustenance. And our proclamation of His death and future return expresses our desire and belief that we will experience eternal life with Him.

Holy Communion is a time of intimate fellowship with Christ, where, in His presence, we recognize His desire for all believers, as He once prayed, *And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me* (John 17:22-23).

REFERENCES

1 John 3:8

John 17:22-23

1 Corinthians 11:27-28

John 8:31-36

Seventh Article of Faith:

I believe that Holy Communion was instituted by the Lord Himself in memory of the once brought, fully valid sacrifice, and bitter suffering and death of Christ. The worthy partaking of Holy Communion establishes our fellowship with Jesus Christ, our Lord. It is celebrated with unleavened bread and wine; both must be consecrated and dispensed by a minister authorized by an Apostle.

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1. At the very end of John 17:23, Jesus says, “...*and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved me.*” Let that sink in for a minute. Jesus is saying that God loves us as much as He loves His Son. What’s your response to this? How does this affect the way we love one another? (See nac.today articles – *Let us love our neighbour as we are loved by God* and *Everybody should feel loved*)

3. It's mentioned in the chapter that Holy Communion commemorates our liberation from sin. What does it mean to be liberated from sin? (See John 8:31-36 and nac.today article, *Four steps that lead to freedom*)

4. Remember an experience when you particularly felt the strength that comes from partaking in Holy Communion. How did that experience make an impact on you?

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5. What do you express in your prayer after receiving the communion wafer?

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6. If you had the opportunity to explain Holy Communion to a friend or nonbeliever, how would you describe it?

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7. When you read the beliefs stated in the seventh Article of Faith, how do you respond to it? In what way does it impact your faith?

On the night...

In this session, we'll continue examining the seventh Article of Faith, concentrating our discussion on an important point about the night when Holy Communion was instituted.

In our seventh article, we profess that Holy Communion was instituted by the Lord Himself, so that we would remember His sacrifice. Remembrance of His sacrifice alone silences our soul so that we are no longer distracted by the noise of life. Being distracted from the true meaning of Holy Communion is why we find Paul writing to the early Christian believers in Corinth – to teach and correct so they could participate in the Lord's Supper worthily. It is in 1 Corinthians that we can read this very important aspect about the night the Lord Jesus instituted Holy Communion.

The Corinthians were using their gatherings around the Lord's table as an opportunity to make social distinctions between the wealthy and the poor. Their lack of understanding stole the attention away from the sacrificial death of Christ. Paul writes the following to reset the focus of the believers: *For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread...* (1 Corinthians 11:23). The Apostle provides two very important points. First, the celebration of Holy Communion was given to the church directly by the Lord Jesus, which corresponds to what we profess in our seventh article. Why is Holy Communion so important and vital for disciples of Jesus? Because He instituted it! He is Lord! The historical Jesus, who is God, created this spiritual meal for His people. We need to hold sacred and value more and more all that the Lord Jesus has given us. Second, the Apostle writes a very important statement about the night when this meal was celebrated

for the first time. It was night, and in this night, Jesus was betrayed; it's a jarring point that adds a deeper gravity to the sacrament.

Jesus didn't institute Holy Communion on just any night. We receive from Paul's writing the context of when this event occurred. Today, we benefit from having the entire New Testament available to us. However, at the time when Paul wrote this letter, the Gospels were yet to be written. Because of this, the believers in Corinth relied on the words of God's messengers to provide them with clarity and truth about the events of Jesus' life. Today, we can read the Gospels and learn about the night and the betrayal that Paul makes mention of. Jesus gathered together with the twelve disciples, including Judas, to share the Passover meal. Before they all settled into that place, the Gospel writers tell us that *Satan entered Judas* (Luke 22:3), and he sought out the chief priests to devise a way to betray His teacher and friend. In John's Gospel, Judas was portrayed as a thief (John 12:6). And, when the chief priest offered him 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave at that time, Judas, distracted by his love for money, made the plan to betray Jesus.

The fact that Jesus was going to be betrayed by one of His disciples wasn't unknown to Jesus. In John's Gospel, while eating together, Jesus identifies Judas as His betrayer – *When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke... "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon* (John 13:21-26). John then tells us that, *receiving the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night* (v. 30). Startling, isn't it? There was a darkness surrounding Jesus at this critical time of His life. Someone so close to the Lord Jesus, who journeyed with Him from place to place, witnessed the miracles, heard His teaching, was trusted to handle the money, was loved by His teacher, and sat in a place of honor at the table, was willing to betray Him and chose to do so. Many of us know the heartache that comes from being betrayed by someone close to us. It is often life-shattering and plan-altering. Yet, Jesus continues to move forward with God's plan of redemption.

The fact that Jesus was betrayed cannot be separated from the story of His Passion. It's a part of the gospel. We cannot disconnect our remembrance of Jesus Christ from the tense and unsettling reality of the moment when He instituted this meal. It should never be lost on us what our Lord Jesus experienced during these final hours of His earthly life. His betrayal led to His trial, which led to His crucifixion. In the darkness of night, He was abandoned by those closest to Him, and yet, out of love for humanity, He completed His work on the cross so that those who are lost and wandering in the despair of darkness can find the light.

We believe that the Lord Jesus instituted Holy Communion *on the night of His betrayal*. When the truth of that statement settles in our soul, we will come to the Lord's table with deep reverence and love for Jesus Christ.

REFERENCES

1 Corinthians 11:23
Luke 22:3

John 13:21-26, 30

Seventh Article of Faith:

I believe that Holy Communion was instituted by the Lord Himself in memory of the once brought, fully valid sacrifice, and bitter suffering and death of Christ. The worthy partaking of Holy Communion establishes our fellowship with Jesus Christ, our Lord. It is celebrated with unleavened bread and wine; both must be consecrated and dispensed by a minister authorized by an Apostle.

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1. In ancient times, the night was much more sinister than it may seem to us today. It was dark, unknown, dangerous, overwhelming. What emotions does this atmosphere add to the story of the Last Supper and Jesus' arrest?
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2. What are some things that cause you to be distracted from or even miss the true meaning of Holy Communion?
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3. *Then Satan entered Judas...* (Luke 22:3). What do you think this means? Was Judas still responsible for his actions? What happens when you try to push off responsibility for your actions on something or someone else?
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4. Judas' betrayal of Jesus was one of the ways Jesus suffered. Could this insight affect the way you receive the sacrament? If so, why?

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5. Judas, a close disciple of Jesus, betrayed Him. Slowly and steadily, he had distanced himself from the Lord and the other disciples. As His present-day disciples, how might we betray the Lord Jesus today?

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6. How does reflecting upon the events leading up to Jesus' death heighten the impact when we come together to celebrate Holy Communion?

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7. Do you have a favorite Good Friday song or hymn that encapsulates some of the feelings we've talked about in this session?

Forgiveness

Welcome back! Over the last two sessions, we have discussed our beliefs about the sacrament of Holy Communion. But how do we prepare ourselves for this meal with Jesus, our Redeemer? We do this through repentance and forgiveness, which will be the topic of our discussion today.

Repentance starts with **awareness**. We must be aware of and reflect on our sinful actions and thoughts, but a deeper recognition must take place: that we are perpetually sinful beings. Realizing how far we actually are from God allows us to take steps to move closer to Him. We are often running in the wrong direction and need to turn back. Awareness leads to **remorse**. Our broken relationship with God brings us grief and sadness, especially when compared to the goodness and love that He offers. As we experience this inner turmoil and pain, we **confess** our sins to God. Apostle John reminds us that *if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9). This is a prayer that we can practice daily, continually exposing our souls to God in confession and finally asking for His forgiveness and His strength to help us in our **resolve** to change. Having received forgiveness ourselves prompts us to go down the path of forgiveness and **reconciliation** with our brother, sister, or neighbor, and as we pray together in the Lord's Prayer, *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*. Cultivating a repentant heart towards God and seeking His forgiveness are not things that only happen on Sunday; rather, we should wrestle daily, in thought, in prayer, and in reconciling conversations with those we love.

Recognizing that God forgives our sins when we approach Him in repentance, remorse, and confession – let's explore the purpose and

importance of the absolution that we hear every Sunday. In the divine service, before the sacrament of Holy Communion, we hear these words, known as the absolution: *I proclaim unto you the glad tidings: in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, your sins are forgiven. The peace of the Risen One abide with you. Amen.*

These words are the *assurance* of God's forgiveness – they remind us of His willingness to give us a fresh start by the merit of Christ's sacrifice, and the promise that the Lord loves us and accepts us, no matter how many times we fail. Jesus is the One who forgives our sins, not the minister. But the opportunity to hear those words spoken to us is something that we cannot take for granted, for these are comforting words to a repentant sinner.

Let me use two familiar characters to illustrate: Peter and Judas. As we are fresh from experiencing Good Friday and Easter, let us again delve into their stories. Judas betrayed Jesus into the hands of the soldiers, which led to His arrest and crucifixion. While Jesus was being tried and beaten, Peter denied knowing Him three times.

Peter denied Jesus, yet experienced the joy and life of Easter. Judas betrayed Jesus, but chose death in a field, alone (Matthew 27:3-10). Both were remorseful: we read in the gospels that after his denial, Peter wept bitterly (Matthew 26:69-75 / Luke 22:54-62), and Judas was filled with remorse. However, Judas did not get to see the wounds of the resurrected Jesus, or hear Him say, "Peace be unto you" in the presence of the disciples, or eat breakfast with Him on the shore, or experience the joy and wonder of Pentecost. Judas is known as the villain of the story, while Peter became the rock on which the church was built. What is the difference between Judas and Peter? Peter repented and turned back to the circle of the disciples. Judas regretted his actions and fled.

In isolation, Judas could not experience the grace of God. Ashamed, he withdrew from the community in which he could hear and experience words of forgiveness.

He could not create for himself God's word of grace, and neither can we. We need to hear it said over us, like a balm on our brokenness. As Paul says, *faith comes through hearing* (Romans 10:17), and in order for us to believe that we are forgiven, we need someone to say it to us. And this is what Jesus gave His apostles the authority to do – to proclaim forgiveness; to preach forgiveness ***in His name***.

It's through *hearing* that we are assured of forgiveness, love, and the peace of Christ. By accepting those words, we can prepare ourselves to have communion with Jesus Christ, our Savior.

REFERENCES

1 John 1:9

Luke 22:54-62

Matthew 27:3-10

Romans 10:17

Matthew 26:69-75

1. The Greek word for repentance is *metanoeo*, which can be interpreted as “rethinking” or “changing one’s direction.” Think of a time you’ve changed direction or rethought something in your life. Share with the group how you worked through that process.

2. How does the process of repentance lead us to forgiveness?

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3. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray, "*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*" How can you pursue reconciliation with those who have wronged you or with those you have wronged?

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4. Is my decision to forgive someone 100% in my control? How about reconciliation?

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5. Describe the importance of the absolution. Why is it so important that we hear those words said over us?

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6. What can you learn from the stories of Peter and Judas?

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7. In some way, all the disciples abandoned Jesus during His arrest and execution. How do you think they felt when the resurrected Christ appeared to them and said, "*Peace be with you*" (John 20:19)? How do you feel when you hear those words every Sunday, "*the peace of the Risen One abide with you*"?

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8. Why do we continually need to have a repentant heart, even after experiencing the forgiveness of God?

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9. The chapter said that it is through hearing the words of the absolution that we are assured of forgiveness, love, and the peace of Christ. What other things are we assured of when we are in community with each other?

Meals of communion

Today, we're going to finish our discussion on the various aspects of the seventh article and Holy Communion by exploring the meals we are celebrating when we come to the Lord's table.

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). This was quite a provocative statement! What could Jesus mean by it? Jesus was evoking two references from the Hebrew Scriptures, which His Jewish listeners would have recognized. The first was the miracle of manna, the bread sent from heaven, which God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 16). The second is found in Deuteronomy, embedded in the giving of the Mosaic Law, where Moses reminds the people of God's provision for them in the wilderness, which was a lesson for them – ...that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Jesus takes this imagery one step further when He continues to explain this statement to His disciples, as we read in John: *I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead...I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world... unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you... (John 6:48-49, 51, 53).*

What does Jesus mean by this? What is happening when we eat the wafer during Holy Communion?

We believe that during the consecration, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the real presence of the body and blood of Christ is invisibly joined together with the bread and wine. When we eat the wafer, we are sharing in the life of Christ, just as He explained to His disciples, *He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him* (John 6:56). Through the sacrament of Holy Communion, which Jesus established with His disciples (Matthew 26:26-28), He shares His life with us, giving strength and power to the new life we received at our baptism and sealing, transforming us more and more into the nature of Christ.

As we celebrate Holy Communion we look to the past in remembrance, we look outward in profession, we look around us in fellowship, and we look toward the future, always giving thanks for God's provision. Let's explore these different perspectives a little further.

Holy Communion is a **meal of remembrance**, as it commemorates the death of Jesus Christ, who through His sacrifice freed us from sin (John 8:34-36) and redeemed our relationship with God. Even as He instituted the Lord's Supper, Jesus encouraged His followers to *do this in remembrance of Me* (Luke 22:19). This remembrance extends beyond Jesus' suffering and death, to His resurrection and ascension, and gives us certainty of His presence in our lives and the coming of His future kingdom.

Holy Communion is a **meal of profession**, which is made clear from the words that we hear: *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes* (1 Corinthians 11:26). We profess belief in the death, resurrection, and return of Jesus Christ; these are foundational statements to our Christian faith. And we also profess belief in the activity and authority of the apostle ministry, which was established by Jesus Christ, and with whom He instituted Holy Communion.

Holy Communion is a **meal of fellowship** in three unique ways:

1. First, Christ shares communion with His Apostles, repeating the original circumstances of the establishment of the Lord's Supper.
2. Second, Christ has fellowship with believers who partake worthily for their salvation.
3. And finally, the believers gathered in the divine service also have fellowship with one another.

This is a great wonder! Jesus Christ brings unity among us by gathering all of us to Himself. Only if we are one in Christ can we achieve true oneness amongst one another.

Holy Communion is an **eschatological meal**, a meal pointing to the future and foreshadowing the marriage feast in heaven. In Jesus Christ, this future kingdom has drawn near to us. In accordance with His statement: *I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes* (Luke 22:18), we, as the congregation joined in Holy Communion, await His return and the fulfillment of this promise. Until He comes, we experience the most intimate fellowship with Jesus when we are joined together in Holy Communion.

Finally, Holy Communion is a celebration of thanksgiving! We give thanks for the forgiveness of our sins, made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We give thanks before we commune with Christ, just as He established in the first Lord's Supper, *...Jesus took bread, [gave thanks for] and broke it... then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them...* (Matthew 26:27). We are especially thankful that our Father in heaven has given us this celebration, and the faith to believe and follow Jesus Christ, because as He explained to His disciples – *He who eats this bread will live forever* (John 6:58).

1 Corinthians 11:26

1. Read Luke 22:14-20. What meals of Holy Communion are referenced in the institution of the Lord's Supper?
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2. Discuss what each of the meals of Holy Communion mean:
 - a. What do we remember?
 - b. What and whom do we profess?
 - c. Who are we having fellowship with?
 - d. What do we look forward to?

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3. Complete the following thought: *Because Jesus shares His life with me, I can...*

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4. How does the power of Holy Communion help transform us into the nature of Jesus Christ? What are some characteristics of His nature?

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5. How does our participation in Holy Communion unite us together as believers?

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6. One of the names of communion is “Eucharist,” a word that comes from the Greek *eucharistia*, which means, “to give thanks.” Share examples of what you are thankful for when you receive Holy Communion.

Holy Sealing

Welcome back! In today's session, we're going to explore the eighth article of our Creed, which discusses Holy Sealing. Let's read it together:

I believe that those baptized with water must, through an Apostle, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to attain the childhood in God and thereby the prerequisite for becoming a firstling.

We find three main points that we will focus our discussion on:

1. The sacrament of Holy Sealing
2. Childhood in God
3. Becoming a firstling

These three points are intertwined in the following way – the sacrament of Holy Sealing has a present and future effect: the present effect is our childhood in God, and the future effect is to become a firstling.

Both sacraments, Holy Baptism and Holy Sealing, together, comprise the rebirth of water and Spirit. In the New Testament, baptism is often understood as consisting of two parts: baptism with water and baptism with the Spirit or fire (Acts 8:14-17, 10:44-47, Luke 3:16, Matthew 3:11). Holy Sealing is the completion of the grace received at baptism.

We can look further into Holy Sealing through the message of our Chief Apostle from Pentecost 2018:

On the feast of Pentecost, Apostle Peter promised that those who were baptized and repented for their sins would receive the Holy Spirit. We

believe that God fulfills this promise through the ministry established by Christ – believers who are baptized receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through the prayers and the laying on of the hands of the apostle. The recipient of this sacrament does not receive the Holy Spirit as a Person of the Trinity. Rather, we receive God’s power, His life, and His nature. The Holy Spirit as part of the triune God is the Giver of the sacrament, He does not become the property of man. Rather, the Spirit of God now dwells in us; in this sense, we “have” God’s life, which empowers us to live the life that God created us for.

Paul’s words in Ephesians 1:11-14 give us insight into what it means to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit: *In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*

With our Holy Sealing, we receive **a seal, a guarantee, a promise, a pledge, and a calling**. These five gifts will be outlined in the guide for your discussion.

Let’s turn to the phrase *childhood in God*. What does it mean to attain childhood in God? First, we must understand that all human beings are, in a sense, the offspring of God because they have been created by Him and have the opportunity to call Him Father (Acts 17:28-29). He made human beings in His image, to be in relationship with Him, and He loves and desires all to be saved. It is to this relationship that He calls us. However, not all people accept His call, and that’s where this phrase *childhood in God* comes in. Perhaps a better way to think of it would be a *citizen* or *heir* who is adopted into His kingdom or house (Romans 8:14-17). This relationship is defined by recognizing God’s call, and our choosing to accept it, receiving the sacraments, believing in the gospel, and aligning our lives to the return of Christ.

Aligning your life to the return of Christ bring us to the future aspect of Holy Sealing, fulfilling the *prerequisite for becoming a firstling*. What is a firstling? The word “firstling,” in the Greek texts “firstfruits,” describes those that will be received by Jesus Christ when He returns. This refers back to the Old Testament laws of offering the first of the crop to God: *The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God* (Exodus 23:19). We believe that daily following Christ and leading a life in accordance with the gospel in both word and deed (Revelation 14:4-5) prepares us for living in His kingdom.

The presence of the Holy Spirit within us also can have profound and noticeable effects on our present life: the unfolding and growing of characteristics and virtues, which Apostle Paul figuratively describes as **fruit of the Spirit** in the fifth chapter of Galatians. The Spirit also awakens spiritual gifts in every believer to use in the building up of the church, as well as the community around them.

Let's let the life of God transform us more and more into the nature of Christ, so we can live the life that He has called us to.

REFERENCES

Acts 8:14-17

Acts 10:44-47

Luke 3:16

Matthew 3:11

Ephesians 1:11-14

Acts 17:28-29

Romans 8:14-17

Exodus 23:19

Revelation 14:4-5

Eighth Article of Faith:

I believe that those baptized with water must, through an Apostle, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to attain the childhood in God and thereby the prerequisite for becoming a firstling.

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1. Read Ephesians 1:11-14 as a group. Discuss the five gifts received at your sealing, how they are referenced in the verses from Ephesians, and what each one means to you:
 - a. **A Seal** – the assurance that we belong to God and He will always receive and accept us
 - b. **A Guarantee** – the assurance that as long as we remain in an active, close relationship with God, He will provide all that we need to enter His kingdom, despite the weaknesses that exist in the visible church
 - c. **A Promise** – the assurance that we will experience the resurrection of our body and enter the kingdom of God, which is the foundation of our hope for the future
 - d. **A Pledge** – the assurance that we can already today receive part of our inheritance in experiencing a foretaste of the kingdom by going deeper into the knowledge of our Father in the divine word, feeling His presence in the sacraments, and growing in His unity in our fellowship
 - e. **A Calling** – the task to praise and witness Jesus Christ to those around us and profess His gospel and His return. Further, this is the basis for spiritual gifts, which each receive in order to share with and edify the body of Christ.

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2. Discuss how you would finish the following sentence: *As a child of God, I am...*

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3. How is the presence of the Holy Spirit visible in the lives of people around you? How is it visible in your life?

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4. How does the Holy Spirit empower us to live the life that God created us for?

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5. What are the prerequisites for childhood in God, and how is this relationship defined?

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6. The chapter mentions that the Spirit awakens spiritual gifts in every believer to use in the building up of the church, as well as the community around them. How are you using the gifts God has given you to build up the church and your community?

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7. What is your response to the belief stated in the eighth Article of Faith?

Future events

Welcome! Today, we're going to focus on future events as outlined in the ninth Article of Faith.

While we don't know everything that will transpire in the future, the Bible provides many insights and promises that reveal a plan of great glory and much joy for all those who love the Lord and desire to experience eternal life with Him in His kingdom.

The ninth Article of Faith is packed with a lot of details, demonstrating the priority future events are assigned in our New Apostolic faith. We'll look at this in three major parts. The first part is about the return of Christ, where it states: ***I believe that the Lord Jesus will return as surely as He ascended into heaven and that He will take to Himself the firstfruits of the dead and living who have hoped for and were prepared for His coming...***

The expectation of the return of Jesus is foundational to our faith. Jesus Himself talked about going to prepare a place for us, where He then stated, *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also* (John 14:3).

Later, after His resurrection and when Jesus had ascended to heaven, two angels came and spoke to the disciples, reminding them of His promise to return, where they said, *"This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven"* (Acts 1:11). In other words, Jesus is coming again!

Now, the “firstfruits of the dead and living” refers to all those – living and dead – who have become God’s own through the rebirth of water and spirit, have prepared for the return of Christ, and have kept the expectation of this event at the forefront of their lives.

Interestingly, when Jesus returns for His own, also known as *the rapture*, He will give them a resurrected body, like the one He was clothed with at His resurrection. This is an amazing body that can’t be hurt and will allow us to move between different places seamlessly, like Jesus did (1 John 3:2).

Let’s now look at the next part of the ninth Article of Faith: ***...that after the marriage in heaven He will return to earth with them to establish His kingdom of peace, and that they will reign with Him as a royal priesthood...***

The image of the “marriage in heaven” marks the beginning of a direct fellowship between Jesus and His bride, also known as the firstfruits. But the length of this period is of limited duration. When it is completed, Jesus Christ, along with His bride, will direct attention to all human beings who did not partake in this event.

This is when Jesus will visibly appear on earth and establish His “kingdom of peace” (Revelation 20:6). And His first order of business will be to bind Satan, so that he can no longer tempt anyone to sin. Nevertheless, human beings will continue to be sinners. During this time period, we believe people will continue to be born and to die, as death and suffering will still exist to some degree.

Now, as a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 20:6), the bridal congregation will share in the rule of Christ. The gospel will be proclaimed to all human beings, both the living and the dead, which includes all people who have ever lived since the beginning of time.

A note of interest here. When we say the “bridal congregation,” we are referring to the figurative number of 144,000 that’s referenced in Revelation 14. This suggests the bridal congregation is a sizable number, yet not that big when compared to the billions of souls who

have ever lived. Whatever the size of this group, the task ahead of proclaiming the gospel to everyone is enormous!

Now to the last part of the ninth article: ***...After the conclusion of the kingdom of peace, He will hold the Last Judgment. Then God will create a new heaven and a new earth and dwell with His people.***

Many Christians talk about, and fear, judgment day. But, we can see here that it is only “after the conclusion of the kingdom of peace” that Jesus will “hold the Last Judgment.”

In fact, the kingdom of peace will come to an end when Satan is released for a brief period and given one last opportunity to tempt mankind. This is when Jesus will see who really chooses to follow Him, and who does not. After Satan’s ultimate defeat, he will be condemned and *cast into the lake of fire* (Revelation 20: 7-10). Evil and all its manifestations will finally have been rendered powerless forever.

What then follows is the resurrection of the dead, meaning all those in yonder world, for judgment (Revelation 20: 11-15). Christ will then judge all human beings who did not take part in the first resurrection. It is at this point that it will be made known to all of creation that Jesus Christ is the righteous Judge from whom nothing is concealed (John 5: 22, 26-27).

The concluding sentence of the ninth Article of Faith provides an outlook into God’s future creation, where it says, “Then God will create a new heaven and a new earth and dwell with His people.” Among other things, Revelation chapters 21 and 22 refer to the new creation. This is the domain of the perfect presence of God. When it says that God will dwell with His people, this refers to a completely new existence with God, namely the “life everlasting” that is mentioned at the end of the third Article of Faith.

Join us next week, where we’ll look at the tenth Article of Faith.

REFERENCES

John 14:3

Acts 1:11

1 John 3:2

Revelation 20:6-15

1 Peter 2:9

Revelation 14, 21, 22

John 5:22, 26-27

Ninth Article of Faith:

I believe that the Lord Jesus will return as surely as He ascended into heaven and that He will take to Himself the first fruits of the dead and living who have hoped for and were prepared for His coming; that after the marriage in heaven He will return to earth with them, to establish His kingdom of peace and that they will reign with Him as a royal priesthood. After the conclusion of the kingdom of peace, He will hold the Last Judgment. Then God will create a new heaven and a new earth and dwell with His people.

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1. Was there a part of the ninth article that you had not thought about before? What was something new that you learned from this session?

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2. In Hebrews 9:28, it states, *To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.* What does it mean to “eagerly wait” for the Lord?

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3. For many, it might seem that we have been waiting for the return of the Lord for a long time. How can we live our lives with the expectation that Jesus Christ will return at any time?

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4. Who are the “firstfruits”? What does it mean to be part of the firstfruits?

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5. It’s mentioned in 1 Peter 3:15, *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear...* How would you describe your hope for the future? Find Bible verses that support this hope.

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6. In the thousand-year kingdom of peace, we believe the gospel will be proclaimed to all human beings, both the living and dead. What are some ways we can proclaim the gospel already today?

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7. When we hear the phrase, “proclaim the gospel,” what exactly is the gospel?

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8. During the thousand-year kingdom of peace (for those on earth), have you ever considered that children will be born, and people will still die? Or that people will still sin? Reflect on what that will be like.

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9. What is your personal take-away from studying the ninth Article of Faith?

Worldly authorities

Welcome to the conclusion of our study on our Creed. We hope that you've not only enjoyed this study, but that over the past few months, you have grown in your understanding of the main tenets of our faith.

The tenth article stands out from the preceding nine. The articles that we've studied so far have focused on God's creatorship, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the church, the Church's ministries, the sacraments, and in our last session, our future. The tenth article completes our Creed by teaching how our faith deals with the Christian's relationship to the government.

The tenth article reads: ***I believe that I am obliged to obey the worldly authorities provided no godly laws are thereby transgressed.***

It's clear from this article that Christian life does not occur outside the framework of civic and societal reality. It demonstrates that the Christian faith has a generally positive relationship to the government, the "worldly authorities." As followers of Jesus Christ, Christians are first citizens of the kingdom of God. We should always keep in mind that our citizenship is in heaven, and while we live on earth today, we are to magnify and glorify our Lord in all we do. This includes obeying the natural authorities.

The relationship between the Christian church and the political authorities was already highlighted in the New Testament. In Matthew 22, Jesus is being questioned by the Pharisees, who are seeking to entangle and embarrass Him. They ask the Lord, *Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?* (v.17). This was a challenging question because the Jewish people believed that paying any tax to a pagan ruler

went against God's lordship over His people. After identifying that the image on the coin was Caesar's, Jesus ends His response with, *Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's* (v.21). Jesus wasn't in the midst of setting up a new political kingdom that would oppose the Roman empire, so paying taxes and obeying civil laws was something the Jewish people were expected to do. He was teaching His followers to accept the government that was allowed by God, be obedient to its rules, and give it the proper respect.

Paul connects with this response from Jesus when he wrote the following in Romans 13:6-7, *For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.* Just as Jesus taught, Paul is encouraging the new Christian believers to fulfill their duty by paying the taxes imposed by the Roman authorities. Those who find themselves in authoritative roles naturally are always subject to God, who has authority over all things. It is because we honor God and recognize that He is always in control that we willingly submit to the civil authorities of our time. God has allowed the creation of civil governments and laws because without them, there would be anarchy and evil would run rampant. Believers are to obey their leaders even if they personally disagree with them because God has allowed them to govern with their free will and imperfection for a time. Remember, when we respect the worldly authorities, we are honoring God.

The apostles, in experiences recorded for us in the book of Acts, show us how to stand up for godly laws when authorities attempt to prevent us from fulfilling what God has called us to do. For example, prior to His ascension, Jesus told His apostles that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. And that's what Peter and John were doing in Acts 4 and 5, and as a result, they found themselves arrested, on trial, and ordered not to teach in the name of Jesus. We can read their response to the religious authorities in Acts 5:29, *But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."* When any authority forbids what God has commanded or commands what

God has forbidden, a Christian must obey the Author of all authority, who is God Himself. As the apostles experienced, we may be punished for fulfilling the commands of God, but let us do so with a joyful heart, knowing that we are doing what God has called us to do.

Peter also adds to this teaching in his first letter to the believers. He encourages them to demonstrate obedient and respectful behavior toward the government in order to silence the unreasonable slander of unbelievers. Peter writes, *For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves* (1 Peter 2:15-16 NIV). For sure, our relationship with Jesus Christ sets us free, but that freedom doesn't give us a license to sin. Our freedom in Christ must be used wisely. Let us use our freedom to engage in all things that are good, including respect and reverence for the laws of our land, so that we can be an example to our neighbors, silence our opponents, and magnify our Lord. We are to live as *God's slaves*. Not slaves of oppression, but slaves to the love of God, using the freedom He has given us to love Him above all things and our neighbor as ourselves.

While it may not always make us happy, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we should resolve ourselves to respect the laws of our country, our states, counties, and our towns. It is our responsibility to obey the law of the land unless it is against the will of God. Always keep in mind that our God is over and above all earthly authorities, and in respecting them, we honor Him. We are citizens of God's kingdom already today, and we demonstrate that by honoring all people, loving our fellow Christians, fearing God, and respecting authorities (ref. 1 Peter 2:17).

REFERENCES

Matthew 22:15-22

Romans 13:6-7

Acts 4, 5

Acts 5:29

1 Peter 2:15-16 NIV

1 Peter 2:17

Tenth Article of Faith:

I believe that I am obliged to obey the worldly authorities provided no godly laws are thereby transgressed.

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1. What are some practical ways to demonstrate that we are already citizens of God's kingdom through our citizenship here on earth?
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2. Read Matthew 22:15-22. What do these verses tell us about Jesus and His teachings?
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3. What are some examples of godly laws, and how might these laws be transgressed? Use Acts 5:17-32 as a point of discussion.

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4. The chapter stated, “It is because we honor God and recognize that He is always in control that we willingly submit to the civil authorities of our time.” Is this easy or hard for you to do? Why or why not?

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5. How do you act or respond when you don’t agree with natural authority: a) when it’s not against God’s law, and b) when it is against God’s law?

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6. Peter writes that we are to “*live as God’s slaves*” (1 Peter 2:16 NIV). The word “slave” generally has very negative connotations. Why is this not the case here? What do you think Peter’s words mean for us today?

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7. How does the tenth article demonstrate the relationship that exists between the Christian faith and the government? How should this guide us in our beliefs and feelings regarding civic duty?

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8. As we finish this series on our Creed, what is something new you have learned? Has your understanding of what it means to be a New Apostolic Christian changed? If so, how?

Facilitator Notes

Below you'll find a few suggestions for leading your small group discussion. More training materials can be found on ndi.nac-usa.org

1. Begin your discussion on time and stick to 60 minutes unless you have agreed on a longer time together.
2. Be sure everyone in your group has a book and encourage them to prepare beforehand.
3. Encourage everyone to participate, but do not pressure those who might not be comfortable yet. Remind the group of the confidentiality of the conversation, that this is a place of trust and if you're comfortable, please feel free to share your personal thoughts and feelings.
4. If everyone was not able to read the chapter ahead, it might be helpful to have someone read it (or take turns reading it) together.
5. You'll notice there are different types of questions; some questions are *knowledge and interpretation* (discussing what has been explained and how each person understands it), and others are *application* (applying the concepts to our personal lives).
6. Feel free to ask the questions in your own words, or skip one if you feel it has already been answered. Consider your group and come up with additional questions if you would like.

7. Avoid answering your own question right away. If necessary, rephrase the question until it is clearly understood.
8. Don't be afraid of silence – people may need time to think through their responses.
9. Don't be content with just one answer. Ask, "What do the rest of you think?" or "Anything else?"
10. Acknowledge all contributions, and try to be affirming. If an answer is off base ask, "What led you to that conclusion?" or "What do the rest of you think?"
11. Have fun! Allow your small group to be an environment where people can learn and grow in a place of trust, love, and generosity.

