

May 19, 2019

One Church
Ephesians 4:1-6

4:1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,
4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,
4:3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
4:4 There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call--
4:5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
4:6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

1. Reality of Church

The Apostles' Creed continues "the holy catholic Church" after "I believe in the Holy Spirit." We repeat the word "I believe in the Holy Spirit." Every time we confess Apostles' Creed, we repeat the word, "I believe in the church." But what does it mean to "believe in church?" Because "God, the Father almighty" and "the Holy Spirit" are invisible, we can understand believing "God and the Holy Spirit" well. "Jesus Christ" is a visible person and the first disciples "saw, heard and touched with the hand" but we today have not seen Jesus Christ and there is no look now. But, as we have in the Bible, we "love and cherish Jesus Christ, and we are in joy and fullness of joy that can not believe in words," (1 Peter 1: 8) Faith shows reality of the invisible facts, let us experience it now. We really want to thank for the faith in Jesus Christ and for the power of the faith.

We believe in the invisible God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit because they are invisible, but the church is visible. Why do we still believe the church? That is because, first of all, the church is visible, but it has invisible reality at the same time. The church is not just a group of people, activities, and organizations and buildings. If it is only that, there is nothing different from other groups. There are more, more essential things in the church. Without it, it can not be called a church, no matter how many people gather, and even if it is active. “Believe in the church” is because the invisible nature of the church must be known by faith and be shown as reality.

In the Bible, the church is called “the people of God,” “the body of Christ,” and “the temple of the Holy Spirit.” God chose Israel as the people of God in the Old Testament period. It was because Israel, who experienced God’s salvation, proclaim other nations God’s salvation. However, Israel forgot their mission, and instead of making other nations known about God’s salvation, they could not keep their own salvation. So, in the New Testament period, God gave the mission to those who believe in Jesus Christ from all nations, making them the people of God, and gave them the mission to preach the salvation of Jesus Christ to the end of the earth. Yes, the church is the people of God in the New Testament period. God gave them the mission to preach the gospel.

Also, the church is “the body of Christ.” This does not mean “like the body” that works as hand and feet of Christ. It is not metaphorical to say that it is the body of Christ. The church is a real “body” with the connection of life with the head Christ. If the head were cut from the body, the body is the living body no more. If the church doesn’t

have a life-to-life connection with Christ, it is no longer alive. It's not a living church. And when the church is described as "the body of Christ," it is emphasized that it was made to live, grow, and bear fruit by the life of Christ.

Furthermore, the church is "the temple of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit lived in every one who believes in Christ, and chose the church as a temple, a temple, a sanctuary, where we worship and glorify God.

The fact that the church is "the people of God", "the body of Christ", and "the temple of the Holy Spirit" can not be understood without learning from the Bible by faith. For many, the church may be the only place to enjoy pageant at Christmas, to perform egg hunts at Easter, to go to bazaars and concerts. Also, Christians may also lose sight of the invisible aspect of the church, that is, the essence of the church, and they are just spending years there just doing the regular events.

Every time we confess that "I believe in the church" according the Apostles' Creed, we find that the church is not only something visible gathering of people, but also it is invisible thing that belongs to the Father God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. And we know that what is invisible is more important than what is visible. "I believe in the church." By this word, we affirm that the church is of God, of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit. We also affirm that the church is given a mission from God, lived by Christ, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

2. Mission of Church

And we believe and affirm that the church is "the people of God",

“the body of Christ”, and “the temple of the Holy Spirit” because we will perform the mission as “the people of God”; we will grow as “the body of Christ,” and will show the existence to the world as “temple of the Holy Spirit.” The word, “I believe in the church” is not just to say what the church is, but to make the church what we confess.

The church has a mission to proclaim the grace of God’s salvation as the “people of God.” 1 Peter 2:9 says, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

The early church was a missionary church. The apostles have become witnesses of Christ, as Jesus said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) . Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, saying, “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.” (Acts 2:32) Even he was banned from speaking in the name of Jesus by the Jewish leader and imprisoned, he said, “God raised him from the dead. To this we are witnesses.” (Acts 3: 15) “And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” (Acts 5:32). Paul also received the same mission as other apostles, and had witnessed Christ. Paul said, “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:24) And this mission is given not only to the apostles, but to everyone who believes in Christ as well. All Christians are “the witnesses of Christ.”

“Becoming a witness of Christ.” This mission does not change from the early church until today in the 21st century. In some companies, the contents of the business may change. A company that was originally a station coach company became a bank. But for two thousand years, the church continued the same business of “proclaiming the gospel” and never changed. “The same business in two thousand years.” This is the pride of the church. And it must not be changed from now on.

The world has become small today. It used to take months to go to missions from Europe and the United States, but now it can go anywhere in the world in one or two days. The world mission seems to have been achieved, but communism and Islamic countries are not yet allowed people to preach the gospel. Once the church prospered and sent out many missionaries, Europe is now one of the “mission fields” where we have to go there and tell the gospel. When thinking about Japanese people, even though there is some knowledge about “Christianity,” the gospel of Christ has not yet been witnessed to ninety nine out of one hundred people. Jesus told the parable that one of the hundred sheep was lost, but in the case of the Japanese, ninety nine out of one hundred were lost sheep. Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14) The gospel has not yet been preached to the whole world. The gospel must be witnessed to all nations and to all people of the nation.

But how can you do that? It is not something that can be done by one and two missionaries and evangelists. It is not something that can be done using mass media. Each and every Christian with faith has

become the “Christ’s witness” at the place where he is placed, and he must witness the Christ to the people who are close to him. Every time I confess that “I believe in the church,” I would like to renew the mission of witnessing Christ given to us.

3. Unity of Church

The church witnesses the gospel, Christ, as “the people of God.” So what does the church do as “the body of Christ?” Ephesians 4:13-16 says, “Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

The church is nurtured and grown by the life of Christ. The church has a mission to develop itself as well as a mission to preach the gospel to the outside world. Of course, it is God that makes us grow, but every Christian has something to do to help the church for her healthy spiritual growth. The church can not go out, share the gospel, have the power to serve the people around it, and can not bear its fruit without the spiritual growth.

There are many things that are important for the growth of the church, but today’s passage teaches “unity,” saying, “with all humility

and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (2, 3) And the unity should be realized not only in a local congregation, but also in all the churches. “Humility,” “gentleness,” “patience,” “love,” and “peace” should be exercised not only in a congregation but also in all true churches.

The Bible teaches that the church is “one” from the beginning. In Japanese, it is translated as “Ephesian’s Church” or “Philippian’s Church,” but in the original language it is “Church in Ephesus” or “Church in Philippi”. It shows that one church is scattered among Ephesus, Philippi, and all over the world. God is one and has only one God’s people. One Christ can only have one body. Ephesians 4:4-5 says, “There is one body and one Spirit --just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call-- one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” This word teaches that in any country or in any denominational church, a real church does not exist independently from other churches.

In the world of sports, *shogi* and *go*, skills grow by competing with each other. However, the spiritual growth of the church is not something that members of the church can compete with each other, and that this church and that church, that denomination and another. As Ephesians 4:16 says, “From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

And this unity gives people the most effective witness of Christ’s love, grace, and salvation. A song titled “We are one in the Spirit”

became popular among any churches. This was made by a Catholic priest named Peter Scholtes.

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love

When we learn that the church is “one” and we aim at unity, we can fulfill our mission as the “people of God” and grow as “the body of Christ.” When we confess, “I believe in the church,” we pray and work for the unity of church to be realized and seen among us.

(Prayer)

Father God. You are the only Father of those who believe in Jesus Christ and gave us one Savior and one Holy Spirit. Please help us to witness that we are one body by the encouragement of one Holy Spirit and making Christ our only one head. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ.